

Exemplar 15

Trails and guided work directives

Introduction

One very successful way to organise explorations in the environment is to use guided work directives or trail workcards/booklets. These trail booklets should provide a structure for the child's observations and investigations in the environment. Trails are immensely adaptable. Many aspects of the environment may become the basis for a trail and trails are useful in other settings and in other curricular areas. Some suitable themes for trails include:

- a small area in the immediate vicinity of the school, for example a section of a street, a church or graveyard, a mill, a pond or river
- a more extensive area of a town or village, for example a number of streets or a square
- a theme such as house design, or street furniture, or bridges
- an historical period, for example a row of nineteenth-century houses and shops, which will be found in many villages
- a walk in a country area, which would give opportunities for children to observe different styles of boundaries (such as walls, fences, hedgerows), changes in field and land use, flora and fauna
- an historic site or house
- an exhibition in a museum or gallery.

Step 1 Background research

Good background research and preparation are essential for the successful use of the local environment. The sections on *How the locality of the school will be reflected in the programme* and *Identifying support for implementation* and the list of sources for local history in the *Appendix* will provide useful hints about where to start in finding out about the local environment.

It should also be borne in mind that while a village, town or landscape may not contain buildings or items of great national importance, its features may reflect some aspect of wider historical developments. For example, a ruined mill or disused railway station can lead to a discussion of changes in work and

transport, a rath or 'fairy fort' can complement a study of the Celtic period. Visiting and walking the area, ideally in the company of another teacher and perhaps a long-time local resident, will help to identify items of potential interest.

Step 2 Classroom work

Children will find a visit to places in the environment much more rewarding if they have some background or contextual knowledge of the period or of the type of items which they will see. For example, if they are going to encounter a late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century building such as a courthouse or market house, some work on the typical building features of the period would be useful.

Step 3 Design and plan the trail booklet

When the theme and subject of the trail booklet have been identified, a route should be decided upon and tasks designed. The route should not be too long. A useful rule of thumb suggests that a distance which may be walked in 10–15 minutes will yield sufficient work to occupy a fifth or sixth-class child for at least an hour (including walking time). Obviously, the distance and the length of time will be reduced for younger age groups.

The locations and route to be followed should be relatively free of traffic and safe. Urban areas need not be precluded, but very congested spots, busy times of day and dangerous crossings etc. must be avoided. A circular rather than a linear route is best.

The tasks to be included in the trail booklet should make visiting and exploring the environment a pleasant and purposeful activity. A wide diversity of tasks is essential if children are to develop and use a broad range of skills.

The tasks should encourage children to

- recognise items and features which they may have encountered in another context. For example, if children have learned about the features of eighteenth-century buildings, they might be asked to identify some of these features on a real building

Tasks on trail booklets or work directives should encourage the child to:

- *recognise items and features*
- *observe closely*
- *collect and record facts and details*
- *classify information*
- *notice instances of change and continuity*
- *make deductions from evidence*
- *use estimation, measuring and recording skills*
- *work co-operatively*
- *develop an aesthetic awareness in the environment*
- *appreciate and care for the environment*

- observe closely. Many of us walk around in our environments and yet never 'see' several interesting features. Directions on the trail leaflet should encourage children to look up (frequently the upper floors of buildings will have remained largely unchanged), to note details using drawing (often more satisfactory than written recording), to search for items included on the sheet but not immediately visible to the casual observer (for example a design detail on a door knocker or an inscription on a building).

An excellent way to do this is to supply an incomplete sketch of an object or feature and ask pupils to complete the drawing. This type of exercise can also help children to observe how something is constructed or how it works. For example, children might be asked to complete a picture of a hand pump by adding the handle

- collect and record facts and details which they encounter. These might be obtained from observations, estimations, labelling and notices on the buildings, road signs, street name-plaques, advertisements. In the case of exhibitions, information may be collected from guides and museum labels. For younger children, the need to use sentences and extensive written recording should be minimised: 'tick-the-box' or 'fill-the-gap' answers might suffice.

Some of the tasks should encourage the collection of information which might be used for further work and analysis on returning to the classroom

- classify information. If children are directed to look for particular patterns or features they may be able to begin classifying items in the environment. For example, one task might require children to examine the details of a late nineteenth-century shop front, its large display windows in carved wooden frames, strong lettering, pull-down blinds and the separate entrance for the house attached to it. Further exploration in the environment might lead the child to notice these features on other buildings and thus to group these shops as being of one period. Other features such as chimneys on houses, the shapes and proportions of windows, the colour and type of building materials used in walls and on roofs, the sizes of fields and the types of boundary walls used all provide possible criteria for classifications
- notice instances of change and continuity. A trail might lead children to stand at a vantage point recorded in an old painting or photograph and comparisons could be made. Changes and some of the apparent reasons for such developments might be recorded. (See section on *Using pictures and photographs* pp. 87-98.)

- make deductions from the available evidence. For example, if children are asked to count the number of chimneys on roofs, they might be asked to speculate on what this tells us about the number of fireplaces in the houses and whether it might tell us anything about the number of rooms in the buildings. By examining the names of streets, roads, fields and other features children might deduce something of the activities carried on in the past. For example 'Market Street', 'Railway Road', 'The Straw Field' and 'The Flax Hole' may bear little relation to present activities but are important sources of evidence about the lives of people in the past
- use other skills such as map reading, estimation, measuring and recording skills
- develop co-operative and group working skills.

Useful equipment for the child when exploring the environment

- pencils (not ballpoint pens which do not write in the wet)
- trail booklet
- a simple camera, if available
- extra paper and crayons to make rubbings of interesting details
- a tape recorder to record sounds such as that of a mill wheel, traffic, chime of clock, etc.
- small rucksack/bag to carry items and leave hands free
- a waterproof coat!

It is probably best if the tasks in the booklet are arranged into a number of distinct stages or stops. Consideration could also be given to grading the tasks, especially if a mixed-class group is involved. Questions for older children, for example, could be marked with an asterisk. The attractiveness of the booklet is also important, and the use of pictures and graphics will greatly enhance its readability. It is also a good idea to test the completed draft booklet 'in the field'. The opinion of a teaching colleague can be invaluable at this point.

Step 4 Organising the visit

When visiting sites in the environment children will probably learn most effectively in small groups under the supervision of a responsible adult. This raises organisational, safety and resource considerations, and teachers should be aware of any school policies on the use of adult helpers, safety procedures, insurance and other relevant regulations.



Making deductions from evidence: what do foot scrapers tell us about street conditions in the past?

Many schools benefit from the support and help of parents in organising visits outside the premises of the school. In all cases where parents or other adults are involved in the supervision of pupils the sanction of the principal and board of management should be obtained. Helpers should be given clear instructions on the work to be undertaken by the pupils, the names of the children in their group, any potential sources of danger and procedures to be adopted in cases of emergency. They should also be advised of the reasons behind the work to be completed by pupils and the importance of not supplying all the answers!

In some environments, for example in a churchyard or at the top of a village street, it may be possible for the teacher and class to view the whole area from a suitable vantage point before work begins. This can help children to get some overall impression of the area before concentrating on the individual details.

Step 5 Follow-up

Opportunities should be provided for children to

- compare and discuss their findings and observations
- discuss the deductions which they made from the evidence they observed
- find out more about elements in the environment which they noted
- present their findings, perhaps in a series of murals, friezes or models.

An interesting exercise with older children who have completed a range of local studies is to ask them to compile a trail for younger children or a guide leaflet for tourists visiting the area.

Step 6 Sharing resources

A well-researched, successful trail leaflet represents a significant investment of teacher time. By co-developing trails and by swapping trail booklets with other teachers and schools, a bank of work directives suitable for use in the area may be amassed. These will need editing to suit the needs of individual classes, but much of the labour will have been shared.



Exploring and recording in the environment. Graveyards and memorial inscriptions are important and accessible sources of information.