Prepared for
The Sea and Culture Online

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Introduction

The following evaluation of OOKL was undertaken in 2006 by the Centre for Educational Technology and Distance Learning at the University of Birmingham.

Conclusions on the project objectives

OOKL is different from other multimedia museum guides: it connects the museum visit to the classroom and to the student’s homes, so that the visit becomes part of a sequence of planning, engagement, and reflection. The students experienced pre and post museum visit lessons which extended the museum visit back into the classroom. It was in the post visit lesson that the students really reflected on their collections. The alternative educational service for students (in this study) at the museum would have been paper-based worksheets, which the teacher has described as “passive”. In contrast, the students described their experience with OOKL at the museum as “less boring, more modern”.

OOKL makes exemplar use of mobile technology to build bridges between technologies and activities, between different types of technology, between different learning spaces, and between different learning contexts:

Bridging technology and activity: the design of the mobile phone application and the website went hand in hand with the design of the three-stage learning experience (in the classroom, in the museum, and back in the classroom). Teachers, educational consultants, museum educators, and Local Education Authority representatives were involved throughout the design of the system, providing expert advice on the kind of functionality that would be useful and shaping the template for the learning experience that would make use of that functionality.

Bridging technologies: OOKL does not confine the learning experience just to interactions with a mobile device. Rather, it makes use of the mobile devices for the part of the experience where they bring the most value (i.e. for data collection in the museum, where the use of fixed technologies is impracticable and the use of traditional media such as pen and paper is cumbersome). The mobile device is then used as a bridge to technologies used in other parts of the learning experience (i.e. the exhibits, installations and printed media available in the museum that trigger reflection and inform data collection, or the Web-enabled ICT suite at school used for data analysis). This is a wiser use of mobile technology than an indiscriminate digitisation and ‘mobilisation’ of all learning activities.

Bridging learning spaces: OOKL allows visitors to interact in three spaces: the physical space of the museum which they explore; the personal space on the mobile technologies that they use to collect and create items of personal interest; and the virtual space provided by a web portal that stores their collected items and additional resources for them to organise, share and present. Not only does it enable interactions in these spaces, though; OOKL offers balanced opportunities for interacting in each space. For example, when collecting an item in the museum, the student sees a list of other students who have also collected that item. Although it would be possible for the system to also display the other students’ reasons for
collecting that item, instead it only displays a suggestion that the user might want to talk to them face-to-face, thus encouraging face-to-face interaction rather than attempting to replaced it.

**Bridging learning contexts**: OOKL users end up with something real to work with back at school, after their museum visit. More than that, they can then work to produce something lasting that can be shown to their friends and family. The benefits, however, go beyond simple mobility of artefacts – learners are able to continue their learning experiences across different locations and contexts.

OOKL can form bridges between different technologies, contexts, experiences and learning spaces. However, bridges that are designed to aid the learning practice will also change and affect that practice. The way a system like OOKL is used cannot be determined until it is actually used by real people in real settings. Often the way learners adopt a piece of new educational technology is not the same way that the designers and educators expected. New tools that enable learners to perform new activities may change the way they perceive and carry out old activities. Thus, the importance of continuous evaluation and re-design cannot be stressed enough: it is only through continuous evaluation and fine-tuning of the new technology with the learning practice (including adjustment of peripheral and contextual support, like lesson planning, IT support, and activity planning), that OOKL (like any other successful educational system) will reach its full potential in transforming educational practice.

This report has identified many benefits of OOKL – and also a number of areas for improvement. Addressing these areas will be a good starting point for the finetuning of OOKL.