

From Cholera to Comic



Evaluation

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‘From Cholera to Comic’

A collaboration between Berwick Record Office,
Berwick Museum, Berwick Academy and
Newcastle University

Background to the project:

Learning Arc is a group of North East archive educators whose members meet regularly to share good practice in archive education. They are dedicated to developing a deeper understanding of local heritage through the rich resource of archives. Regular discussions between the members revealed that archives are being underused by schools- in particular secondary schools - with the archive educators struggling to find ways to break down the barriers and work on sustained projects with this older age group of students. In order to find ways to challenge this situation, the members of Learning Arc decided they would benefit from training on innovative educational practises, thus enabling them to develop projects which address the specific needs of secondary schools.

Academics and researchers from the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT) at Newcastle University have been working with schools over many years on the development of innovative pedagogies to tackle the issue of student (dis)engagement. Most recently their research has focussed on Project-Based Learning using community resources- a process known as *Community Curriculum Making*. Central to this approach is that students ‘go places, meet people and do and make things’ and that there is an external audience for the work giving it value and ensuring its quality.

The Learning Arc members and CfLaT successfully applied for funding¹ to run a project that included:

- Training delivered by CfLaT which introduced the Learning Arc members to innovative curriculum approaches/pedagogies (with a key focus on Community Curriculum making); as well as tools for planning and evaluation.
- Funding to support two of the archives to develop pilot projects with two secondary schools. These were: 1) Berwick Record Office/Berwick Museum and 2) Special Collections and Archives, Robinson Library, Newcastle University
- Evaluation of the impact of the projects on the archivists, students and teachers.

The Evaluation:

The evaluation of the two projects was undertaken by Ulrike Thomas, Research Associate, Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University. For each project initial meetings were undertaken with the stakeholders in order to establish the outcomes that it was hoped the projects would achieve as well as the data that would be required in order to

¹ ESRC Impact Acceleration Account administered by Newcastle University

evidence them. The data included a mix of researcher-generated data (interviews, questionnaires) and project generated data (final products, photos etc).

The following report focuses on the evaluation of the 'From Cholera to Comic project undertaken by Berwick Record Office, Berwick Museum, Berwick Academy and Special Collections and Archives, Robinson Library Newcastle University.

The Project

The planning of the project took place in several stages and involved all of the key stakeholders. An initial outline of the project was drafted in order to have a concrete starting point for discussions with the Head of Humanities at Berwick Academy. At this meeting the following issues were addressed:

- Was the theme of cholera relevant to the history curriculum? In what way?
- What format would the teacher like the project to take i.e. one week embedded in the curriculum over several weeks?
- Which students would he like to involve?
- When could the project take place?
- Could a visit to Newcastle University be included?

A critical component of the development of the project was that it included the key principles of a Community Curriculum: '*Going places, meeting people, doing and making things*'. A community curriculum project aims to create meaningful projects, underpinned by National Curriculum subject content, but which also develop the social and cultural capital of the pupils involved. The rationale for adopting this approach is that it provides a real-world context for learning as well helps to inform and shape identity and aspiration. Other key criteria for a Community Curriculum project are that it starts with an inspiring entry event and has a product which is showcased to an external audience in order to raise the quality of the work.

The project took place in June/July as part of an end of term enrichment week. Year 9 pupils were offered places with a particular interest in history, science and/or art. 15 pupils chose to take part.

Day 1:

The entry event for the project was a visit to Newcastle University in June where the pupils were introduced to the special collections archives more generally and then specifically to the resources related to cholera. They then took part in a science workshop in the Medical School. Here they worked with a lecturer and PhD students to find out more about the disease and the cures.



The pupils are introduced to the archives at Newcastle University Special Collections



The pupils take part in a workshop in the Medical School

Days 2-4:

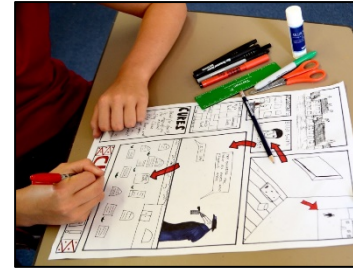
This introduction was followed by 3 days in July at Berwick Record Office and Museum researching the local Cholera outbreaks. The pupils were introduced to the archives, visited local sites (streets, churchyard) affected by the outbreaks and heard about a volunteer's research on one of the victims. They then worked with a comics researcher/practitioner on the production of a comic which would introduce the subject to a teenage audience. The project also included a visit to a graphic designer/printer who talked about his job and demonstrated how he would be laying out and then printing the comic.



The pupils conduct research in Berwick Record Office



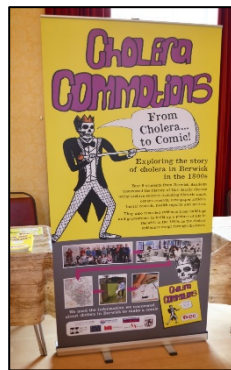
The pupils visit a local churchyard and find cholera victims



The pupils work with a comic-maker to create their comic

Showcase events:

The pupils' work was showcased to a wider audience at two local community events in Berwick: A heritage open day and Berwick Literary festival.

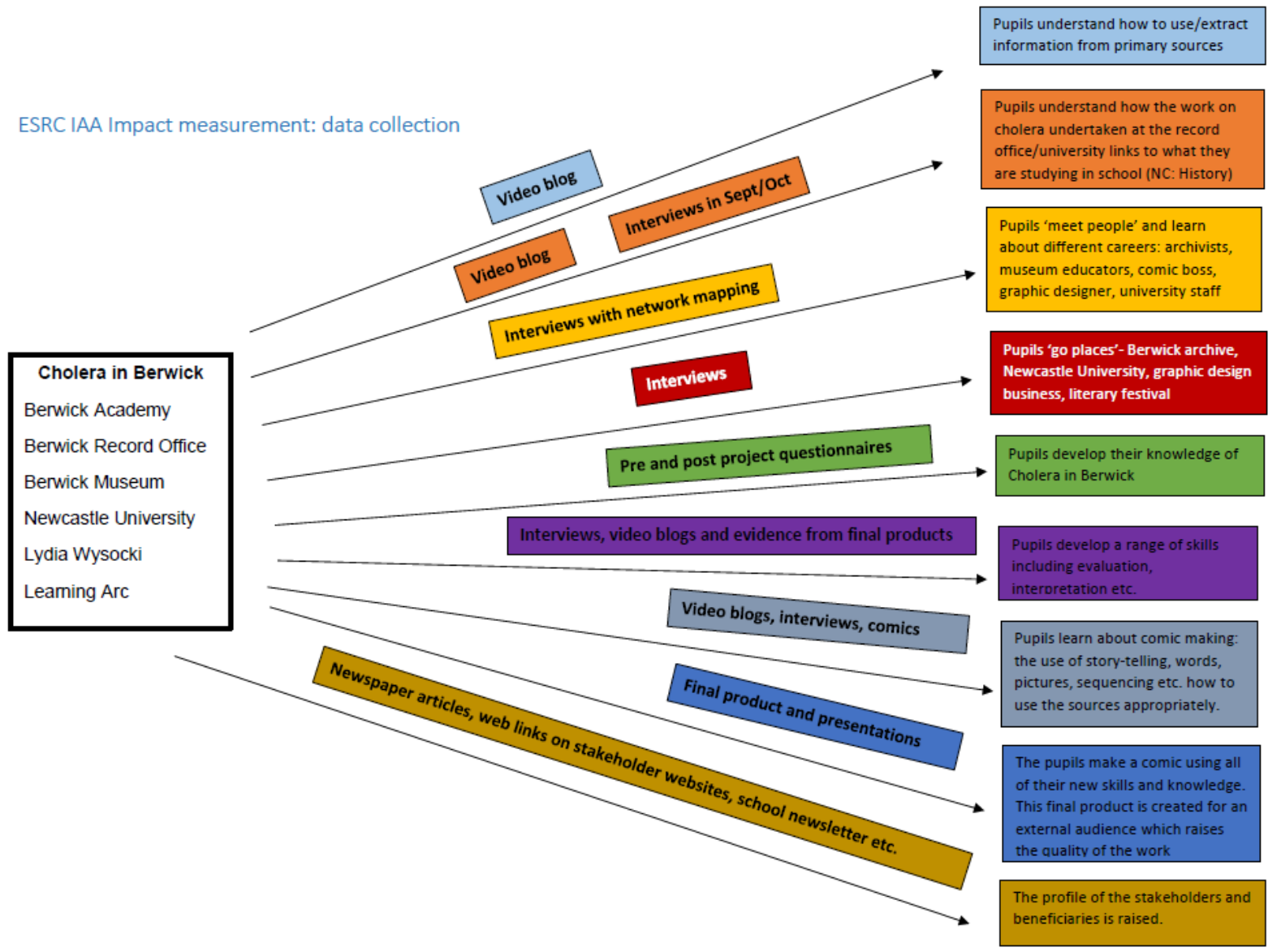


The evaluation focus

The focus of the evaluation was identified at meetings between the researcher and the main project stakeholders: Linda Bankier- Berwick Record Office and Jane Miller – Berwick Museum. Each partner identified the outcomes that they hoped would be achieved by the end of the project. Further collaborative discussion helped us to determine what kind of evidence would demonstrate that the outcomes had been met.

On the basis of this discussion the evaluation model on page 5 was created and this provided the basis for the data collection and subsequent presentation of the evaluation findings.

ESRC IAA Impact measurement: data collection



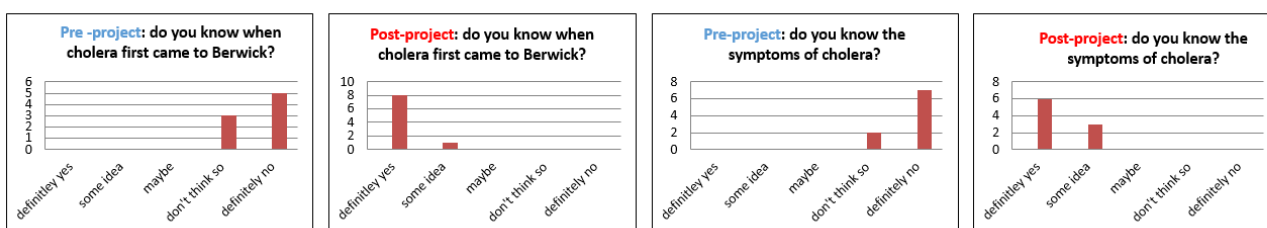
Findings: the impact on the pupils

Pupils: Subject content knowledge

Pupils understand how the work on cholera undertaken at the record office/university links to what they are studying in school (NC: History)

Pupils develop their knowledge of Cholera in Berwick

The pre and post project questionnaires demonstrated that the pupils had developed a good understanding of cholera as a disease including its symptoms and that this had improved significantly by the end of the 4 day project -which the pupils themselves recognised.



definition	pre	post
cholera	<p>'It's a virus I think'</p> <p>'A disease'</p> <p>'A disease'</p>	<p>'A waterborne disease with a lot of side effects that eventually kill you.'</p> <p>' A disease spread by dirty water. You usually die quickly and your skin turns blue, your tongue goes white, you vomit. it came to Berwick in 1832 then in 1854.</p> <p>'A disease that happened around 19th century and could kill'.</p>

It was also apparent that there were real benefits to exploring the local aspect of the cholera epidemic and that this added interest and relevance to the learning:

Pupil: I think it makes it more interesting because when people say cholera comes to Berwick and stuff like that you don't really think oh Spital or Tweedmouth, you think of the main, you know, where the town hall is, it was facts about the surrounding area and where I live and that makes it more interesting

The interviews with pupils several months after the project had ended and when they had started their GCSE history course also showed that they still remembered key facts about the disease and that it was both the work at the university and record office that had supported this:

Pupil: The facts we used, some were from the university, like what went into the cure and stuff and like how the cure worked and some from the archives we learned it was from the water they were drinking

They also demonstrated their understanding of how their learning fitted in with the Public Health aspect of the GCSE history course, although the pupils commented that the teacher

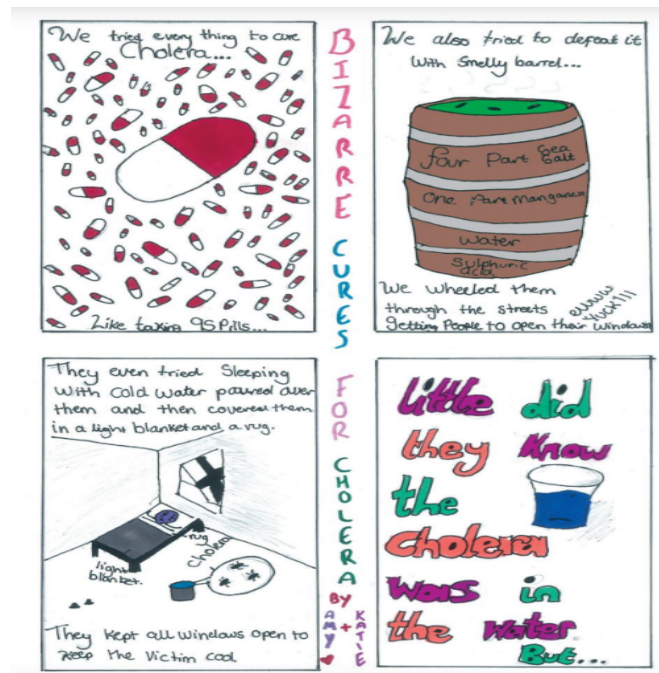
had not made use of the comic resource that the students had produced or built on their learning from the project in any significant way.

Pupil: We're doing a public health assessment this term.

Interviewer: Has it helped? Have you done anything on cholera?

Pupil: We did a little bit but we moved on quite quickly

The final version of the comic included many of the key facts that the pupils had learnt. It also highlighted the particular areas of interest for the pupils.



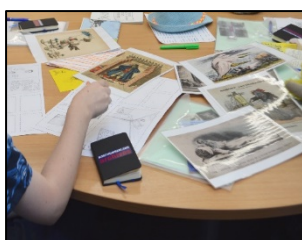
Pupils: Skills

Pupils understand how to use/extract information from primary sources

Pupils develop a range of skills including evaluation, interpretation etc.

Pupils learn about comic making: the use of story-telling, words, pictures, sequencing etc. how to use the sources appropriately.

The interviews highlighted that the pupils were aware that they had learnt a variety of skills over the 4 days and these included conducting research and working with archival resources as well as how to make a comic. The evidence suggests that the archivists and comic-maker scaffolded the work very effectively.



Pupil: [we learnt] how to organise the facts in a better way. They gave us notepads to put in all the important information

Pupil: we also had to use our judgement when we were looking through the names on the burial records because they were spelt the same and you had to judge whether you thought that was the same family

There were specific comments about the way the comic-making was structured as some of the pupils acknowledged that prior to the project starting they were quite anxious about having to draw:

Pupil: I didn't think, I won't like this, but I'm not huge on drawing either, I'm not great at it, but.... the way it was done, it was quite structured, we weren't just left to like draw

Pupils: building social and cultural capital (going places, meeting people)

Pupils 'meet people' and learn about different careers: archivists, museum educators, comic boss, graphic designer, and university

Pupils 'go places'- Berwick archive, Newcastle University, graphic design business, literary festival

There was clear evidence during the interviews that pupils had developed their social and cultural capital. They were aware that they had met a variety of people who had different jobs, most of which they knew they knew 'existed' but had 'never really thought about'.

They also described in detail the various places they had visited from the local sites in Berwick to the university. They showed a clear appreciation of the opportunity provided to behave like 'real' students when they visited the university:

Pupil: when we were there we didn't just learn about cholera, because we got to look around sort of the university itself, so they let us look at the university and how students went round in the day.....On open days you sort of look around a university but when we did it we looked at how students go around and how they actually did it themselves.

Pupils: production of high quality work (creating a final product that is showcased to an external audience)

The pupils make a comic using all of their new skills and knowledge. This final product is created for an external audience which raises the quality of the work

A key feature of the project was the production of a comic that would be printed and given out to pupils at Berwick Academy and to the local community at a variety of locations and at different events. There was acknowledgement from the pupils that having a final product and seeing their own work in print was something they were proud of:

Interviewer: What was it like seeing the finished comic?

Pupil: I was quite proud after because like we'd all completed that ourselves

Pupil: I was quite surprised because I didn't think it was going to go that well because neither of us can really draw, yeah, I was quite proud

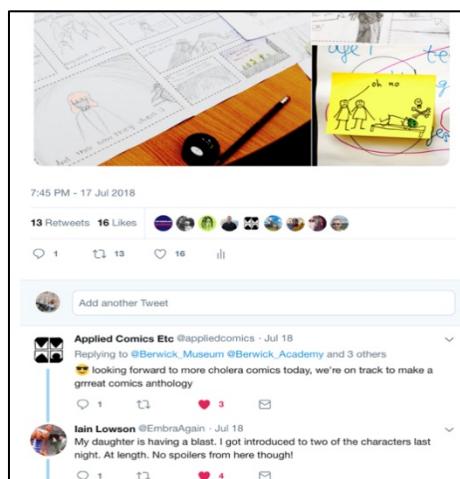
Pupil: I was quite happy because I didn't expect it like to go out to that many people

There was also acknowledgement that the nature of the project resulted in a great deal of effort:

Pupil: were not the best at drawing in the world but we did it in a way where it was meant to look simple. When you work on something three days straight, 4 days if you count the university, I think you want to put a lot of effort into it

Overall engagement:

The level of engagement in the project is exemplified by the fact that the pupils were talking about it with family and friends. One parent commented on twitter 'My daughter is having a blast. I got introduced to the characters last night. At length.'



Findings: The impact on the stakeholders from Berwick Record Office and Berwick Museum

The initial training that the partners from Learning Arc received, aimed to introduce them to the concept of a Community Curriculum and the principles that underpin it. With respect to Berwick Record Office and Berwick Museum, the archivist and education officer were not only keen to develop a project that adopted this approach they were also keen to develop links with Berwick Academy which they had until this point found very difficult.

Interviews with Linda Bankier and Jane Miller highlighted that they had found the training useful -in particular the concept of community curriculum making and some of the planning tools e.g. project tuning. They were introduced to the comic maker at the training event and it was this encounter that led them to choose a comic as the project end product. The

relationship between them and the comic-maker proved to be very effective with meetings and email exchanges ensuring that all were confident and well-prepared.

Initial contact between the school and Berwick Record Office was brokered by the researcher from Newcastle University. It was hoped that the reputation of the university would enable this contact to be established – something that had not been possible in previous attempts by the Record Office. Although a meeting was finally secured with the Head of Humanities; this did take several months. Trying to broker this contact via the head teacher proved impossible and it was actually conversations with the receptionist that provided the researcher with the appropriate person in the school to get in touch with.

The project benefitted from Linda and Jane's historical knowledge and understanding of archives, but also their local contacts, including a volunteer who helped with the archival research and who also worked with the pupils. They were also able to draw on their networks to arrange the visit to the graphic designer/printer and to have the pupils' work presented at the final showcase case events (the heritage open day and the Berwick Literary Festival). All of this proved critical to the success of the project.

The 4 day nature of the project was considered very beneficial because it allowed Linda and Jane to get to know the pupils and helped them build rapport. Overall Linda and Jane were impressed with the pupils' levels of engagement throughout the intensive few days. Initially they had thought the pupils' weren't very interested, but they soon realised that this was predominantly the result of early nervousness. Their overall comments about the pupils were that they were hard-working, well-behaved and respectful of each other's views. They all worked to the deadlines with some staying after school to finish the work off. This demonstrated both the levels of interest plus their determination to produce a high quality product.

With respect to the development of new relationships during the planning and delivery of the project, this has been very successful. The relationship between Berwick Record Office and Berwick Museum and the school has been transformed with the Head of Humanities getting in touch about resources and involvement in future opportunities. Similarly the project has strengthened links with the university.

Findings: Areas for improvement

It had been intended that the project would have a more significant impact back in school with it being incorporated into history lessons rather than an enrichment activity. This would then encourage a more sustainable relationship between the Record Office, museum and the school. Building in a regular visit to Berwick Record Office to look at the cholera archives and embedding it in either the Year 9 history lessons or the year 10 GSCE Public Health component of the course would ensure that the pupils would continue to experience the archives, learn how to conduct research and work with primary sources, and provide them with the opportunity to meet new people in different contexts. There would equally be the potential to continue to visit the university.

To achieve the above would require the active involvement of teaching staff in the planning process and delivery, and for them to take on board some of the visit organisation. In this particular project the workload on Linda and Jane was huge and they relied heavily on the support of the archive volunteer who did a lot of the research.

Interestingly both the pupils and Jane and Linda raised the fact that the project needed to be longer as it felt rushed. The pupils commented that there was information 'overload' particularly on the first day at the university. Because of the timing of the enrichment week (the last week of term) there was also no scope to add in additional time to give feedback on the comic strips prior to printing or for the pupils to go back to the printer to proof read the comic as part of the design process.

Conclusion

This project was extremely successful with respect to achieving the outcomes identified in the initial evaluation model (see page 5). The project adopted the principles of community curriculum making which resulted in the pupils able to take part in an engaging experience that developed their subject content knowledge and skills; introduced them to different careers and included visits to places both local and further afield.

This report concludes with word clouds of the results of two questions from the pre and post project questionnaire. The first is made up of the 5 words the pupils would use to describe their perfect lesson (pre-project) and the second is made up of the 5 words they would use to describe the project they took part in (post project). It is interesting how closely aligned these are.

