Developing Digital Communities – The War Detectives

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Abstract

This paper describes the building of a digital community in Scotland to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII. "The War Detectives" project encouraged intergenerational learning between war veterans and schoolchildren. It had to bring together the digital native younger generation with the digitally excluded elderly. The project proceeded in the context of considerable prior activity and expertise in building digital content and eLearning services in Scotland. This paper outlines the scope of the project and the extent to which it met its objectives, and concludes by enumerating some lessons for the future.

Background

The *Scottish Library and Information Council* (SLIC) is the advisory body for libraries in Scotland to the devolved administration and its Ministers and our members. SLIC was responsible for the co-ordination of the *New Opportunities Fund* (NOF)[1]-funded *People's Network* programme in Scotland which installed free internet access in 545 public libraries across 32 local authorities. SLIC has been advocating the development of relevant digital content and the use of metadata standards since 1999. With this in mind, this paper outlines one of the digital programmes we have developed, coordinated and delivered. From this experience I hope to highlight some of the successes and the challenges of such programmes.

The *Big Lottery Fund*'s *Their Past Your Future* scheme was one strand of the *Veterans Reunited*[2] programme which was designed to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. Big Lottery Fund asked key strategic bodies in libraries museums and archives across the UK to help them implement this programme in a very short timescale and posed many challenges. SLIC, the *Scottish Museums Council* (SMC), and *Learning and Teaching Scotland* (LTS) developed, co-ordinated and delivered *Their Past Your Future* in Scotland. The consortium worked in partnership with the *Imperial War Museum* (IWM) who were awarded GBP4million to organise a series of UK-wide exhibitions to raise public awareness about WWII.

The grant enabled the Imperial War Museum touring exhibition to visit six destinations in Scotland, and the Consortium was able to develop a programme to reflect the Scottish experience and record information and experiences of the war effort at local, regional and national level. More importantly the programme supported events and exhibitions, which focused on intergenerational and lifelong learning. The projects involved creating a legacy of resources for learning that complement existing

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[1] NOF is now Big Lottery Fund http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk
[2] http://www.tpyf.com/ and http://www.iwm.org.uk/server/show/nav.00n008

archives and collections.

What could we deliver within the timescale?

As a partnership there were many challenges and issues that we had to address before we could launch the programme. First of all we to had get agreement that the programmes would need to be developed under an overarching programme for the UK, but which took account of local need and landscape. We recognised at an early stage that an exhibition alone would not generate sufficient interest from schools and get them involved with War veterans. As a result of the events in a Dunblane Primary School in 1995/6, there were concerns about health and safety, disclosure checks, time out of school, security in schools etc. We also had to consider how we could ensure that intergenerational learning happened - no small task when something of this scope and scale had not been attempted before. We have had large scale digitisation programmes such as those funded by the New Opportunities Fund and The Millennium Commission[3] , but these were largely institutionally led and the learners' experience and contribution came later.

These issues were further compounded by the fact that there is no single curriculum for the United Kingdom. The Imperial War Museum had assumed that they would be able to engage all school pupils from 5 to 18 in this programme across the UK. The history of the Scottish Education system is well documented and it was crucial that as partners we are able to present a programme to schools and local authorities that fitted this and could be delivered. This meant we had focus on a specific age group where World War II was already part of the curriculum: within primary schools, age 10 and 11. We also had to think of something which captured the imagination and encouraged participation and interaction with libraries, museums, archives from schools and veterans.

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[3] EnrichUK http://www.enrichuk.net, Enrich Scotland http://www.EnrichScotland.net and SCRAN http://scran.ac.uk/

The Digital User's needs and skills

The wider digital landscape was a key consideration. These pupils were largely "digital natives",[4] and their learning needs and capabilities were developing in a very different way from traditional learning methods. These were people who increasingly expect services to be delivered 24/7 across high capacity broadband networks. The Google Generation think that quality information is free of charge and that speed of response matters more than the quality of the information. They also expect it to be delivered seamlessly via multiple channels, from internet, mobile technology and television. However good their technical digital skills may be, their information literacy and competency are not necessarily at the same level.

In an article in the FT Digital Business Supplement 21/9/2006, "digital natives" were described as follows:

- They are video gamers with different expectations about how to learn, work and pursue careers.
- They are technology literate, but that does not make them media literate (or information literate).
- They are content creators and that shapes their notions about privacy and property.
- They are product and people rankers and that informs their notions of propriety.
- They are multi-taskers often living in a state of "continuous partial attention", where the boundary between work and leisure is quite permeable.

On the other side, participants were "digital immigrants" or more likely "digitally excluded", perhaps even verging towards "Luddites"[5] and we were expected to bring these two together.

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[4] Marc Prensky, Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. From On the Horizon (NCB University Press, Vol. 9No. 5, October 2001)
[5] Luddite: one of a group of early 19th century English workmen destroying labour saving machinery as a protest; *broadly* : one who is opposed to especially technological change

There have been a number of initiatives in Scotland to use digital material in learning and teaching. Teachers have had training in the use of digital technology through NOF funding, participation in the *Masterclass* programme, and other training provided by Learning and Teaching Scotland. However, it would be fair to say that the evidence of its use in the classroom was modest and there was still some way to go. There were IT security and broadband capacity issues which we had to consider and a preference still to work from CD ROM in the classroom. The Scottish Executive had committed funding to the Scottish schools digital network now known as GLOW[6] . This was only in development when we started this project. It was anticipated that GLOW would provide a secure information network for teachers and pupils which it was anticipated would include secure mail and chatroom facilities, a managed learning environment, and digital content.

Managing the community participation and social interaction was also important to encourage active citizenship and community cohesion. There were a myriad of issues of which we had to be aware.

Developing Digital Content – the Scottish Context

Scotland is extremely fortunate in terms of our knowledge base to support digital issues. We have key organisations and bodies who are keen to participate and have considerable experience and expertise. In addition to the well-known SCRAN, there are many more which expose and preserve community resources and heritage:

- Virtual Mitchell http://www.mitchelllibrary.org/vm/
- Glasgow Digital Library http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/
- Springburn museum http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/springburn/
- Am Baille http://www.ambaile.org.uk/en/index.jsp
- RLS – Resources for learning Scotland http://www.rls.org.uk/

- Scottish Cultural Portal Http://www.scotlandsculture.org
- Portal to the Past http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/heritage

An underpinning theme of the development of digital resources has been partnership and collaboration. Sectoral networks have also worked to develop frameworks which address the issues of interaction between people, build communities and help people find what they want.

Whilst Librarians and libraries across the world know that finding information and ensuring customers find what they really, really want, consistently and quickly, can only be achieved through the adoption of standards. It is sometimes more difficult to persuade others without this background that this is important. This was a difficult area for us in this project, as we knew that the standards we wished to apply would not be understood by those creating the content.

A comment which is regularly made about the adoption of standards is that there are so many, so what do you choose? SLIC has argued in two of its publications[7]   that standards need to be adopted to ensure that digital information can be recycled, repurposed and reused. They fall into two areas
- Technical and interoperability standards such as MARC 21, SCORM (learning object standards), and E-gif (e government interoperability framework)
- Semantic standards, which in Scotland includes the Integrated Public Service Vocabulary (IPSV), thesauri, taxonomies, controlled vocabularies, subject headings, and classification schemes

The development of the "Their past your future- Scotland" programme

The development of a workable and sustainable programme was challenging and the Business Plan for the Big Lottery Fund we proposed two strands to the Scottish programme, one which encompassed the Imperial War Museum's Touring Exhibition, enabled local museum content

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[7] Enabling Seamless Access 1999 http://www.glowscotland.org.uk and Organising Information 2001 http://www.slainte.org.uk/files/pdf/slic/orginfoimplement.pdf

to be fully exploited and a second separate e-learning strand, which
- Generated Inter-generation learning opportunities
- Provided a quality museum experience and explored the concept of "entitlements"[8]
- Developed and improved competencies and skills in Information and Media Literacy
- Provided a Digital legacy of the collective memory of World War II in Scotland
- Provided Learning Resource for the future
- Linked to the Scottish Curriculum

War Detectives – the e-learning strand

SLIC had the lead role in the e-learning strand of Their Past Your Future Scotland (the War Detectives project), with support from Learning and Teaching Scotland. SLIC worked with grant recipients, developed their content for the web site and administered the project. SLIC developed two web sites for Their Past Your Future Scotland: www.wardetectives.info and www.scotlandswar.info which provided information on the touring exhibition and events programme during the period of the programme.

War Detectives encouraged school children and community groups in Scotland to learn about the Second World War. Participating groups spoke to people who experienced war, gaining an insight into the impact war had on peoples' lives and then investigating how their communities were affected.

From their research, pupils produced a series of digital resources that are available from this website: www.wardetectives.info.
Local authorities and schools were invited to apply for grants of up to £10,000 to facilitate inter-generational learning experiences which use ICT; offered educational activities that:

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[8] Draft Culture (Scotland) Bill 2006
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/160710/0043681.pdf

- describe, expand and illustrate the impact of the war on local citizens, communities, geography and social history;
- support teaching and learning for areas within 5-14 Environmental Studies, Information and Communications Technology and Citizenship. This includes 'People in the Past' and 'People and Place';
- create new digital assets which can be used by the wider school population and local communities.

The projects developed digital learning resources by talking to people in the community who lived through the war. Project leaders approached individuals and organisations to invite older people to participate in the project. The older people were interviewed by the young people and asked to tell their war time experience of childhood, school, work, family life or the armed forces.

Digital resources and other materials developed by pupils and teachers were then produced from these interviews and the films or audio recordings were transcribed for the web site. Young people researched the topics discussed during the interviews in their local library or museum. Schools, libraries and cultural co-ordinators worked with individuals and organisations in the local community. Groups involved in the project included: Royal British Legion, Senior Citizens Clubs, local authorities, library services, museum services, residents of sheltered housing complexes, church groups, RAF Tain, Fort George, Historic Scotland, Commando Museum, Nairn Museum, War Veterans of Normandy, The Guild Players, National Museums of Scotland, Kittochside Museum of Scottish Country Life, Fly Right Dance Company, BBC Scotland, Seaforth Highland Regimental Museum, Ellon British Legion, Gordon Highlander Museum, and the Museum of Flight.

Projects provided their resources in variety of formats including CD-ROM and DVD. Material included text, digital images, HTML pages, audio files and film. SLIC managed the resources and developed content suitable for web delivery. For example, film supplied on DVD was edited so that it was in appropriate sections to ease web delivery. The maximum length of time for optimum web delivery is 6 minutes and clips were edited into sections to reflect specific themes.

The number of digital resources or assets received is detailed in the table below. A digital asset examines a particular aspect of the war; this could be broad area or a specific event. An asset received could vary from a full DVD to an individual image, therefore it was difficult to in the early stages meaningfully quantify how much relevant material we were actually

dealing with. The number of assets on the web site gives a more meaningful indication of the resources created and this information is available when the assets are developed for web delivery. The project as a complete entity has developed 615 digital assets. It is important to note that we discarded a considerable number through quality checking (of both technical quality and relevance).

Project	Assets received	Total web assets created
Am Baile	2	155
Cauldeen	23	41
Cowdenbeath	4	44
Dysart	3	16
East Ayrshire	27	77
Inver	26	51
Inverclyde	45	63
Loirston	4	19
North Ayrshire	26	22
Summerhill	4	25
Sunnybank	12	53
West Lothian	9	49

Making all this content "internet ready" was not as simple as one would have thought; it did require considerable support from SLIC staff to make them "fit for purpose". Material was arrived in a variety of formats, digital and non–digital (despite the fact that this was a digital strand), and were of varying extent and quality. The following are some examples of what we are able to produce;

- Mary Munro's husband was a prisoner-of-war in Germany; her daughter Catriona helps her tell their family's story – audio in Gaelic with English translation

http://www.wardetectives.info/projects/wardetectives/gaelic/amba0011.htm

- Children learning by interaction east Ayrshire street games (also links to transcript)

http://www.wardetectives.info/projects/wardetectives/eastayrshire/eayr0110c.htm

- An intergenerationa learning experience through interview – a veteran talking about Inverness (also link to transcripts)

http://www.wardetectives.info/projects/wardetectives/highlandmemoirs/caul0004.htm

What subjects did we cover?

First of all, they had a people and community focus as one might expect.

- Food and rationing.
- Military service.
- Military transport.
- Local reminiscences.
- Evacuations and evacuees.
- friendship, friends and family lost.
- Entertainment, street parties.
- VE day, VJ day, D Day
- Atomic bomb
- School and teaching, propaganda
- The battle front.
- The home front
- Attacks, safety equipment
- Travel
- Air raids

Project Reach and achieving objectives

War Detectives engaged over 1200 people in their 12 projects and had the following age breakdown

- 738 aged 5-12
- 11 aged 12-17
- 173 aged 17-60
- 267 aged 60+

The children learned from the older generation about their experience of living through the war either as children, in the forces, or working. This achieved inter-generational learning and developed childrens' understanding of life during WWII.

The children then researched various themes that arose during these interviews in local libraries, museums and archives developing their knowledge and understanding about the war.

The young people met the older people both in the context of interviews and during social events including street parties and tea dances that were held to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII and to celebrate the success of the War Detectives project.

Throughout the process children developed various soft skills including note taking and improving their communication skills through developing techniques in asking the right question and listening. Their information

handling and research skills were improved as the children undertook research into topics relevant to their local area and the discussions with the older people. ICT skills were developed including using word processing to transcribe interviews and using equipment to record the interviews.

Many of these transferable skills will be valuable for the children in future learning activities and social interactions.
Project leaders were asked to evaluate if they felt that time was well spent on the project and if the project achieved the objectives. The response was that all projects either strongly agreed or agreed that time was well spent on the project and that the project achieved its objectives.

The project aimed to create a web site that would provide access to digital material reflecting the wartime experience in Scotland. This material was created by inter-generational learning resulting from interviews of older people by young people, capturing unique reminiscences.

In terms of community engagement
- 76% of visitors increased their knowledge or understanding of WWII
- 29% feel differently about others/their community
- 28% think or feel differently about WWII
- 26% feel differently about themselves/their family
- 9 in 10 people up to the age of 59 (and 6 in 10 over the age of 60) felt they had learned more about the War,

We achieved all our goals, albeit in a slightly longer timescale as we had to extend the project to deal with some of the technical issues.
- Learn about the war in their own area √
- Inter-generational learning √
- Create their own learning material √
- E-learning strand √

- Entitlement to attend exhibition √
- Create a digital archive of Scotland's War √

We looked specifically at the learning outcomes for pupils using *How Good is our school 2*[9] , which is a self evaluation framework linked to inspection for Scottish Education. It considered:
- The extent to which the learning environment stimulated and motivated young people
- Pace of learning
- Personal responsibility for learning independent thinking and active involvement in learning
- Interaction with others

The Levels at which these Outcomes are achieved are important: Level 1 is unsatisfactory, Level 2 is adequate, Level 3 is good and Level 4 is excellent. The evaluation gave the e-learning programme the following assessment;

Project	Stimulated & motivated	Pace of learning	Independent thinking /active involvement	Interaction with others
Am Baile	4	3	3	3
Cauldeen	4	4	4	4
Cowdenbeath	4	2	2	4
Dysart	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
East Ayrshire	3	3	4	4
Inver	4	3	4	4
Inverclyde	4	3	4	4
Loirston	4	3	4	4
North Ayrshire	4	3	4	4
Summerhill	4	2	4	4
Sunnybank	4	4	4	4

[9] How Good is our School 2 http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/hgios.html

West Lothian	4	3	3	3

Teachers and pupils responded positively to the project and saw the whole process as relevant to the curriculum and a stimulating way to teach and learn. An important point to note is that learning was more than a classroom experience, and involved more than teachers. Currently a new curriculum for Scotland is being developed. "A Curriculum for Excellence[10] seeks to develop four capacities in learners;

- • Successful learners
- • Confident individuals
- • Responsible citizens
- • Effective contributors

Young people should be **successful learners**, with enthusiasm and motivation for learning, determination to reach high standards of achievement, openness to new thinking and ideas, and ability to:

- use literacy, communication and numeracy skills;
- use technology for learning;
- think creatively and independently;
- learn independently and as part of a group;
- make reasoned evaluations; link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations,

These elements are crucial to what libraries do.

Young people should be **confident individuals** with self respect, a sense of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing; secure values and beliefs; ambition and ability to:

- relate to others and manage themselves;
- pursue a healthy and active lifestyle;
- be self aware;

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[10] A Curriculum for Excellence http://www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk

- develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world;
- live as independently as they can;
- assess risk and take informed decisions; achieve success in different areas of activity.

I would beg to suggest that reading can underpin and support these aspirations, alongside access to quality information resources that the library can provide.

Young people should be **responsible citizens** with respect for others, commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life and ability to:
- develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it
- understand different beliefs and cultures make informed choices and decisions
- evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues develop informed, ethical views of complex issues.

Young people should be **effective contributors** with an enterprising attitude; resilience; self-reliance and ability to
- communicate in different ways and in different settings;
- work in partnership and in teams;
- take the initiative and lead apply critical thinking in new context;
- create and develop solve problems.

We were able to demonstrate through War Detectives that Libraries, learner resources centres, museums and archives, and professional staff can contribute to all of these four cornerstones already outlined in A Curriculum for Excellence

Outcomes and Lessons

In the light of experience there are many lessons learned which we will take into account in the future – some general and others digital.

SLIC found that the resources created were sometimes in a format unsuitable for web delivery. Addressing this technical problem and the associated quality issues required staffing resources. For example, a number of projects created DVD films which were too long for effective delivery over the internet. SLIC engaged consultants to edit these films into appropriate formats and lengths. These requirements should have been addressed in the project plan.

The project provided some guidance regarding technical standards and interoperability. At an early stage SLIC and LTS made a decision to simplify these standards in order to encourage participation, with a view that project staff would apply the more complex metadata standards in preparation for web delivery. As the project progressed it became clear that more specific information should have been provided and practical support available to assist project leaders as they developed content.

It emerged that some advice given by strategic organisations did not reflect the reality within organisations. For example, the equipment in schools and ICT skills of teaching staff were not in evidence on the ground despite indications that equipment was available and skills development had taken place. The assumption was made, because teachers had the training and schools had the equipment, that it was being used on a regular basis, this was not the case. A number of projects recognised this in their evaluation.

There were a number of issues with compliance with Copyright legislation with regard to use of images and audio material. SLIC took the view that if ownership of copyright was unclear the resource would not be published on the web site.

Some projects were unclear about the definition of an educational resource and, while there was a value in the experience of creating the material, some resources appeared to be of limited value to other learners. SLIC would ensure that definitions are clearly defined at the start of future projects.

Projects were asked to provide transcripts of all film and video produced. The quality of transcripts varies between projects and clearer guidance on how to prepare transcripts should have been provided. For example, some transcripts paraphrase the interviews, while others give a verbatim account of what was said.

The project has developed experience in interviews and creating digital material and many projects learned valuable lessons that will inform future activity. Lessons learned and issues identified include:

- Considering the location prior to the interviews, including background noise and interruptions.
- Arranging an informal meeting of the children and veterans prior to the interviews to enable more effective and informed questioning.
- Creating a storyboard prior to filming to ensure that children

were confident in the interviews.
- ICT access in schools patchy.
- The equipment available were Apple Macs not PCs, thus leading to compatibility problems.
- Children required practice in using equipment.

The age of children limited some activities as they did not have some basic skills. For example, word processing skills and basic typing skills were required. A number of projects reported difficulties in getting appropriate staff skills and expertise. There was an over estimation of ICT skills of both pupils and staff and any project of this nature should have a more realistic approach. One non-school based project reported that feedback from teachers will help inform future activities to meet the needs of the curriculum and support children of this age group.

Some projects reported that there were difficulties in scheduling time for the project with the other demands of the school day. A small number of projects were unable to arrange to see the touring exhibition as the dates did not tie in with timelines of the project. These points demonstrate how crowded the curriculum in Scotland is, and how little time there is for other ways of teaching and learning. *A Curriculum for Excellence* seeks to provide more time to allow a more flexible approach to teaching and learning which suits individual pupil needs and interests. *War Detectives* demonstrated that e-learning can provide a focus for such an approach.

Summary

In delivering *War Detectives* the partnership has

- Created two websites
- Developed a WWII Scotland digital archive – to be deposited with National Library of Scotland for the future, also GLOW.
- Established a model for libraries, museums and archives to interact with the curriculum
- Gained experience on which to develop a strategy for digital asset management in Scotland
- Demonstrated that partnership working can deliver a range of services
- Delivered a positive experience for all

Big Lottery Fund has asked the partnership to look at developing Their Past Your Future Scotland II. The Scottish Museums Council is developing a bid.

There is one message that we can bring from the project about developing digital communities, learning and assets. A range of literacies and competencies is required for the 21st century. Being technically or media literate is not enough. Reading and Numeracy are still key, alongside communication and social skills. These need to be developed and nurtured to ensure that people have adequate levels of technological, information, media, and digital competencies to create relevant and quality digital assets which can then be used to build digital communities. But even with that they still need the specialist help of librarians to organise and ensure those communities are vibrant and can be easily accessed by all.

War Detectives provides a unique first hand account and digital record from those who lived through the war years in their own words and provides a digital legacy for those in the future.