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TIME TRAVELS

**Innovative and Creative
Methods of Historic
Environment Education
in Modern Museums**

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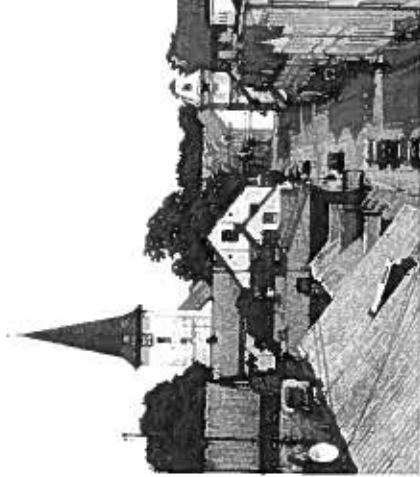
CEĻOJUMS LAIKĀ

**Inovatīvas un radošas
kultūrvēsturiskās vides
izglītības metodes
mūsdienu muzejos**

Tukums museum

Time Travels

Innovative and Creative
Methods of Historic
Environment Education
in Modern Museums



Tukums

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A teacher: "As you know, most of this student population has been drawn from a larger group typified by social/cultural deprivation. They're unfamiliar with the experience of having strongly positive interaction with adults - this was a real eye opener for them!"

Historic Environment Education at New Mexico State University uses nearby history to focus on important periods in New Mexico's past. Working with museum professionals, local historians and schoolteachers, we will continue to train educators and public historians in the techniques and methodologies of HEE. Through the Bridging Ages network, we will also share ways of enlivening the teaching of history among our members in various countries. Through oral history, historic preservation and living history, we will keep on making history come alive for our students.

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"Time Travel". Eketorp, Iron Age. Sweden. 425 AD

Lena Fritzen and Birgitta Gustafsson

Now and Then: The Similar and the Different

Time Travels Bring Schools and Museums Together

Introduction

Time travels are educational events during which qualified experts take people back in time to learn about historically significant places, times and events. This travel through time represents an encounter between now and then. It encourages people to relate the present to the past and to reflect upon their own lives in encounters with the unfamiliar "Other", and the unfamiliar time. The goal is to replace an "us and them" attitude with an approach which unites people and highlights what they have in common. This is a type of encounter which can create

new meaning. If “now and then” and “similar and different” are merged, it becomes possible to understand one’s own place in history:

“/.../ Dealing with the past is not an escape; escape is when you focus on the present and future with dogged concentration that is blind to the heritage of the past that influences us and that we must live with.” (Schlink and Högläsaren, 1997)

Schools and museums share the responsibility for ensuring that children and adolescents can create meaning. Both cultural institutions can be seen as pedagogical practises in which one needs to identify and then deepen one’s understanding of oneself and the surrounding world.

In 2005, the Kalmar County Museum invited us to serve as constructive critics, tasked with monitoring and, to a certain extent, analysing the educational aspects of the Eketorp fortress on Öland Island. The initiative was part of a larger European Union project which dealt with the global cultural history of the southern parts of the island. The Kalmar County Museum has years of comprehensive experience with educational activities, and particularly with time travels (see www.kalmarlansmuseum.se). We were invited to join in discussion with those who are responsible for educational activities at the museum – archaeologists and museum pedagogues who are in charge of time travels at the prehistoric Eketorp fortress. Also present were representatives of those schools which take part in this process, particularly the Mörylångå school. We took part in two time travels, one meant for schools, the other for tourists. This paper should be read in the context of this experience, although it can also be seen as a description of time travels in general – ones based on contexts other than Eketorp.

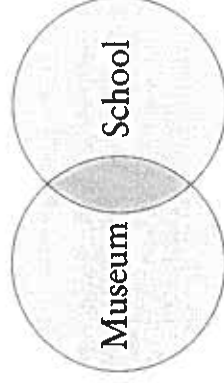
The purpose of this paper is to discuss time travels as processes which create meaning, particularly with respect to children and adolescents in the context of school.

We begin by describing the origin of our critical discussion of time travels as a collaborative meeting place between schools and museums. We describe our views about how these two cultural institutions are being brought together, and we consider what the concept of creating meaning means to us. We also highlight a few didactic factors which schools and museums should take into account when offering time travels. We conclude with a few reflections on what time travels can contribute to the context of schools.

A Place where schools and museums meet

Our focus has been on what happens when a school and a museum encounter each other in the context of time travels. As can be seen in Figure 1, the school’s involvement involves much more than just a trip to a museum, while the museum’s activities must involve more than just a time travel with the school. The intersection of the circles creates an interface or area within which the museum and school meet.

These results, of course, can be examined from many different perspective, but as we are pedagogues, we were interested in what



the process offers in terms of learning, understanding, creating meaning, participation, etc. In other words, we see the interaction between the school and the museum as an arena for pedagogical practice. To us, this refers to a social context in which participants – schoolchildren, museum employees, archaeologists and teachers – learn and develop in social terms. This involves collective action via which understanding oneself and the world in which one exists is developed. This process draws attention to the fact that an individual’s actions are dependent on context, that context is crucial for conceptual development, and that conceptual development is a relational process (Fritzen 1998, Gustafsson & Fritzen 2004).

Museums and schools are cultural institutions which, to a certain degree, have the same duties. Both are charged with sustaining societal values such as democracy, equality and solidarity. Both contribute toward the understanding of a society’s cultural and historical heritage. Still, there are also two basic differences between the two institutions and the way in which they operate. Museums are relatively free in deciding on what to do with their budget, while schools are regulated and controlled to a much greater degree. These system-related differences must be taken into account in the encounter between the museum and the school. Even if the children are liberated from the classroom

for awhile as they visit the museum, the fact is that they are there with classmates and teachers, and that means that the inherent structures, relationships and attitudes of the school are still in place.

The cultural policy goals of the museum

The museum's operational objectives are based on seven cultural and political goals which were formulated by the Swedish government in 1974 and modified in 1996:

- 1) To safeguard freedom of expression and create proper conditions for everyone to take advantage of it;
- 2) To lobby on behalf of everyone's ability to take part in cultural life, to form contacts with culture, and to indulge in creative cultural activities of their own;
- 3) To promote cultural diversity, artistic renewal and quality, thus countering the negative effects of commercialism;
- 4) To provide suitable conditions for culture to act as a dynamic, challenging and independent force in society;
- 5) To preserve and make use of Sweden's cultural heritage;
- 6) To promote the desire to learn;
- 7) To promote international cultural exchange and the coming together of various cultures within Sweden.

These goals are intended as a framework for cultural activities in every sector of society (www.kulturradet.se/index.php?pid=2056).

Schools have greater or lesser legitimacy in society, but museums and cultural institutions often must justify their very existence, both amongst themselves and in terms of the public at large. Allocation of resources, too, often depends on political good will at the national and the local level. Small museums can also be dependent on charitable contributions (Aronsson, Gerrevall & Larsson, 2000).

The Eketorp fortress, which was the starting point for our study, is run by the Kalmar County Museum (www.kalmarlansmuseum.se). The museum has a broad scope of interests – in addition to its collection, archives of imagines, exhibitions and archaeological objects, it has produced a comprehensive educational initiative which is called "History Through All Time". Here is a description of this educational service:

"The museum takes care of source materials and teacher training.

Teachers and students pursue their studies at school as a normal part of their everyday education. The school and museum then collaborate on a one-day "trip back into time", focusing on the period of history that the class has studied at school. The time trip is held at a site of local historical significance." (Eklund, Danielson & Westergren, 2003)

Each year, some 2,000 schoolchildren and teachers take part in these time travel programmes at Eketorp. The site is visited by people not only from the local county, but also from other parts of Sweden.

The capabilities and limitations of schools

Schools are part of a system which demands results in terms of achievable goals, grades and other aspects of quality. Schools are controlled both by municipalities and by the National Agency for Education. Schools are a part of society, and they are continually influenced by scientific trends, political decisions and developments in educational theory. In this section we shall highlight the capabilities and limitations of schools in terms of establishing opportunities for the creation of meaning outside of the traditional context of the school.

This is part of a curriculum which was established in 1994 (Lpo 94). The curriculum did much to move toward a break-up of the individually oriented and positivistic view of knowledge (SOU 1992:94, *Vygotskij*, 1962). Where once there was a list of items in each subject that had to be covered in each school year, now the goal is to deepen the understanding of schoolchildren of various concepts in different areas. There have been dramatic changes in terms of what knowledge is and how learning occurs. Teachers traditionally have sought to facilitate learning by eliminating difficulties and ensuring "trouble free" teaching processes. This is a type of teaching which does not involve any challenging cognitive puzzles. According to *Vygotskij* (1926/1999), transmitting knowledge "in pre-cooked, ready-to-serve form is the easiest and most comfortable way to teach." Children must instead be presented with complicated and unforeseen events which force them to focus entirely on the creation of new combinations of existing experiences. Dialogue with the "Other" renews cultural knowledge, establishes solidarity among people, and develops one's sense of personal identity. If the school views learning as a relational process, time travels play an important role. The intersection between the school and the museum thus becomes a place at which schoolchildren, museum pedagogues, archaeologists and teachers can create a space in which new meanings can emerge.

When the Lpo94 took effect, however, strong winds of neo-liberalism were sweeping across the Western world, and this counteracted the ambitions of the new curriculum (Daun, 2002). Western educational discourse has increasingly been linked to a type of "business-oriented" discourse (Ball, 2001). Teachers are becoming producers, and schoolchildren and their parents are becoming consumers. Schools are turning into profit-driven enterprises, and principals and headmasters are increasingly seen as CEOs, as opposed to educational leaders (Ball, 1996). The perception is that the Swedish school system has shifted from a societal process focused on the common good to an increasingly private affair dedicated to the private good (Englund, 1995). The life-oriented space which the Lpo94 addressed offered a chance for people to create new meaning, but the curriculum has increasingly been colonised by system-related forces (*Håbermas*, 1987; Taylor, 1991). The focus is increasingly on measurable knowledge and on national and international tests. "Hard" knowledge makes it possible to rank countries at the international level, municipalities and schools at the national level, and teachers and students at the level of the individual school.

Going back in time through the process of time travels is an activity which cannot be measured. Because of eagerness to live up to a school's demands, this is a "learning encounter" that is easily dismissed in terms of being something that can be assessed. Time travels must offer something that is of particular interest, something that cannot be provided in the school environment as such. Schools must see time travels as a priority in their educational programmes.

Learning in terms of creating meaning

From our perspective, the term "creating meaning" refers to an educational approach in which learning occurs in interaction among people and can, therefore, not be seen as something that is isolated and occurs within the individual's own head. Learning is a process in which people challenge themselves and their existing thought patterns through cultural encounters, among other procedures, and time travels provide for such cultural encounters. These can occur among individuals, groups, ideas and conceptual worlds. They can be seen as confrontations or as arenas in which one can understand oneself in relation to one's surroundings.

Creating meaning – this requires that one be able to relate oneself to the events of a time trip. People understand the world if they are involved in the events that are enacted. Creating meaning

is a confrontation which sets one's own experience in motion and makes it possible to catch a glimpse of what is hidden inside oneself – the prejudices and that which is often taken for granted. When one's thoughts and reflections on experiences during a time trip are taken up in group discussions, new significances and meanings are created. This can be viewed as a creative act, one that must be taken seriously. The discussion lead to the emergence of something new – something that is greater than what each individual thinks.

What is the background for our ideas about learning as the creation of meaning? The theoretical starting point of our argument comes from the philosopher Charles Taylor (1991) and his discussion and analysis of modern Western society. Taylor discusses societal phenomena in the sense of life dilemmas. Western society today is coloured by individualism, argues Taylor. When the external and uniting "order" (context of meaning) collapsed in the middle of the 20th century, the concept of meaning changed. It was no longer anything comprehensive, now it referred to individual well-being. This was the source of the modern freedom to choose one's own lifestyle from a myriad of possibilities. When contexts of meaning collapse, instrumental explanations are given more room in people's lives. People increasingly are captured by instrumental and common-sense reasoning – rational thinking that has nothing to do with overarching value systems, writes Taylor. If a value system is unclear, that makes it difficult to ensure normative functions in everyday life, and this can lead to increasingly instrumental thinking.

What, then, is the true measure of success and the meaning of life? The answer lies in one-dimensional measures that are described as the success of the system in terms of efficiency, profit, quality assessments, etc. Instrumental thinking seeps into contexts in which other value premises have prevailed in the past – areas such as health care and schools. Individualism and instrumental reasoning can create a feeling of powerlessness and a lack of freedom. Even if individuals have been given greater freedom in a certain sense in that they are allowed to question authority, but the situation can still be interpreted as a great lack of freedom. This is most visible when no value system is in place. In that case, individuals are necessarily guided by their own personal values. These determine what one considers to be right and true. Taylor asserts that the job is the same for all of us – to find truth within ourselves. Being true to one's own self means finding one's specific authenticity. The route to self-understanding, thus, is one which each individual must find himself or herself. Only in genuine interaction with the

“Other” can one find one’s own identity, says Taylor.

This interpretation creates challenges for schools and museums alike. How can they present an arena for the creation of meaning, one which makes it possible for schoolchildren to understand themselves, their time and their place in the world?

Time travels as an encounter between school and museum

If we accept the idea that time travels represent a place where schools and museums encounter one another, then we see that this is an arena in which the self-understanding of schoolchildren and their ability to understand their surroundings are challenged and provoked. Time travels, thus, bring along didactic consequences for the operations of schools and museums alike. In our analysis of the operations of the Kalmar County Museum and, particularly, the time travels taken to the Eketorp fortress, we have highlighted three didactic aspects for the school and the museum to consider when organising time travels. These can be summarised in three concepts – conceptualisation, participation and confrontation.

The importance of creating context

The way in which meaning is created from situations or texts depends on the background knowledge of those who are concerned – in this case, the schoolchildren. They make interpretations on the basis of the applicable cultural context, and this context, in turn, influences understanding. Time travels can create a common experience for students which can become a new interpretative horizon. Understanding has a circular relationship from the whole to the component and then back to the whole – an endless process which is the very art of understanding. It is in the encounter with a new horizon, with the unfamiliar, that one’s own horizon of understanding can change (*Gadamer, 1989*). Learning is a situational process, which means that everything must be understood in relation to the system of which it is part (*Säljö, 2000*). A journey through time creates this kind of situational context of meaning – a created context in which the museum’s visitors are made a part thereof. The way in which this historical context and space for meaning are created is of key importance in determining whether the schoolchildren who have taken part in an historical journey have actually become involved in it (*Lefebvre, 1991*).

The space for meaning can be framed by a mental image or a story. What is the story which the museum wants to tell? Whose stories are the basis of the time trip – those of men, women or

children? Which are the prejudices that are challenged? How much knowledge about the historical context is needed if students are to become absorbed in the time trip? The school and the museum must think about what students will need to know in advance about the historical context of the trip so as to heighten their engagement in the story that is presented. Creating a context also means thinking about the emotional aspects of the period that is being presented in the time trip. Is there a feeling of harmony or of danger and insecurity? Games and role-playing require a common “playground” – a common story in which both children and adults who are taking part in a time trip can participate. The narrative can bring the story’s characters to life. Is the time trip complex and ambiguous, or is it all too clear-cut and intimate? The dramatic plot should contain intrigue, subplots and tensions. The more complex the plot, the greater the freedom of participants in terms of constructing their own interpretations of that which is challenging and unfamiliar (*Lindqvist, 1995*). One way to achieve this is to allow the framework story to be the common thread which weaves together all of the subplots into a cohesive work of fiction. Short stories and the basic elements of drama can be useful here – establishing time, place, character and dramatic events. The plot can be based on a work of literature, a letter, a piece of music or an artwork so as to place the museum’s visitors into a certain context.

The space of meaning also requires a physical framework, and here we refer to the actual location of the time trip. What is the symbolic or narrative potential of the physical location? How can this be utilised in the plot of the time trip? If a school is to opt for a time trip, as opposed to traditional lessons in history, the trip must take advantage of the magic of the relevant location. Students can be asked to sew Medieval clothing and cook Medieval foods, but they cannot create a magical fortress, whereas Eketorp can. The museum must ask this question: Have we captured the unique essence of the location, or could it be that the time trip might just as well have taken place elsewhere?

Participation

“Everyone is attentive. Hand-in-hand, participants close their eyes to take themselves back in time. The atmosphere can be interpreted as an expression of longing – the wish for something magical to happen during this journey from the present to the Middle Ages. We are standing close together, and there is palpable tension in the air. It feels as if we are leaving the everyday world behind. Now it is time. We close our eyes. Frödis tells us that when we enter, we will be in

the Middle Ages: 'We can't stay here. We've got to get inside the fortress, as it's almost time for prayers!' These are the words which introduce us to life at the fortress." (Notes from Eketorp).

The social framework for the space of meaning involves relationships and participation. Who are we? Why are we here and not somewhere else? What have we experienced? Is the time trip a game or a role-playing exercise?

From the pedagogical point of view, it makes no difference whether the time trip is called a game or a role-playing session. Of greater importance is the particular meaning that is ascribed to the time trip, focusing, too, on the extent to which it can influence the involvement of children in another context – in other words, this refers to the way in which the social framing occurs. It can be interesting to consider the form of a time trip very carefully. There is a clear connection among forms of expression such as theatre, drama, role-playing and games. These are all creative ways of doing work. Games have a close relationship to theatre (*Lindqvist, 2000*). The most fundamental aspects of theatre are also found in games – taking on a role, transforming roles, and animating objects (*Fridell, 2000*). There are also differences between theatre and games, however. Games are their own goal, they are enough in and of themselves, whereas the theatre requires an audience which games do not.

"Suddenly, an unfamiliar man appears in the fortress. There is something mysterious about him. Hulda and Frödis tell the children to follow him and see what he's doing. In these troubled times, one cannot always trust a stranger who enters the fortress. Some children are sent to fetch the chief of the fortress. The stranger claims to be a fishmonger, and he starts to ask the children about life in the fortress. The children are quiet and suspicious in response. Chief Edmund senses danger and becomes involved. He orders everyone to imprison the fishmonger. The children react immediately, taking the man prisoner, locking him up, and then carefully examining his basket. The drama escalates." (Notes from Eketorp)

What are the characteristics of games? In the pedagogical context, games take on new meaning. Human understanding is created when people participate in games. The game belongs to those who play it, and this sense of belonging means that the game cannot be viewed as an object. The person who plays the game gives himself over to it, and the game thus becomes the central factor. It exists only when it is played (*Steinsholt, 2001*). There are similarities between playing a game, reading a fascinating book

and experiencing a work of art. The person who plays the game steps out of normal existence, becomes immersed in the situation or events, and enters a new space. By taking on roles in a game, players become other people or characters. Games can be seen as the very foundation of self-understanding. This transformation, this taking on of a role can create new self-understanding.

Role-playing is different than games. Role-playing is a more consciously aesthetic work process, while games are more geared toward the spontaneous ability of children to shape their own experiences and feelings. In games, feelings steer interpretation and the process of imagination. The entire course of events can be characterised by an unawareness of how one gives shape to and then lives one's role in the context of the plot. In role-playing, by contrast, participants interpret the character of the role, and that requires heightened awareness. Involvement in a role means engaging in dialogue with something or someone. In a time trip, students can find themselves pursuing dialogue with the role figure and the era which that figure represents. Through this overarching dialogue, the role-player can see himself and his time as a difference in attitude toward the role figure's life and time.

Props such as period clothing, implements, tools and names are important for travel through time and space, but these props alone are not enough to ensure that children receive sufficient stimuli to suspend their disbelief and to believe that they really have travelled back in time. If the mental and social framework is weak, there is the danger that the focus will be only on material aspects such as props and locations. If the time trip lacks a story, in other words, the situation can be more reminiscent of a costume party than anything else (see *Lindqvist, 1995*).

The actors at the museum have a crucial function to perform. The way in which they involve visitors in their story is important in terms of determining the investment which the visitors make in the game or the role-playing exercise. Actors can perform different roles, using conversation and activities to draw visitors into the plot. This is necessary so as to keep the plot from stagnating and losing its level of tension and drama. In this sense, the museum's actors become mediators between the story and the audience, as they can act both outside and inside the actual story. As mediators, they become part of the same story as the one that is being watched by the visitors.

Reflective and analytical work begins after the time trip, and the school and museum share responsibility for this. Schoolchildren

need to learn and practice analogical thinking, which entails various links such as “us/them” and “now/then” (Gustafsson, 2002). The time trip and its verbalisation make these analogies possible. Experiences are interpreted, and this is a dialogue in which a new understanding of the historical course of events can emerge. This type of historical reflection can be thought of as the children’s awareness of the fact that they belong to history and are part of it.

Participation is a guiding principle for Swedish schools. Schoolchildren take part in class and school planning via their student and class councils (Lpo94). Through conversation, kids are supposed to take part in the learning process itself. Subjects that are covered must be based on the experiences of the students. Participation is ultimately about democracy, albeit not one that is primarily representative in nature (e.g., choosing members of the student council). Instead, it is a form of democracy which places discussions and dialogue at the centre of the process (Fritzell, 2003; Fritzen, 2003). Discussion, in the sense of attempts to develop a common understanding, requires a symmetrical relationship. In this type of discussion, it is not self-evident that the teacher knows more than the students or that one student necessarily knows more than another does. It is no simple task of ensuring that participants all feel that they are of equal value in discussions, because the culture of a school has traditionally been characterised by power structures and asymmetry. Perhaps time travels can contribute toward the breaking down of power structures at schools, if only for a short time.

Struck by experience

“The stone wall of the fortress, the small houses, the open courtyard, the coarse fabric of the costumes, the aroma of food and spices, the smoke from the fires, the pigs and the pigsty – all of these have something to tell. Entering the fortress is an experience for the senses. The location is full of symbolism.” (Notes from Eketorp)

Time travels are aesthetic projects which are seen, heard and felt. They speak to feelings and imagination alike (Aulin-Gråhamn & Thavenius, 2003). According to Lindqvist (1995), it is crucial to ensure that the plot which is created is full of symbols which release the imagination of the visitor. Only then can there be links between internal and external realities. Time travels and the senses involved with them are so special because they appeal to the visitor to the point where the experience becomes personal. At the same time, they require participants to delve into someone else’s history, thus dispensing with their own self-centredness.

“In a personalised naming ceremony, each participant states his or her real name, and then signs with new names are distributed. The museum’s actors are now called Hula and Frödis. We are standing in a ring and holding hands. Frödis walks around the ring, stops in front of each person, looks that person directly in the eyes, and says something like this: ‘Welcome, Anna. Your name isn’t Anna any more. Now your name is Ragnhild.’ The schoolchildren are silent, and they are concentrating on Frödo with great intensity. This shows that it is an important moment when children transform into someone else.” (Notes from Eketorp)

This is a charged moment, and the “time traveller” becomes lost in the moment and open to the familiar and the unfamiliar. That is the task for time travels, which can create an opportunity to reflect upon one’s own situation and to discover something about oneself – prejudices and preconceived notions in particular. Janik (1991) argues that we must be prepared to forget ourselves if we wish to gain knowledge about ourselves. This type of confrontation with an unfamiliar culture, time and “Other” can become an encounter between different conceptual worlds in which the limits of one’s own conceptions about the world can be challenged. Existing concepts are usually strengthened and validated, but sometimes things which have been held as true are disproved.

Learning traditionally involves teachers who make sure that schoolchildren feel secure and safe in the learning context. Since 1994, the Swedish curriculum has been founded on the idea that students should be confronted with unforeseen events, but it is easy for schools to remain on the “safe side”. What are the perspectives which the museum wishes to present in the historical journey? Does the story tell about women, children, everyday work, harmony, threats, fears, protections? There is much in our troubled world which suggests that we should seek harmony, but the fact is that time travels can also offer a perspective on conflict which can change boundaries and our starting points for discussion and reflection in the school and the museum alike.

Conclusion

Much of the teaching process at schools can be compared to a radio broadcast. Teachers transmit (“broadcast”) knowledge to students (“receivers”). This type of learning model excludes much of the things that time travels can offer. For schools to break out of the “radio transmitter” idea of learning, they need to encounter contexts in which there are other contexts for the process.

Time travels can initiate discussions with schoolchildren which the school can then take in hand and develop even further. Historical contexts can be brought to life in a way that is seldom possible with textbooks. Time travels tell stories, and they can provoke and challenge conceptions about the past, the present and the way in which we live our lives. Time travels can formulate the difficult questions which challenge everyday phenomena and conceptions, and even repressed parts of history can be given voice. It is not always easy to engage in existentially, socially and morally grounded discussions in the environment of a school. Time travels which give shape to contexts can provide a basis for these kinds of discussions. If children are placed in another context through time travel as an aesthetic project, they can leave themselves behind for awhile. They are assigned a role, and this offers a new relationship with their surroundings and classmates. This is a type of imagination, of feelings and aesthetic experiences, which allows children to distance themselves from everyday life. Later they return to it and examine themselves and their time differently and with greater insight. If this is a successful process, then a space that is full of learning potential is created. There is also an opportunity for new analogies – the ability to draw new links between the past and the present, between the similar and the different. It must also be said, however, that being taken back in time offers no guarantee of any deepened understanding or conceptual development. Schools and museums are jointly responsible for ensuring that critical reflection and analysis of the time trip will take place.

Encounters with museums and other cultural institutions can help to dislodge established patterns at schools. Even a brief encounter with a time trip can inspire schools, even in other contexts, to choose educational methods which involve the imagination and creativity of the students.

Additionally, time travels can also challenge the traditional operations of a museum. The Kalmar County Museum offers an excellent example. The museum has built up a great deal of experience through its vast number of time travels, both in its own area and in other parts of the county, country and world. This has influenced the museum's work in a great many ways.

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