Evolving and Involving: a dynamic, participatory experience for mobile learners

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Mudlarking in Deptford is a project that empowers young people to engage creatively with their built environment. Taking advantage of mobile technologies, young people initiate and add to an ever-evolving tour in and around Deptford Creek, London. Students (aged 11/12) walk the usually inaccessible areas of Deptford, making imaginative connections between large and small scale relics that connect histories embedded in the Creek itself.

Participants determine the direction of the walk through responding to located trigger points. These link conceptually and physically so that using digital technologies, the participants receive information and then input their own creative responses. The user captures the story of their tour using a specially designed toolkit that is being built through an iterative design process informed by users. These gathered responses are then collated to create an ever evolving and more involving walking tour whose parameters expand or contract dependent upon the imagination of the participants. The data recorded by the participants is then available to the next student group on the tour. As such, the traditional form of the 'didactic' guided tour is hijacked as participants themselves determine the content for scattered reference points located in the area.

A prototype of the users' toolkit is being developed in a partnership between NESTA Futurelab, Juliet Sprake and artist Peter Rogers. In using this toolkit, students are invited to tell the story of their investigations of the Creek through multimodal representation. The data captured during the tour is linked to a location on a GPS synchronised map and at the end of the tour students reflect upon their data as they upload it to inform future tours.

The paper draws on recent research on out-of-school, location-based and incidental learning to present a project that attempts to understand how new technologies can best be designed to create engaging learning experiences by creating a communal tour from individual stories.