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"Something generally happens" mapping young people's experiences of Constitution Hill

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Abstract

South African heritage sites are places that have the potential to support curriculum learning outcomes, and visits to heritage sites are sometimes included in the school timetable. Learning in museums is difficult to quantify, but it has been suggested that "something generally [does] happen" during visits to cultural sites (Hooper-Greenhill 2007:47). The focus of this research report is Constitution Hill, which is a prominent feature in the heritage landscape of Johannesburg that focuses on the atrocities, and the injustices of the past, while strengthening understanding of democracy and human rights. This research report evaluates the experiences of learners from the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase visiting Constitution Hill and participating in the Saturday Workshops run by Constitution Hill Education Project and attempts to identify what is the 'something' that 'generally happens'.

The data was obtained through semi-structured, open-ended interviews with learners, educators and programme co-ordinators. The data was analysed using the Generic Learning Outcomes Model, an evaluation tool developed in the United Kingdom. The research report proposes, despite the best efforts of schools and educators, many learners, regardless of socio economic background, struggle with making connections between South African history and their own daily realities and that this may influence the value they place on their democratic rights. However, the dynamic interaction with Constitution Hill, provided by the Constitution Hill Education Project, resulted in shifts in attitudes and perspectives suggesting that the 'something' that happens is positive and potentially far reaching. This research report also reflects on the interpretive strategies that characterise the engagement at Constitution Hill.

Keywords

Constitution Hill, Heritage, CAPS for History, Museum Education.