Previous chapters have focused on augmenting the formal education associated with schools, colleges, and universities. In these settings, an external authority such as an organization, institution, or teacher defines not only learners’ goals but also the ways in which they work to achieve those goals. However, much of our learning takes place informally, in settings where we choose our own methods, define our own goals, or work toward shifting goals (Vavoula, 2004). “The basic terms of informal learning (e.g., objectives, content, means and processes of acquisition, duration, evaluation of outcomes, applications) are determined by the individuals and groups that choose to engage in it” (Livingstone, 1999). This chapter and those that follow, therefore, examine the augmentation of learning in informal settings: virtually, using social media and through distributed networks.

Research and scholarship relating to informal learning often focus on its role in workplace training or in organizational settings (see, e.g., the journal edited by Marsick, 2009). Organizations provide complex problems that offer specific learning challenges. There is a need for more-rapid comprehension, better comprehension, the possibility of gaining a useful degree of comprehension in a situation that previously was too complex, speedier solutions, better solutions, and the possibility of finding solutions to problems that before seemed insoluble. (Engelbart, 1962, p. 4)
In the wider world, the challenges are broader. We make use of informal learning in order to make sense of our surroundings, engage with different communities, develop useful skills, deal with change, and understand our roles in the world.

When learners engage through choice rather than compulsion, approaches to learning and teaching are necessarily different. Informal learning often takes place when teachers are largely or entirely absent, so the role of the educator is less central than it is in formal settings. This type of learning is often serendipitous; individuals come across something that inspires them to learn. An artifact or event may provide the trigger for an investigation, and augmentation makes it possible for these to be associated with relevant information, ideas, and communities, helping to support learning even in the absence of an educator.

Museums and heritage sites have a continuing interest in informal learning. Many have worked for many years to augment visitors’ experience. This has included extending learners’ interaction with and perception of their current environment to include and bring to life different times, spaces, characters, and possibilities. This chapter, therefore, focuses on history and heritage, taking these as examples of the augmentation of informal learning in subject-based contexts.

**History and Heritage**

There are many definitions of both history and heritage. These encompass not only their subject matter, but also the practices related to that subject matter. Here, the two terms are used to refer to learning about and interpreting the past and its relationship to the present in academic, economic, and cultural contexts. Broadly speaking, history is taken to be concerned with understanding the past, and heritage to be concerned with mobilizing the past for use in the present and future. These broad definitions take in areas as diverse as cultural heritage, environmental heritage, digital heritage, and the study of texts and artifacts. They also include virtual history and virtual heritage.

Virtual history and virtual heritage are, themselves, terms with several distinct meanings. Although interest in them is increasing, they currently appear on few formal curricula, so their study and their practice are developing primarily through informal learning. They form a significant subset of digital heritage, an area that has been identified by UNESCO as being under threat: “digital heritage is at risk of being lost […] its preservation for the benefit of present and future generations is an urgent issue of worldwide concern” (UNESCO, 2003).