

UNLOCKING THE MAGIC: TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE IN WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

Results of a workshop on museums working with schools

10 October 2005 Manchester Art Gallery

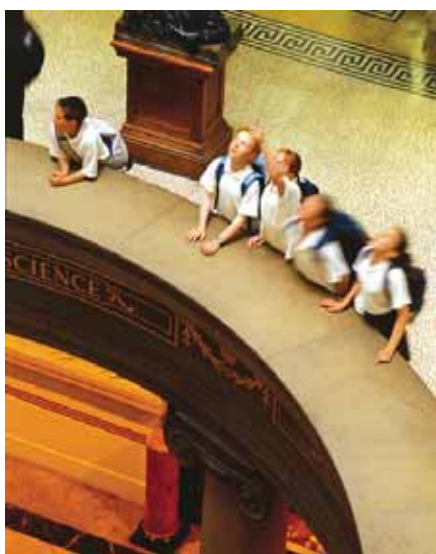


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1. Introduction

This document is a record of a “best practice” workshop organised by the NW Museum Hub.



Context for Workshop: Working with schools is one of the priority areas for all of the regional Hubs in England, the first round (2004-6) of funding for the Hubs focused on education. The Hubs were tasked with establishing a “comprehensive and integrated service to schools”.

Purpose of Workshop: The purpose of the workshop was to disseminate what we have learned from the Hub museums’ work with schools. The workshop was designed to maximise participants’ learning. Speakers were briefed to be brutally honest about what worked and what didn’t and were asked to make their presentation as lively as possible.

The Purpose of this document: To tell people about what happened at the workshop and to reflect on how successful it was.

What Happened:

Presentations: Six people reported on their work with schools and what they have learned from their work.

Discussion Groups: Small groups considered what they had learned and what they thought were the most important elements which should be included in a model for best practice when museums work with schools. The results of these discussions are presented here.

Evaluation: We evaluated the workshop by means of a questionnaire at the end. We also gathered information from talking with people in the breaks and observation. A group of representatives from each of the Hub museums discussed the workshop at a later date. The results of all this are presented here.

2. THE WORKING WITH SCHOOLS WORKSHOP

Madeleine Rogerson, Cultural Entitlement Coordinator from MLA North West and Lee Avison, Education Manager from Manchester City Art Gallery welcomed everyone to the workshop. Lee suggested that “It’s easy to imagine that we all work in the same way, but actually we’re probably working in very different ways. Today is an opportunity for us to come together to share our ideas.”

Unlocking the magic: The Education Programme Delivery Plan - Myna Trustram, NW Hub Evaluation & Research Officer.

Myna’s talk set out the context for the day. The aim of Renaissance in the Regions is to modernise regional museums in order to make them of value to wider audiences. Museum Hubs were set up in the English regions to deliver the Renaissance vision. The first round of funding (2004-6) has focused on education - establishing a “comprehensive and integrated service to schools”.

Each Hub was required to carry out research with teachers and LEAs. This was with a view to establishing a strategic approach to educational development, which would build supply and create demand, and help deliver local and national educational priorities. This is called The Education Programme Delivery Plan. One teacher told us that teachers value museums because they are “the keepers of so much magic for children”.

The Hub’s education programme is characterised by a strong emphasis on collaboration; willingness to try out new approaches; and a determination to influence the education sector from within. It started out very much concerned with getting children through the door and improving the service to schools. But the development of teachers has also emerged as a strong theme. This wider spread and influence of museum education is what we want, but how are we going to manage it? In five years time what will we see as the primary task for museum education?



Inspiring Learning for All and the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) - using them with schools - Paul Khan, Head of Core Programmes (National Museums Liverpool)

All museum staff members, from cleaners, to front of house, to directors, have a positive role to play, and a shared responsibility for the learning experience of museum users. So long as they have a passion for learning, the usual museum hierarchy doesn't matter!

Paul Khan outlined Inspiring Learning for All and the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs), and explained the principles that underpin the framework. These are:

1. People - Effective learning.
2. Places - Museums, Libraries, Archives
3. Partnerships - Building creative learning partnership
4. Policies, Plans, Performance - Placing learning at the heart of the museum

This covers not only enabling people to learn more, but also to make better sense of what they learn. This is partly achieved through positive attitudes and values, understanding the environments that encourage learning, and by including fun in the learning experience. Paul also stressed the importance of evaluating learning outcomes and explained the systems that National Museums Liverpool are developing to address this.

He showed examples of key questions used to prompt stories from pupils' impressions of their visit to the museum. These were then used for qualitative and quantitative analysis of the pupils' experience of the museum. He gave examples of incentives used to maximise pupils' participation, including the use of cartoons and certificates.

He suggested that head teachers know little of what museums have to offer. He suggested that once they know what is available, they become very keen to join in.

Working with specialist schools - Dawn Worthington, Education Officer (Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston) and David Chadwick, Head of Learning & Access (Lancashire Museum Service)

Enthusiasm can make or break your project. We asked them to do ambitious things, and they were very enthusiastic. The results speak for themselves!

Dawn and David are running projects on the theme of migration at three specialist art colleges. One theme of the projects is migration, from Viking and Roman times to the present day. One school looked at the experiences of people from the Caribbean who came to the Preston area. The project combined research and interviews and produced costumes for the local Caribbean Carnival. Another school used dance and drama to tell a story about local people during the Industrial Revolution and the effects of migration from rural to urban settings on a fictionalised family.

The three projects highlighted several key issues for museums working in partnership with schools. These are:

1. It is a big learning curve to understand schools' issues and constraints.
2. Projects have to be relevant to museums' collections as well as schools' curricula. This can limit what museums can offer.
3. Adaptability to unforeseen events is essential to projects' success. This was demonstrated when the museum had to close for a long period.
4. Museums and schools need to be clear about what they expect to gain from a project, before it begins.
5. From the success of these projects, the museum wants to make the projects sustainable, and embed the links with the museums into the schools' practice.

Dazed and confused - negotiating CPD for post 16 educators - Leanne Manfredi, Post 16s Training Coordinator (Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester).

If you're not flexible it does nothing for creativity, it hampers it.

Leanne focused on the research and development of her post as Post-16 Training Co-ordinator at the Whitworth Art Gallery. She is developing her own working practice by a process of imaginative and responsive trial and error.

In 2004 the Whitworth commissioned research into the



We're all learners - children, creative practitioners, and everyone who works in a museum.

Denise Bowler is working with artists who are helping schools to "connect with collections". She started by asking some questions: Why do we collect? Do you collect anything? What is the difference between personal collections and museum or gallery collections? Why do we choose to work with collections?

She did a practical activity with some participants which demonstrated the approaches used in Connecting with Collections projects - invigorating the group, illustrating team work, trust, risk-taking and problem solving; presenting the everyday in a new light.

The Connecting with Collections programme has led to shifts in the perceptions of the participants, all of whom Denise described as learners: the children, the teachers, the creative practitioners, the curators, the learning team and the coordinator.

Artists who perceive the work as an extension of their own practice, rather than those who see it as separate from their practice, have thrived from Connecting with Collections. Some artists feel that education is secondary to art, a notion that is reinforced through the hierarchical structure of galleries and museums.

Denise has found that some schools have little understanding of what museums and galleries can offer. She makes herself familiar with a school before offering taster sessions, rather than launching straight into a major project.

From South Walney to Springfield: Have loan box will travel - Chris Smith, Schools Outreach Development Officer (Tullie House Museum, Carlisle)

That's the way it should be. It should be about taking part of the collections into schools. You've just got to be careful with them, because they're precious!

Chris Smith described her outreach work with schools in Cumbria. She has developed the museum's loan box service, which involves taking themed boxes of artefacts into schools, and using them as the catalyst for sessions. She discussed the question of whether she should conduct sessions in the schools or whether the boxes should go 'unaccompanied' and be used by teachers.

The first option is preferable but the absence of anyone other than Chris to drive the long distances between schools means that there are limits to how many of these sessions can reasonably be offered. Several possible solutions have been considered, such as the training of others to accompany the boxes, and INSET sessions for teachers who can then use boxes to their maximum potential.

provision and demand for CPD in the 16+ sector. The research showed that there was a marked lack of provision. Her research at institutions such as the Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Film Institute helped her to understand what teachers need, enabling her to put together a CPD programme.

Leanne highlighted the crucial need to understand what people actually want from their training, when she said, "don't assume you know what people want".

Leanne has developed a core programme that consists of interdisciplinary events, skills-led (e.g. conservators, curators) workshops and artist-led workshops.

The CPD programme will be evaluated alongside the student programme that the gallery runs. It is envisaged that the increased confidence teachers feel as a result of taking part in the CPD programme will enable them to bring students to the gallery and to take part in non-traditional schemes of work associated with art and design.

Leanne offered the examples of a facial reconstruction workshop with Caroline Wilkinson from the University of Manchester, and also the creation of a Cabinet of Curiosities, using artefacts from the handling collection.

Connecting with Collections - a partnership between Bolton Museum and Art Gallery and Artists in Schools - Denise Bowler, Artists in Schools Connecting with Collections Coordinator (Bolton Museum and Art Gallery)

It's so important to develop individual relationships with people.

3. What did we learn?



Towards the end of the day people discussed together what they had learned from the day. Here are some of the things they identified.

- Museums are getting better at building partnerships
- A school visit to a museum should be seen as part of a process of learning
- Access to collections is opening up despite the problems with curatorial / education relationships
- Teachers don't always know what we have to offer. We have to tell them that we can enrich the curriculum. Nothing replaces the real thing.
- The results of evaluation need to be fed back to everyone involved. We need ways of making this happen successfully.
- We all need time to reflect away from the office. To celebrate what we are doing.
- It's quite different when a teacher delivers a session in a gallery rather than gallery educators.
- What students learn can often be different from what you expect.
- Sticking to the knitting: importance of doing what we do best; not duplicating effort.
- Honesty - admit there are problems.
- We're simply building on skills we already have

4. Evaluation of the workshop

The participants were asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of the day.

Most people said the workshop had met their expectations and that they had enjoyed the day. Participants were impressed with the variety of the presentations and enjoyed the group discussions and the opportunity to network. One person welcomed the opportunity to see the differences between organisations as well as the shared problems.

Adverse comments were that some of the presentations were difficult to follow; they contained “education jargon”; and were not targeted well enough to the audience.

One person wanted more time to network. There were also requests for more audience participation and more visuals to hold the attention. One delegate would have liked to see more curatorial input. The day inspired some delegates (11 of the 28) to consider their evaluation strategy and to continue to build networks.

Some pointed out that there was not enough food!

Following a discussion of the day with Hub colleagues we decided to use the following points to guide our future “best practice” events.

- New ways of reporting back from group discussions to the whole workshop.
- The day was not advertised more widely to non-Hub museums.
- Evaluation needs best practice events.
- Learning from one-off days may be limited if participants do not have, or do not make, the opportunity to follow it up, formally or informally. Perhaps events should be in series where the learning is cumulative.
- Find better ways to cascade learning to non-Hub museums
- Are we happy with the phrase “best practice”? Is there a more open-ended phrase that indicates that our learning is continuous?
- There can be no universal model of best practice. We can only give pointers and principles.
- And, yes, the food was very good but there wasn't enough of it...were also requests for more audience participation and more visuals to hold the attention. One delegate would have liked to see more curatorial input. The day inspired some delegates (11 of the 28) to consider their evaluation strategy and to continue to build networks.

5. A model for best practice

At the end of the presentations participants worked in small groups to answer the question, 'what do you think are the vital things people should know, or should do, when working with schools'?

Here are their suggestions:

General

- One size doesn't fit all museums or all schools - design your work to fit with your partners, your collections, staff expertise and organisational resources.
- Be flexible - your final piece of work may be quite different from what you originally envisaged. This can be a good thing!
- Go for projects and relationships which are sustainable beyond the immediate life of your initiative.
- The sharing of ideas benefits everyone.
- Use Inspiring Learning for All as a framework to improve your work with schools.

Your organisation

- Has audiences at the heart of its vision; they are integral to business planning.
- Encourages and enables easy communication between departments which are aware of their interdependence.
- Is prepared to take risks and enjoys change

Partnerships

- Understand the differences between your organisation and your partners, as well as shared objectives.

Delivery

- When planning work consider active learning; learning styles; the use of drama; interactive learning; loan boxes.
- Recognise the importance of schools doing pre and post visit work
- Teachers and museum staff work alongside each other as professional equals.
- Create and maintain networks
- Use creative thinking to bring out the best of the national curriculum.

Evaluation

- Use the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) to measure the impact of your work on learners.
- Know that evaluation helps identify strengths and weaknesses in your work
- Know that effective analysis of evaluation material helps to unlock its meaning, maximizing its usefulness.
- Share the results of your evaluation
- Consider the use of focus groups and community/educator panels when evaluating your work with schools
- Build in time for reflection throughout your work
- Training & development opportunities are available for everyone

6. How to get in touch

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