

FUTURE OF MUSEUM LEARNING ENQUIRY WORKSHOP

The workshop linked to the Future of Museum Learning enquiry Thinkpiece commissioned by Arts Council England (www.gem.org.uk/future.html) published at the start of September 2013. The workshop posed the question: What do we as a sector need to do now to safeguard and develop museum learning?

Colleagues were asked to make amends or additions to the Thinkpiece conclusions, identify areas of future work and any themes or issues that were missing.

Workshop notes written up by Sam Cairns

(Disclaimer! These are informal notes and represent what I understood from colleagues notes and the discussion. If you were there and want to add in your thoughts please email me: samecairns@gmail.com)

Future of Museum Learning Thinkpiece conclusions and suggested amends in blue:

1. Museum learning has a clear pedagogy, key values and a strong base of practice.
2. Museums are part of a wider ecology of partners from across the public and private sectors that must collaborate to provide services for children and young people. A transactional, dualistic model of delivery won't work in the future *on its own*.
3. Museum audiences don't care what activity is called, it is what museums do that matters. However a shared language across the cultural *arts and education and youth sector* is essential to enable collaboration. The Arts Council quality principles can provide a good scaffold for developing this language.
4. We need to support and build on the parallel conversations and thinking around audience engagement and learning across the arts and museums to enhance our *joint* practice (and not duplicate effort - *remove*).
5. We need to make wise partnerships especially with creative industries to make better (*smart?*) use of new technologies to deliver our work

Response to 'What do we need to do as a sector to safeguard and develop museum learning?'

Carry on **researching and developing** museum learning **pedagogy** and our practice. Individually be able to clearly articulate this. Colleagues were not sure we had adequately set out why museum learning is essential or defined the jeopardy of not having museum learning.

Be clear about how we are different, exciting and distinct from school learning. Explore support we can pull down from the teaching schools practice and research for our pedagogy.

Explore and share different ways of delivering museum learning services and creating the **partnerships** needed for them including:

- models used in the arts with greater commissioning of direct delivery
- cultural assets in an area working as a group with a teaching school cluster
- Issue of time needed to broker relationships within and across organisations – role of the Bridges in supporting this.

There was a set of discussions around **advocating, influencing** and what might be described as the **professional status** of museum learning. Colleagues suggested the following actions were needed:

Carry on **advocating** internally and with museum stakeholders and funders for the role of museum learning. We need to do this in a way that doesn't marginalise, divide or separate out museum learning from the rest of museum activity.

Leadership and a critical mass of learning professionals **influencing and advocating** is needed to ensure the position and future of museum and cultural learning in core provision. Colleagues identified a risk in highly rural areas and highly urban to creating this critical mass. In one there aren't enough people to create a group of peers, in the other too many to identify the right partners.

Funders play a key role in influencing organisations to prioritise learning activities. Echoing and reinforcing funding criteria would help across the lottery funders, perhaps achieved through the Cultural Education Partnership Group.

Colleagues saw a need to increase the **status of museum learning professionals** and were concerned that the quality of our practice was not recognised, which in turn affected how we could advocate for our work. At the end of the workshop we briefly discussed ways in which the status could be increased drawing parallels with the teaching profession and their qualifications and inspections. GEM had explored developing a qualification but all were concerned about costs of this and who would bear.

*After the workshop I had a discussion about portfolios (eg artists portfolios) and wondered if museum educators could develop portfolios of work over their professional life used in the same way as an artists portfolio. ACE is looking at online portfolios for children and young people and perhaps we could use the same mechanism. This would support development of practice, a commissioning model of museum learning and help when applying for jobs, as well as possibly allowing for accreditation.

There was a discussion questioning the role of language in **arts and museums partnership work**. Some of the group felt the barriers to working together are greater than just language, others that there isn't a barrier at all. Observation that bad jargon alienates; good jargon combines, coordinates and cuts to the chase.

The **use of technology** prompted discussion around our fears of giving away too much intellectual property digitally, and the risk we give up content that could be used to provide funding. Colleagues also discussed how we used technology appropriately. We all recognise that new technologies must not be used as an end in themselves but as part of the range of tools we have to deliver our work but we are still concerned that we can get seduced by technology. We want to have a better strategy for using new media and

technology and be clearer about what successful use looks like. It was suggested we have two strands of work:

- The spectacular that you can't do at home; planetarium, big scale sculptures, collaborative interactives
- Things that use public systems: phone apps, twitter, teaching PPIs that teachers/schools will buy.

Leadership came up several times in the discussion, and was often suggested as the thing that would fix many of the issues identified by colleagues around museum learning being marginalised as decisions about funding and focus are made.

*I become worried when colleagues see leadership as something separate from themselves. All of us are leaders in various ways, and if you consider yourself a museum educator then you need take your share of responsibility for leadership of museum learning. Obviously we are all going to have different roles, from being an advocate of museum learning with audiences, to influencing boards and trustees, from the roles at Arts Council to represent the cultural sector at central government level to organisation leaders working with local authorities. I believe how we understand leadership within museum learning and our agency as leaders is worth discussing further.

It was interesting that colleagues had different **understandings of the language** used in the Thinkpiece, and while I've taken on board my colleagues steer that I focus too much on language I still worry that the cultural sector or even our bit of it is divided by a common language. In the workshop:

- some people felt we were too hung up on quality seeing it as the need to deliver perfection a focus which stopped innovation and progress.
- colleagues argued that we should be duplicating effort as part of honing our skills in delivery and practice, that we generate a pedagogy by discovery and repetition. This was a different context to how I had meant the phrase where I was concerned colleagues in the cultural and education sector might be doing the same work in the same place without knowledge of the other organisation's work.
- discussing technology colleagues were concerned about how quickly technology dates and the lack of expertise we have in choosing technology. I suggested partnerships with the creative industries precisely because I see these as issues and that by working with technology partners they would bring their expertise in choosing the right technology and keeping it up to date to the table.

In the workshop I also asked for **areas that were missing** from the future of museum learning thinkpiece. The group flagged up:

- The offer of museums as reliable, transformative, altruistic organisations that are values based in a fractious and fractured society
- Role of leadership
- Learning from other home nations and the rest of the world
- Learning from and the role of the voluntary and community sector.

What next?

Colleagues agreed it was useful to have the workshop and wanted to replicate it with colleagues in their institutions. I have offered to call a meeting during the Museum Association conference 11-12 November in Liverpool as a successor to the GEM conference workshop and any responses from these notes, and then feedback suggestions for support to GEM.

To take part in similar discussions but a Cultural sector rather than museums level colleagues may also want to get in touch with the regional What Next? groups that are forming:

<http://www.whatnextculture.co.uk/how/>

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