

We are interested in learning in museums and other informal learning institutions. We are contacting you because we think you are too. In order to help us write a book about learning and evidence-based practice as it is relevant to visitor experience in museum settings (including exhibitions, outreach, educational programmes, events, resources), we are asking for your assistance. We want to make the writing as user-friendly and practical as possible. So we are soliciting questions and problems that are encountered by people who work in museums (in various education-related capacities) that we might be able to use as scenarios that can be addressed in chapters within our book. We know there are many opportunities for making decisions and choosing between options in your roles. As such, we think it is important to think about how ideas about learning and research can help frame the choices that can be made. In particular, we are hoping you would be willing to share a practical issue that you have struggled with in any of the following areas:

- meaning making
- authenticity
- memory,
- motivation
- narrative and discourse
- identity
- culture & power

We are interested in issues/problems that you have had in any stage of the development of a project (from conceptualisation to delivery) and would very much appreciate any input you could provide. We would be especially interested to know about experiences you've had where things went wrong or didn't go according to plan. If you have used theories/concepts/ideas in your effort to tackle these issues/problems, it would be interesting to hear your thoughts about these as well (we will keep donors anonymous within the chapters, though we would like to be able to include you in the acknowledgements section, with your approval).

To further help your thoughts about what might count as an issue, we have attached a list of examples we found through the website for GEM at the end of this letter.

We would be very grateful if you could email us your ideas to t.moussouri@ucl.ac.uk. Of course, if you have any questions about what we are doing or how we will use your stories, please let us know.

With best wishes,
Theano Moussouri
Jill Hohenstein

Examples found through the GEM website

Issue:

My museum has events planned around an object that we don't actually have in our collection, but is relevant to our local history

Question:

How can storytelling be used as a tool for interpretation, particularly in the absence of objects/collection?

Issue:

My museum would like to improve the service we were providing to people with dementia. However, the team feels under prepared for working with people with dementia and that activities are not necessarily appropriate.

Question:

What type of activities would be appropriate for this audience? We are particularly interested in exploring the relationships between museums, reminiscence, memory, touch and objects.

Issue:

My museum would like to apply a systematic planning process to programme research, planning, development, implementation, and evaluation.

Question:

What research approaches can we use to identify the key components in creating memorable learning experiences for visitors who participate in our programmes?

Issue:

My museum is collaborating with a local school and creative writer who will train young people to script and produce dramas to bring to life some of their uninterpreted street collections

Question:

How does one define cultural identity in a world of diversity?

Issue:

One of the seven Quality principles identified by the Arts Council England Quality Framework project (looking at the Principles of Quality for work by, for and with children and young people) is 'being authentic'*.

Questions:

What does authenticity look like in different forms of delivery such as: drama sessions, object-handling, use of objects in exhibitions, or in historic re-enactments? What is the role of authenticity in the context of new technologies (as surrogates of artefacts become all the more easy to reproduce)? Are we striving for using authentic artefact (the 'object as witness') or creating authentic experiences? How do visitors perceive authenticity?

* In this context 'authentic' is defined as:

- Offering a real and meaningful artistic experience or product, to help young people develop artistic awareness, understanding and skills
- Provide real experiences, not 'surface level' appeal or a 'cut down' version of something designed for adults
- Set the experience in context
- Develop artistic skills and understanding
- Treat young people as fellow artists