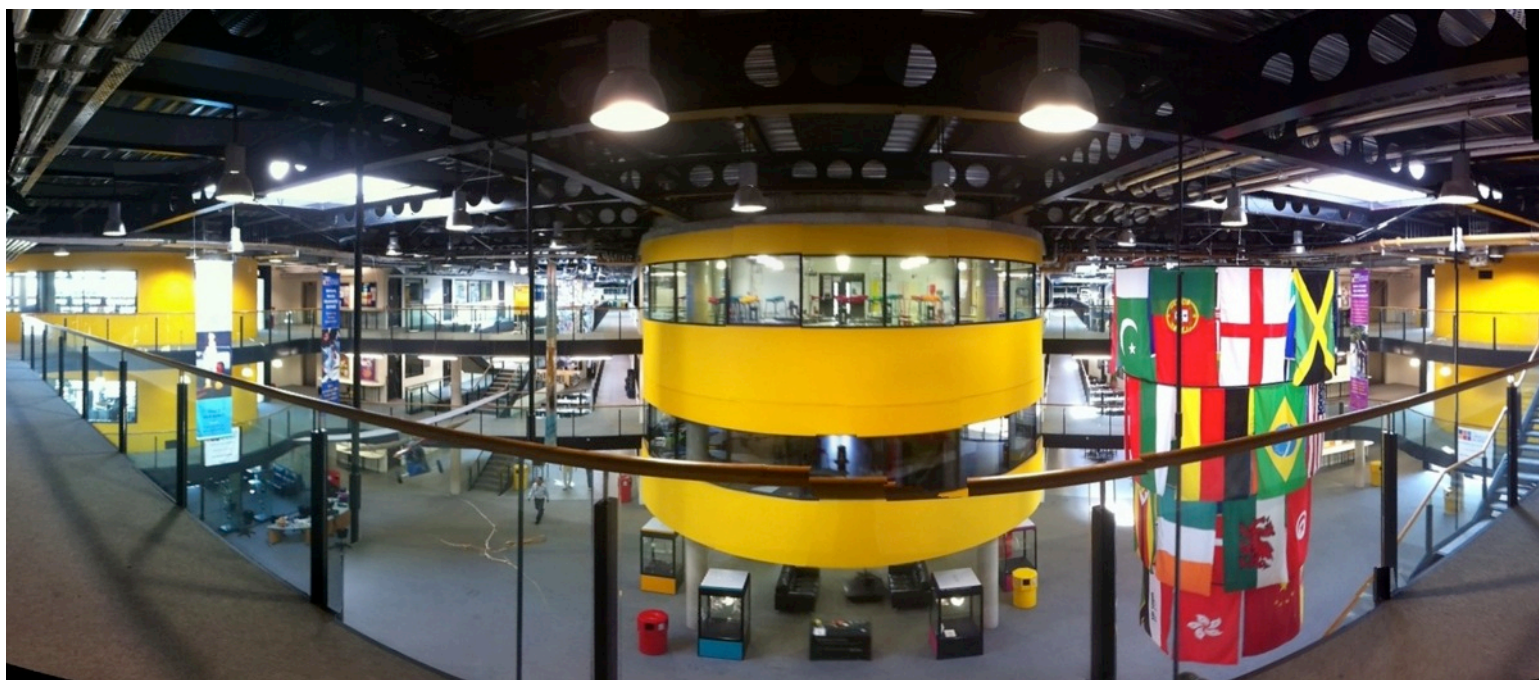


The Langley Academy Case Studies

How museum learning works in a secondary school environment

May 2013



Curious about The Langley Academy? Use these case studies to explore how museum learning works in a school and discover new ideas for your own service.

“The love of learning is really important. Museums can inspire. Teachers are creative people who are time poor and museums can help”.

In April 2012 Artswork, the Arts Council England Bridge Organisation for the South East, were granted funding to implement a Museums and Libraries Engagement Plan. As part of this plan Artswork have worked closely with The Langley Academy to develop a series of case studies that highlight how to embed a museum learning focus into the school curriculum.

This document explores the background to The Langley Academy, highlights how their Modern Languages, English, Science, and Art departments use museums, and provides suggestions on how to incorporate The Langley Academy’s experiences into you own museum education offer to secondary schools.

The Langley Academy: Background

The Langley Academy was established in 2008 and is sponsored by The Arbib Foundation. It is a science specialist academy and the UK’s only museum learning school. Building curiosity, exploration and discovery into the school’s ethos The Langley Academy uses object-based learning as a basis for their approach to the curriculum.

The students and staff have worked in partnership with many different museums – local, regional, and national - to help inspire students curiosity, explore their subjects, and discover new ideas. In addition to this The Langley Academy has its own museum space. . The school displays objects loaned by museum partners alongside temporary exhibitions created and curated by the students and teachers.

Implementing the museum learning focus

The Langley Academy has four partner museums on its Museums Advisory Group - The Museum of English Rural Life at Reading University, The Oxford University Museum of Natural History The River & Rowing Museum, and The V&A. These museums are influential in shaping The Langley Academy, providing advice and guidance for the school and helping to lead the strategic development of museum learning throughout the curriculum.

On a day-to-day basis, The Langley Academy has two members of staff responsible for embedding museum learning throughout the school. The Head of Museum Learning and the Museum Learning Curator liaise with teachers to help identify suitable areas for museum and curriculum development, provide advice on how to use museums and collections as learning tools, and act as a liaison to the wider museum sector.

The initial reaction of teachers spanned from disinterest right through to excited enthusiasm. The Museum Learning team have carried the school and its teachers on their own learning journey, embedding museum learning into a range of subjects and highlighting how museums and collections can be used to inspire students and deliver alternative learning environments for students to develop.

Developing the case studies

As part of Artswork's Museum and Libraries Engagement Plan, interviews were carried out with a selection of teachers and staff at The Langley Academy, and their experiences are outlined in the following case studies. At the end of each case study there are some useful suggestions that you may wish to consider when planning your learning offer to secondary schools. In addition to this a number of more general points and suggestions were uncovered which are detailed below:

- Teachers have a considerable amount of demands on their time, from lesson planning, delivery, training, and student support. Because of this it can be difficult for them to see the benefit in reading emails and correspondence from other organisations such as museums. Making your communications relevant to the teacher and the subject will help to engage them.
- Remember that there is more to your museum than just your collection. There is the environment it is kept in, how it displayed, and how the public and students engage with you.
- Whilst your collection may have obvious direct relevance to some subjects, in particular history or science, try to think outside the box. Can your collection be used to inform art sessions, geography, or mathematics? Do you have archival resources that could be used? If you are a local history museum you are likely to have a wealth of unique resources that you can use to market yourself to schools.
- Know your market and target it effectively. A general newsletter advertising your sessions is unlikely to attract new schools. Instead research the schools around you, read their Ofsted reports and identify their strategic targets. Using this information will help you produce effective marketing that demonstrates to the school how you can help them achieve their goals.

- Find out what the exam boards want from both schools and students. You can then market your sessions as meeting certain exam boards key criteria.
- Teachers and students preparing for GCSEs are under a lot of pressure to ensure that they are ready for the exams and it is difficult for these to make off site visits to museums. Consider concentrating your offer on Years 7 to 9.
- If you are not already targeting 6th forms consider this area. In terms of logistics there is a lot of flexibility, teachers are enthusiastic and classes are smaller. Some of The Langley Academy's most successful projects have been with the 6th form.
- Remember, the teachers want to know what value you add to their teaching and students' learning. Always have in your mind how your museum and collection can enhance what they are doing and provide additional creative stimuli.

The Langley Academy Case Study 1

Curriculum Area: Art

“The students were inspired and so proud of their opening night. The exam moderator loved it too.”

Theme:

From Creation to Curation - understanding the process from creating a self-portrait through to exhibiting works.

Activities:

A-Level students at The Langley Academy took part in activities, at the National Portrait Gallery, V&A Museum, and in the classroom.

Inspiration

The students’ task was to create a self-portrait that expressed something of their personality and/or background. They had to curate a group exhibition and include personal objects to interpret their paintings. The students started with a trip to the National Portrait Gallery to help them study different styles of portraiture and inspire their work. The V&A’s Takeover Day gave them a brilliant taster of life as curator.

Creation

Students returned to The Langley Academy and created their works. Students approached the subject in different ways. Styles included ‘traditional’ portraiture, abstract inspirations, and the artistic and cultural backgrounds of the students, for example Manga and south-east Asian art.

Curation

As part of the process, the students curated their own exhibition. They worked closely with The Langley Academy’s Museum Learning Curator who helped them through the process. The V&A’s Takeover Day also gave them an insight into how pieces can tell different stories depending on the context. At the museum they met teams responsible for exhibition design, hanging, and marketing. Students and staff explored the thinking behind creative decisions and the final impact on their audience.

Exhibition

The students project managed the design and installation of their exhibition in school. They worked as a team to agree how best to present and contextualise their

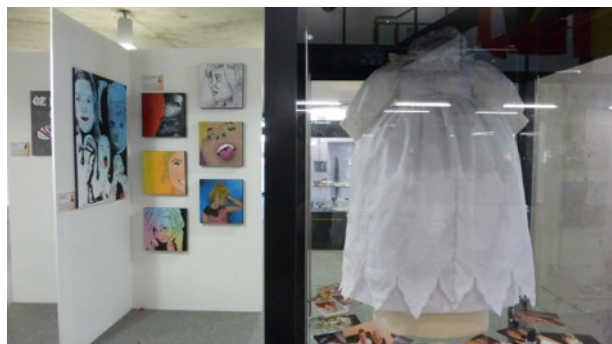
work. They used personal objects to interpret their paintings and tell a richer story. the hanging of their exhibitions at The Langley Academy. Agreeing on how best to present and contextualise their work with personal objects that were important to them and were relevant to the work being displayed. The students designed the flyers and marketed their exhibition. On the opening night they welcomed guests to the exhibition and gave a short presentation introducing their work.

Outcomes:

- Students learned how to use museum and gallery collections as inspiration for their works and development of their artistic style.
- It highlighted to students that the process after the creation of the work is just as important as the work itself.
- Students were exposed to further creative and artistic careers, that their qualifications contribute to, within the cultural and creative sectors, such as exhibition design, promotions, and technical duties.
- It gave the students a better understanding of how the art world works and prepared them to deliver and curate exhibitions in the future.
- Students gained the confidence to create, market, and present their works to an external audience.

Suggestions:

- Think about how your collection could be used to inspire students understand artistic styles and concepts.
- If your museum's collection has a particular art focus, think about how you can market this to potential schools to be a source of hands on knowledge and inspiration.
- Think beyond your collection. Museums have many skills that students studying arts or other creative subjects would benefit from experiencing first hand. These could be in exhibition planning and design, marketing, and audience development.
- Consider that your cultural assets are not just your collection but also your buildings, skills, and environment. Even if you don't have an art collection that could be utilised by students they may get inspiration from your setting.



The Langley Academy Case Study 2

Curriculum Area: English Literature

“using objects and museums makes the learning fun” “[creative learning] is embedded within English”

Theme:

Using museums and their collections to contextualise English literature and increase understanding of the cultural-historical significance contained within works of literature.

Activities:

Students within the English Department at The Langley Academy have participated in activities at museums, used historic artefacts within the classroom and engaged with re-enactors to benefit the study of Dickens, Shakespeare and First War Poets.

Dickens

Staff at The Langley Academy were aware that many of their Year 13 students felt intimidated by the length of the text in *Great Expectations* and devised a new approach to tackle this. Two visits were organised to the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) at Reading University. During their first visit students explored a range of Victorian subjects contained within the novel. Pip’s life at the forge was explored through the areas of rural life, market towns, and childhood; the context of Satis House was explored through looking at gentry, and the background to Magwitch was explored through a study of Victorian crime and punishment. On their subsequent visit, the students were able to use reading material within the archive at MERL to carry out further research. This was followed up with a SKYPE session from Dr Neil Cocks, an English tutor at Reading University.

Shakespeare

Using Year 7’s study of William Shakespeare as a springboard for further activities The Langley Academy commissioned Tudor re-enactors to deliver a series of sessions across the school. These included a number of cross-curricular activities looking at Tudor Apothecaries, 16th century dancing and rituals (in partnership with the Drama department) and Tudor cooking. Students also went out of the classroom with Year 12 students visiting the Staging the World exhibition at The British Museum to look at the historical context of Shakespeare’s work.

The War Poets

In order for students to fully understand the War Poets teachers within the English Department found they needed to contextualise the work as the history curriculum focuses primarily on the origins of First World War and does not detail the conditions experienced by soldiers. Using a teacher's personal collection, students handled trench art, postcards made by the soldiers, photographs and related artefacts. Students then worked with a poet to develop creative responses to the material.

Outcomes:

- Through visits to the Museum of Rural Life students were able to explore key elements of their chosen text in an innovative and enjoyable environment. These visits and the study of Victorian life were of particular benefit to students who were new arrivals in the UK and did not have the primary school experience of studying the Victorian; by studying the history of the period they gained a greater understanding of cultural context of Dickens.
- Utilising the skills of a university lecturer offered students support with what would be expected from them in their exams.
- Historical re-enactors brought the 16th century to life helping students understand the social, cultural, economic, and physical differences with the present day.
- Handling collections helped to deepen understanding of the conditions that inspired The War Poets body of work.
- Exploring material created by serving soldiers personalised the experiences and encouraged students to reflect on their own responses to the Great War

Suggestions:

- Museum collections and visits are springboards to greater understanding of works of literature and can be used as a foundation for English lessons.
- Try to consider what your museum could add to the value of the English curriculum being studied. It may not be the direct relationship between the author and your collection, but the adding the historical background to students understanding.
- School day structure restricts the ability of students to be able to visit museums. Whilst loans are useful it is better, if possible, to have the 'museum experience' to really contextualise the



object/learning within a museum. Bring the experience to them - try to think more innovatively at bringing the 'experience' not just the loaning the objects.

- If museums can be flexible in their offer to secondary schools then it makes it easier for schools to engage with them. The ones that have really worked are where there has been consultation with museums to deliver sessions in 'partnerships' with museums. So knowing what museum could offer to students and school. Consider whether your museum could 'part facilitate' session, with a mixture of facilitated activities (to inspire) and self-led (to create).
- GCSE students are very focused on passing their exams and it is difficult for teachers to be able to arrange off site visits for these students. It may be easier for museums to engage with teachers and students at 6th form level.

The Langley Academy Case Study 3

Curriculum Area: Modern Languages (French)

“Objects are great!”

Theme:

Using museums to contextualise vocabulary, inspire learning, and deepen comprehension.

Activities:

French students have recently undertaken activities at three different organisations, Windsor Castle, Reading Museum, and the River & Rowing Museum.

Windsor Castle¹

The focus of the visit to Windsor Castle was Queen Mary’s Dolls House. The largest dolls house in the world, it was built in the early 1920s and is a perfect replica of an aristocratic home of the time. Built to a scale of 1:12 students at The Langley Academy were able to explore each floor in turn including the wine cellar, the library, working lifts, flushing toilets, hot running water and sources of electricity. They learnt about the functions of each room, looked at the objects within, and discussed the French equivalents. Following the visit the teacher worked with the Design and Technology department at The Langley Academy to build a Doll’s House that could be used by students to label, in French, the relevant parts after their visit.

Reading Museum

Loan boxes from Reading Museum were used alongside an installation at the school of the ‘Flying Flea’ or ‘Pou de Ciel’ - a 1930s aeroplane designed by Frenchman Henri Mignet. Using these resources as inspiration, students were tasked with writing and performing a short play in French.



River & Rowing Museum

Key Stage 4 students visited the River and Rowing museum and studied the existing guide of the museum. They took the English language versions back to The Langley

¹ <http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/visit/windsorcastle/what-to-see-and-do/queen-marys-dolls-house>

Academy and worked in groups to translate it. The class then produced a French language guide which is now used by the River & Rowing Museum as their official guide for French speakers.

Outcomes:

- Through exploring Queen Mary's Dolls House students extended their vocabulary and deepened their understanding of the context of French words.
- The concrete activities undertaken provided memorable experiences for students providing new tools for remembering vocabulary.
- The 'Flying Flea' inspired creative learning that further deepened students speaking, writing and comprehension.
- Using the museum guide students gained first hand experience of how their modern language skills could be deployed outside of the classroom and within the workplace. It provided the students with 'real world' experience of using their French vocabulary and writing skills.

Suggestions:

- Think about your building and/or collection. Many museums and historic houses can provide opportunities for modern language students to explore and remember new vocabulary.
- Think of the museum as a 'creative space' to inspire new ways of learning and utilise modern language skills.
- Archival material can offer a wealth of translation opportunities.
- Promote to schools the ability of the museum to provide an environment in which students can apply their modern language skills in the real world.

The Langley Academy Cast Study 4

Curriculum Area: Science

“Museums help students to stop, observe, reflect, and analyse; all essential skills for scientific study.”

Theme:

Using museums to help students understand scientific principles and develop scientific skills.

Activities:

The Science Department at The Langley Academy have used innovative approaches to the teaching of science incorporating visits to Oxford Museums, the River & Rowing Museum, and the Ashmolean.

Oxford Museums

Teachers wanted to give students an introduction to the basic principles of science at the start of year 7. The school worked in partnership with the Oxford University Museum of Natural History and the Museum of the History of Science and developed a session called “Ideas and Evidence.” The Academy supported the class teacher to plan with the museums, ensuring the trip would be fully integrated into the curriculum. For students starting at the school it is an exciting way to welcome them to the science specialism and the museum learning focus. At the museums the students explore how science changes, how a tiny new piece of evidence can radically impact on big ideas.

River & Rowing Museum

One of the many exciting objects on display in the Academy was the eight man boat rowed to victory by the GB crew at the Sydney Olympics. This was loaned by the River & Rowing Museum and was an inspiring starting point for teachers. They used it for a study of materials, forces and design. A visit to the museum helped students investigate changing boat design and improving performance. They took this knowledge back to the classroom where, in small groups, they developed their own designs for boats and oars. The students then built model boats with oars



powered by electric motors. The students raced their boats to find out how their designs worked in practice, with the winning models exhibited in school.

Ashmolean Museum

To help students understand how scientific principles and knowledge are used in everyday contexts, Y10 and Y11 students were given access to the conservation labs at the Ashmolean Museum. They learnt about the importance of understanding materials when conserving them and the effect of different chemical and physical processes on museum artefacts. This activity helped students think about different science careers and how classroom lessons have implications in the world around them.

Outcomes:

- Investigating artefacts at Oxford Museums gave the students a dedicated place to develop the essential scientific skills of observation, analysis and reflection – sometimes hard to develop in a classroom environment.
- Students had access to ‘real’ artefacts that enabled them to understand and apply scientific principles in the real world.
- Studying museum collections helped the students understand the scientific basis behind the design and engineering of objects.
- Museum visits offered opportunities to learn about science in a different environment providing students with a different perspective - the development and application of science outside of a classroom or laboratory.

Suggestions:

- Liaise with teachers to identify how museum visits will meet the curriculum foci.
- The skills of observation, reflection, analysis, and communication are all delivered by museums. In the digital age where so much information is instant, many schools find additional work is needed to develop these skills in Year 12 and 13. Think about how your museum can develop activities to nurture these skills in students.
- Many museums artefacts will have an obvious design and/or engineering focus and can be used by schools to demonstrate how scientific principles have been applied in the real world. Highlight these areas of your collection to encourage school bookings and projects.
- Think about the different areas of the science curriculum. For instance, The Langley Academy did a project on biodynamics (using nature to inspire

engineering) and studied the bone structure of Pterosaurs as an inspiration for developing the material, design and engineering of gliders.

- Think creatively. The Science Department at The Langley Academy collaborated with the Art Department to undertake a project based on the structure of DNA. Year 7 students designed 'personal strands' to reflect their individual personalities and hopes for the future which were pieced together to form an installation of DNA's double helix.

Credits:

Artswork would like to thank the staff and students of The Langley Academy for taking the time to be interviewed for these case studies, and Arts Council England for funding them.

The case studies were compiled through interviews with staff and site visits conducted by Paddy McNulty, culture and heritage consultant. You can contact Paddy via email: culture@paddymcnulty.co.uk

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