

BEST PRACTICE OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: HOW EOTC EDUCATORS SEE BEST PRACTICE IN THEIR ROLES

2011 MEANZ and NSTP Workshop Roadshow

Best Practice and New Directions

27 January – 4 February 2011

Round Table Discussions at the MEANZ Roadshow

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Chaired, Margaret Tolland, Pataka

How can we define 'best practice' pedagogies for education settings beyond the school classroom? Can MEANZ develop a framework of 'best practice' characteristics? How might 'best practice' change in the future?

These questions formed recurrent themes through each of the presentations at the 2011 MEANZ Workshop Roadshow. Round table discussions on museums education best practice were held at the end of each full day session of presentations, in venues in Auckland (27 January at MOTAT); Rotorua (1 February at Rotorua Museum of Art and History); Wellington (2 February at Te Papa Tongarewa); Christchurch (3 February at Canterbury Museum); and Dunedin (4 February at DPAG). Sessions were chaired by Margaret Tolland (Pataka) and recorded, and subsequently edited, by David Bell (UOCE). Participants, representing learning programmes outside the classroom in a wide range of museum, art gallery, zoological and botanical garden settings, are listed at the end of this edited summary of the discussions.

Defining good practice in New Zealand museum settings today

Participants described a diverse range of practices underpinning successful learning experiences outside the classroom. While many contributions drew on the educator's experience within their own unique institutional and regional settings, almost all seem readily transferable, accessible, and flexible. Many recurred in each centre and many settings; in the following summary some of these contributions have been conflated into generalised qualities of good practice.

Innovation informs positive learning opportunities

Best practice is responsive and innovative. Don't be restricted by your limitations. Really good practitioners are able to bend the responses children make to the resources in hand, responding flexibly to what children discover during conversations and being prepared to change direction accordingly. Being able to respond in these ways can enrich learning experiences. Best practice challenges the teachers and children in front of us. It is about taking risks – moving beyond our comfort zones and experience and extending our knowledge and practice. Provocative programmes make children grapple to extend themselves further. Innovation means refining and changing – and discarding material that doesn't work. Innovative practitioners always bring something *new* to the experience, or a new or different way of looking at familiar things; this generates that extra X factor. We encourage children to bring and use cameras – recording informs remembering and extending. It may mean looking at our resources through a different set of eyes, capitalising on the implementation of technological facilities in the museum. Having hands on activities for example, making things punch-card codes on site, engages children positively; gaming technology excites, surprises and engages children.

Good educators respond to children

In New Zealand we often (though not always) benefit from the teacher-background of museums educators. Successful educators provide student-centred engagements, recognising and embracing students' own prior experiences, and providing avenues for each to develop learning through their own imaginative engagements. They talk *to* or *with* children, not *at* them, engaging them in learning conversations. They maintain engagements by keeping groups moving, refocusing and engaged and allowing opportunities for rest or invigorating exercise. Good educators recognise and embrace childrens' prior knowledge rather than viewing them as 'empty vessels'. They elicit feedback from children throughout the learning pathway, and allow them space to disagree, and explain why they disagree. Good educators can synthesise huge amounts of information generated from diverse childrens' responses during learning interactions, very quickly, to inform their flexible and adaptable adjustments to different scale and diversity, ages, contexts and responses of each group.

Good programmes inform depth learning experiences

Successful programmes often provide opportunities to build from initial encounters or views of objects into deeper engagements by encouraging connection making, imaginative questioning, making comparisons; and making engagements fun. Depth learning often builds on childrens' own knowledge, from their own settings, histories and environments – in one instance for example it built on the special knowledge of a child whose uncle had discovered the plesiosaur fossil in the museum the class was visiting.

Depth learning benefits from multiple visit programmes. Childrens' responses to challenges grow and build through repeat experiences. The development of on-going relationships with

schools and classes is richer than in one-off visits. Drama projects benefit when narratives can be developed through several visits. Multi-visit programmes can be developed through and between different institutions to create linked programmes or collaborative points of view, and share experiences and outcomes of visits with those of others. In one example, participants saw, through a Lakes District Museum presentation, how to enrich the visit subsequently by posting displays and providing subsequent community events as opportunities for extended learning.

Quality practices are collaborative

Positive experiences outside the classroom benefit from close collaborations between educators, schools and class teachers. Negotiation, at every level, with learners, institutions, teachers and communities, contributed to successful teaching and learning. Maintaining continuous open dialogue between all participants contributes to the ongoing growth of museum programmes. It allows educators to tailor programmes specifically and differently to the needs of each class. Educators agreed that pre-visit negotiation is all important: educators really need to know about the class and its programmes. Constructive museum experiences draw on prior learning experiences in the classroom programme and contribute to longer term and cross-curricular learning engagements. Some educators went out into schools to meet teachers before each visit. Others engaged class teachers themselves in team teaching engagements. Close collaborations build relationships with schools and *children* (not just teachers) and allow educators to respond to childrens' own ideas about what they might want to do. Educators might learn through the immediate conversations they have with children between the museum gate and the learning place, but are enriched by the development of closer long-term relationships with classes and teachers. Getting to know learners as well as possible benefits ongoing and close relationships with teachers and children.

Positive relationships with teachers contribute to their own professional development. Educators have a strong mentoring role for teachers. They are often regarded as experts in their own areas, and are experienced in mentoring one another. Educators themselves can benefit from their own learning engagements in the educator role

Collaborative practices *within* museums contribute to quality programmes. Positive relationships between curators, educators and display people contribute to accessible and engaging presentations. Positively disposed museum directors can allow space and freedoms for their education teams to work as they might wish to. If institutional managements allow opportunities for children to hold, feel, or weigh taonga for example, they can promote closer learning *engagements* with objects.

Successful collaborations inform inter-institutional sharing

Educators agreed on the positive value of learning from others and engaging other ideas and experiences into their own practices. Being part of a supportive professional network like MEANZ provided a platform for mutual support. It gave educators a sense of having their own 'voice', and of having a common voice. It supports their ability to engage their ideas within their own institutions, and to makes each feel part of a larger group through which each can become better informed in terms of what they can do, and who they can connect with to facilitate their programmes. Others acknowledged the useful place of National Services initiatives, in facilitating inter-institutional and interpersonal mentoring and support. Collaborative relationships provide frameworks for making broader contributions to the profession by sharing one another's new experiences. In this sense innovative practices become tangible realisations of 'action research' at work: 'Best practice collects evidence to shape future best practice'

How do we know when educational experiences have been successful?

Success is when children get excited enough to return to the museum – bringing their friends and families with them.

Best practice can be conditioned by a range of factors

For many institutions, LEOTC contracts provide both funding and comprehensive frameworks for practice that make quality education programmes possible. It can also condition the kinds of learning experiences educators can offer. A perceived problem with the LEOTC contract lay in the tension between the requirements of 'bums on seats in 1 hour visits' and the desirability of developing deeper, longer term relationships. Some participants also noted it can constrain the kinds of risk taking they would like to do. In some instances this might also reflect the trained teacher-backgrounds of LEOTC funded practitioners – and in one instance in particular a very successful risk-taking project in an extended, multi-visit programme, reflected the non-LEOTC funded educators non-teacher background.

LEOTC contracts can be positive however, and they can be supportive by negotiating lower numbers in their requirements and become more flexible, provided a legitimate case is made. Successful museum learning is demonstrated in the generation of curiosity in children and within their broader communities – and LEOTC likes this and responds positively to initiatives that can achieve it. Funding for the development of innovative long-term school partnership relationships at one institution, however, did draw on its own museum funding resources.

Constraints may be internal to a learning setting. Many institutions depend on a legacy and ongoing commitment of volunteer contributions. Where education practice in those institutions built from a legacy of strong visions and agendas of earlier people, educators

felt that best practice must reflect and respect those visions, the special character and nature of the institutions and their collections, and the active interests and expectations of management teams and Trust Boards.

Good practice for the future

Innovation: Lead rather than being led

Rather than waiting to build practice on research from other programmes or initiatives, developing new programmes through stages of planning, implementation and evaluation can inform an education teams own realisation of 'research in action'. This can favour initiative and innovation and immediacy.

Collaboration:

Museums educators are collaborators. They have both personal and association networks for sharing their experiences, resources and skills. The roadshow experience itself represented a successful exercise in sharing – one educator for example drew immediately on discussions on bicultural issues during the presentations to refocus her programmes on the concept of turangawaewae and the potentials in her setting for developing this as a core for programmes around making childrens' own turangawaewae a better place to live. Ideas for the immediate future included a further focus on sharing experiences in practical workshops, a n examination of changes occurring in LEOTC would be useful (MEANZ might communicate with LEOTC to clarify current state of play), and the development of collaborative arrangements with Australian colleagues.

The web seems the most accessible medium for supportive collaborations in the future. The worth of arranging a case study template in which people can put what they are doing up on the website was mooted. Examples of case studies seem easily accessible and useful. Perhaps they might be posted on social e-media networks like youtube. Educators or teams could document their own successful projects and circulate them as clips on the new Arts Online website and tki to demonstrate transferable, achievable, curriculum related and student-centred exemplary materials? Participants recognised the permissions issues attending the uploading of these materials onto social sites.

Working with a clear sense of purpose:

Examining the frameworks of charters and goals, not just of LEOTC requirements, but also of institutional agendas, personal specialisations and capabilities and schools and learning communities can inform long term planning and envisioning how programmes and related activities might look like in the future. As we do so, and as educators negotiate change within their institutional frameworks, we need to gather evidence of the benefits of museum experiences to longer term learning to make a case for shaping policies for the

future. Supporting arguments, agendas and pathways to change with evidence – documented improvements in museum visiting habits, success of your educational programmes etc – by research sharing and evaluating our own practice provides clear evidence to inform and support requests for future change. to

Embracing technological innovation:

Together with many of the roadshow presentations, contributions to the ‘best practice’ discussions confirmed the inevitable, and positive, roles of technology for informing and engaging students in museum based learning in the future. Skype and other personal or community audio-visual active online links can develop immediate, flexible and linked face-to-face interactions. I-phones and i-Pads can provide inter-active tools providing immediate access to diverse information sources or learning conversations during museum or gallery engagements. Using still and movie digital cameras for recording museum experiences provides a resource to inform ongoing learning in classroom programmes. Social web links like facebook or youtube provide media for sharing interactions within class groups and beyond, to schools, school communities, and other community groups. Using computer generated interactive games at the museum, classroom or home can engage, entertain, challenge, and extend children in diverse and innovative learning engagements. For ‘digital natives’ these tools are primary media of social, entertainment and learning interactions in which students are literate, resourceful, articulate participants. Adoptions of these initiatives are already evident. The MOTAT team are obtaining a set of video cameras; each class can take one round during their visit to record through their learning experience. The recording goes on the school’s website, and also provides a resource that MOTAT educators themselves can refer back to. With a project at ARTSPACE one of the school’s media studies classes had documented the project. Te Papa teams embrace a range of interactive technologies in its Mixing Room, distance conference and digital wall technologies.

Conclusions:

In final summary discussions, many participants confirmed that the programmes presented during the roadshow link nicely with and fulfil the five Ministry goals for learning outside the classroom, but acknowledged also the demonstration of thinking outside the square to inform innovative and refreshing ways of doing things. Innovation and accountability are compatible. Participants agreed that best practice reflects a singular degree of passion and commitment to our subject matter and settings, plus a flexible adaptability to the differing needs of the audiences in front of us. Each institution benefits from, and has an obligation to serve the needs of those audiences, through the best employment of our passions as we reflect on, review and redevelop our programmes in the future. Change lies right at the heart of positive progress for the future: Best Practice never stops – maybe we never get to the point where we can define it in a finite way – rather it keeps extending and growing and

changing and reinventing itself in response to the changing worlds of educators, institutions and the audiences they serve.

Participants:

Participants in Auckland included: Karen Walters, Frazer Dale, Milly Morice, Elaine Baldwin and Kaye Jensen, MOTAT (hosts); Vera Mey, Artspace; Gail Romano, Waikato Museum; Monique Zwaan and Nathalia Jellyman, Auckland Zoo; Lesley Smith and Iona Matheson, Lopdell House Gallery; Leonie Garmaz, Awhina Rawiri and Ma'ara Maeva, Auckland War Memorial Museum; Sue Popping and Christine Miles, Howick Historical Village; Jackie Chambers, Auckland Botanic Gardens; Paula Thornburrow, Wallace Arts Trust; Sophie Keyse, Uxbridge Creative Centre.

Participants in Rotorua included: George McLeod and Emma Liley, Rotorua Museum (hosts); Gaynor Comeley, Eloise Taylor and Jenny Wake, Hawkes Bay Museum and Art Gallery; Irene Sandle, Kawerau District Council Museum; Christine Potter, Taupō Museum; Barbara Arnold, Te Manawa Museum Trust; Nathan Whaanga, Waikato Museum; Jennifer Pewhairangi and Gale te Kani, Tairāwhiti Museum; Grant Thompson, Tauranga Art Gallery; Alan Reilly, Te Awamutu Museum.

Participants in Wellington included: Riria Hotere, Andrew Watt, Emma Best, Gabrielle Lawton, Aaron Compton, Edy MacDonald, Te Papa Tongarewa (hosts); Shelley Gardner, Wellington Museum; Philippa Henwood, Miranda Thompson, Pat Siemonek and Joanne Wear, Parliamentary Service; Philip Dittmer, Featherston Heritage Complex Society Inc.; Rebecca Faulkner-Eglis and Chris Barry, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery; Linda Fordyce, Pataka; Margie Beautrais, Whanganui Regional Museum; Vera Watson, Sally Robertson and Rachel Bolstad, NCER; Bernadette Cantin Buckley, Katherine Mansfield Birthplace; Kirsty Glengarry and Kayla Martin, City Gallery Wellington; Emma van Berkel, Te Unga Mai; John Orchard, Heritage Education at Marlborough Museum; Fiona Campbell, Real Art Roadshow; John Reuhmen, Ecoworld Trust; Mary Sheridan, Te Manawatu Museum Trust; Melissa McNulty and Silke Bieda, New Zealand Historic Places Trust; Jacci Galloway, New Zealand Film Archive; Stephen Aitken, Capital E; Mark Holland, Reserve Bank Museum.

Participants in Christchurch included: Louisa Preen, Anthony Henning, William Yip and Mel Gibson, Canterbury Museum (hosts); Cindy Hey, Jenny Walkinshaw and Robert Percy, Ferrymead Heritage Park; Trevor Creagh, Taranaki Aviation Museum; Nikki Wallace Bell, COCA Art Gallery; Claire Norton, Chris Richards, Rutherford's Den; Esther McNaughton, The Suter Gallery Nelson; Lynda Burns and Brian Appleton, Christchurch Botanic Gardens; Wendy Hurst and Keely Kroening, South Canterbury Museum; Susie Cox, Christchurch Art Gallery.

Participants in Dunedin included: John Neumegen, Dunedin Public Art Gallery (hosts); Tahu McKenzie, Orokonui Ecosanctuary; Victoria Rosin, Sally Carson and Steve Cutler, NZ Marine Studies Centre; Sara Sinclair, Otago Settlers Museum; Gloria Hurst, Waitaki District Community Gardens; Angela Avery, Lakes District Museum and Gallery; Colin Anderson and Koreena Wilks, Southland Museum; Heather Robertson, Otago Museum; Rowan Carroll, North Otago Museum.

Travelling speakers included: Victoria Esson, National Services Te Paerangi; Helen Lloyd, MEANZ; Margaret Tolland, Pataka; Julie Noanoa, Te Papa; David Bell, University of Otago.

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