

Learning Museum

A Meeting Place for Pre-Service Teachers and Museums

Tine Seligmann

Abstract Learning Museum 2011–13 is a nationwide multidisciplinary collaboration project involving 26 Danish museums (art, cultural and natural history) along with 13 colleges of education.¹ The project has provided a large group of pre-service teachers with unique opportunities to participate in training courses, academic internships and bachelor's thesis preparation work in collaboration with the country's museums. Perceiving pre-service teachers as important resources who can significantly contribute to knowledge-sharing within museum educational departments allows those students to develop their professional and pedagogical competencies and strengthen museum teaching practices on the whole. New, user-driven educational offerings and teaching resources take form, creating innovative initiatives and products that provide enrichment for individuals and institutions in direct relation to the potential target audience — the future primary school teacher.² Through a selection of best practice case examples, this article discusses how the work of the museum, as an integrated learning space and a developmental forum for pre-service teachers, helps to develop those teachers' academic and pedagogical skills and to create exciting and innovative learning opportunities for the pre-service teachers themselves as well as their future pupils. It is further discussed how these processes have contributed to the development of Danish museums as educational providers, and how museum educators have gained a critical awareness of the importance of collaboration and mutual responsibility in their role as educational providers.

External learning environments possess unique learning potential because they allow for experiences that cannot take place in a formal classroom setting. Creating a professionalized, external learning space requires using the space and objects to their full potential by applying tested didactic models and pedagogical methodology. Teaching practices must be developed in an active dialogue between learners, teachers and museum educators. Educational offerings at museums must be incorporated into primary schools' core learning objectives and be an effective supplement to the teacher's daily lessons in the classroom. Museum educators are responsible for creating a professionalized learning space that ensures that learning does indeed take place. These goals for museum learning are widely accepted in the field of museum education in Denmark as well as in the other Nordic countries.³ We have taken inspiration from, among others, British researchers' work, and focused on dialogue-based, constructivist approaches to museum education.⁴ The teaching must also integrate democratic approaches as core values, to ensure that emphasis is placed on the learning opportunities that arise through the meeting of differing opinions and viewpoints.⁵

The Teacher's Role and Lack of Knowledge of External Learning Environments

Elementary school teachers see museums as valuable learning environments, but rarely have enough knowledge of the museums' educational offerings and opportunities. Many museums offer programs for schools as well as introductory courses for professional teachers. However, few museums, as of yet, offer focused training or internships for pre-service teachers from colleges of education. The teacher's role, understanding and knowledge of external learning environments is, in many areas, still lacking due, in part, to the need for the museum world and the educational sector to develop a closer understanding of one another. Traditionally, the educational programs at Danish museums have been used by primary schools but without any involvement of teachers in the programmatic development stages. The teacher's role has, therefore, primarily been secondary and passive when school classes visit a museum. The museum visit becomes, thereby, in many cases an isolated event that is not integrated into school curricula, before, during and after the visit, sadly a universal concern among museum education colleagues. In short, the goal for the

Learning Museum project is to build better collaborations between museums and the education sector.

In a qualitative user survey done for The National Museum in Denmark in 2011, a group of teachers were asked why they did not integrate museums into their curriculum.⁶ They responded that their picture of museums was that of dull and dusty institutions, often based on their experiences from childhood. They perceived museums as being specifically subject-related. A teacher of mathematics would, therefore, have problems seeing the relevancy in taking her pupils on a museum visit. Overall, the teachers lacked the justification to include a museum visit in the curriculum. The teachers' lack of knowledge of museums' learning potential and lack of understanding of the difference between formal and informal learning is not solely a Danish problem. Janette Griffin, an Australian specialist on museum-school collaborative learning wrote:

The experiences of both museum educators and researchers clearly show that students DO learn and enjoy their visits to museums, as long as they are allowed to do so. School teachers, however, may be the ones whose attitudes and behaviors have changed least. This is shown by research and evaluation studies and educators' experiences over more than 20 years in Australia ... Teachers find excursions to museums to be worthwhile but stressful ... Teachers frequently find themselves out of their depth and feel inadequate, even frightened, when conducting excursions. Hence many seem to be running excursions in the same way they experienced them when they were students at school. The 'fear factor' seems to interfere with learning-oriented interactions with the students while in the museum. Often teachers simply hand over the students (and the responsibility for the learning) to the museum educators. (This has been and remains a feature of museum visits in many countries.)⁷

Addressing this issue has come to the fore in Denmark after the government in 2013 conducted a comprehensive reform of both teacher education and the primary school system. Both reforms encourage the participation of educational institutions in targeted partnerships with the community's cultural institutions, as well as local and national businesses. These partnerships have to enable students to put theory into practice outside the classroom. Teacher training will, in so doing, build upon the development of skills and competencies. Pre-service teachers will no longer be measured solely on what they know,

but also on how they can perform in practice. The students' formative and didactic skills need to be strengthened. It is here that museums can offer an alternative space to develop these needs.

Consequently, to strengthen the teachers' role and to break down the aforementioned barriers, the following objectives were set for Project Learning Museum:

- Museums must be visible as institutions of knowledge and education for future teachers and their pupils.
- Museum education must be an integral element in the required curriculum for pre-service teacher educational programs.
- Collaboration with colleges of education must be integrated into museum strategies and educational programs.
- A national platform will be established where all museums and colleges of education can take part in the Learning Museum network and concept.
- The outcome and experience gained during the project should be shared in a best practice manual and article collection for future development.⁸

Learning Museum, Collaboration through Educational Programs

The project is a three-year collaboration between 26 museums and 13 colleges of education around all of Denmark. To strengthen the project's interdisciplinary focus, museums specializing in a variety of subject areas were chosen to participate (cultural and natural history as well as art museums) in close proximity to the selected colleges of education. The project appointed teachers from the colleges of education also had a variety of different professional backgrounds in history, geography, religion or art. Collaboration focused on the following three approaches to the integration of the museum in pre-service teacher education. First, focus on pre-service teachers' specialist modules (history, art, science, pedagogy and the like); second, focus on the academic internship; third, focus on research sessions for the Bachelor's thesis. The following cases are taken from the first focus area, relating to pre-service teachers' specialist modules. This was found to be to the most common route by which pre-service could integrate the museum into their curriculum.⁹



A pre-service student group at The Funen Village worked on a mobile device app about the influence of the Danish folk high school on peasant society. Dressed up as peasants, the students created a series of small videos with explanations of different aspects of peasant life. The app contained a series of quizzes that would lead school pupils around the museum, place to place, subject to subject. Photo: Tine Seligmann.

Case Study: History, Religion and Mathematics at the Open Air Museum — Digital Challenges

A student teacher excursion to The Funen Village, an open-air cultural history museum, illustrates cross-disciplinary training. The overall objectives of the day were to provide students from the specialist modules of history, religion and mathematics with an in-depth knowledge of the museum, its educational practices and how those can be applied in sessions with school pupils. The pre-service teachers were charged with an assignment to produce a digital teaching tool in order to provide The Funen Village with pedagogical and didactic professionalization and insight into their learning space, especially for classes coming on self-guided visits. For the college of education, the assignment needed to retain focus on the core curriculum requirements in the areas of academic and practical skill development and to help students acquire the

knowledge and skills to develop digital learning materials. Student evaluations were revealing:

... It is great that we not just go to a museum, but that we really use it when we are out there ... It is also super to get the assignments, and that we are constantly using the theory concepts, and get them tested in practice in the Museum! ... This process has truly developed my own historical awareness.

The museum developed and implemented four of the student teachers' suggested educational offerings.

Case Study: Mathematics at the Art and Design Museum — an Anarchistic Process

A pre-service teacher team visiting the art and design museum Trapholt in Kolding, DK, was presented with a museum task as if it were an employment contract: "We, as experts in the field of mathematics and mathematical education, have been hired by Trapholt to develop learning materials that show how the museum can be used as an environment for primary school mathematics teaching." The museum has an innovative approach to education and is constantly on the lookout for new perspectives from which to explore its collections. It therefore welcomed a collaboration with a mathematics class from the nearby college of education. For the college of education, the collaboration served as a developmental project, giving students insight into aspects of collaborating with partners from different disciplines outside the world of primary school teaching. In their feedback, participants said, "My students understood that there are other ways of doing things when using the world outside the pupils' classroom. It's an important point that I cannot always get clarified in theory at the teachers college." The museum educator categorized the collaboration as a kind of anarchistic process of taking the collection beyond the fields of history and design theory. The basic fact that it was even allowed to take place already lends relevance and importance to the museum as a learning environment. "Some of the activities developed by the pre-service teachers were truly innovative, while others were so obvious and relevant that I am totally amazed that we have not had this focus before," she commented. The resulting educational offerings were tested on a fifth grade class, and three of the resulting products were selected and presently in practice at Trapholt.

Case Study: Geography at the Cultural History Museum/Shared Responsibility

The Worker's Museum in Copenhagen worked in a collaboration with pre-service teachers taking its specialist module in geography. The museum has had a long-held desire to gather new ideas on how its course offerings based on the exhibit *Industrial Labour* could be made more interactive, cross-disciplinary, and relevant for older primary school pupils. The college of education wanted to explore the subject of geography from a cultural historical perspective in order to show students how broad a subject field can become from the perspective of another discipline. Starting with a workshop day at the museum, the pre-service teachers were to produce a series of subject-specific questions relating to the museum's exhibit on industrialization. These questions would later lay the foundation for an educational offering and series of activities with a solid didactic basis covering the subject of industrialization in geography today.¹⁰

The museum educator at The Worker's Museum explains that the experience with Learning Museum offered staff a closer collaboration with pre-service students, eliminating an "us versus them" set up. The Learning Museum encouraged both parties to meet for shared reflection in preparation of workshops and internships:

We offer the option of different types of partnerships now. Collaborative partnerships, whether they be workshops, internships or undergraduate projects, are shaped to a significant degree by individual participant. Each collaborative partnership is, therefore, a new encounter, a new reflection that expands the museum's potential as a qualified learning space.

Formal and Informal Learning Spaces

Actively contributing to the development of teaching in the museum gave pre-service teachers a greater awareness of the difference between teaching in formal and informal learning spaces. This, in turn, made them aware of the impossibility of successfully applying the same methods in two so divergent spaces. Griffin explains this: "This underlines the need to provide pedagogical preparation for teachers in order to actively participate in the potential learning opportunities provided by the museum. While teachers view the school and

museum as complementary learning experiences, very few perceive a difference between classroom and excursion learning strategies.”¹¹

It is, on a general level, of critical importance that this view be maintained by both parties, especially at a time when museums are compelled by professional teachers to offer what teachers “believe” they want from museums, namely teaching that duplicates the training they provide pupils with in a classroom setting and that meets formal curriculum requirements.¹²



At the Museum of Fine Arts in Odense the pre-service students worked with role games in front of the paintings. Photo: Knud Erik Christensen.

An Active Contribution and Marked Innovation

A great motivational factor for pre-service teachers was to practically apply knowledge learned. This process created ownership, motivation and the desire to use museums as an active part in their future work as primary school teachers. The project has also opened new pathways that make each group's roles and responsibilities clear cut and valued. It has broken down the all-too-common museum dominant dynamic highlighted here by Griffin: "There is a misrecognition of the social relations of power in which museum staff are dominant and in which school-based educators have an ill-defined and often educationally ineffective pedagogical role. Unfortunately much of the interaction is one way — we need to find ways to encourage and facilitate shared roles and responsibility for teachers and museum educators in the learning process."¹³

Encouraging collaboration between museums with specific academic focus areas and pre-service teachers from disciplines not traditionally associated with these areas made apparent the interdisciplinary opportunities that museums offer. As illustrated in the aforementioned case of "design meets mathematics," these collaborations challenge the museums' self-understanding and allow pre-service teachers and their future primary school students to see their school subject put into a new context.¹⁴ The interdisciplinary aspect challenges students to look at museum collections and exhibitions in more creative and innovative ways. Characterizing many of the educational products the students produced was a playful and more informal approach to the collections than one generally experiences in museum education. For example, they involved the senses and in contrast to the perceptions of many of the curators and museum educators, the pre-service teachers focused on the fact that didactic and pedagogical methodology are not strictly bound to specific academic subject-areas such as a cultural history or art history.

Conclusion: Who is Educating Whom?

Those collaborative partnerships and issues illustrate how incorporating the pre-service teacher as a key player in the development of museum educational practices can lead to mutually beneficial development for all involved. Departing from the "them and us" mentality and further developing a more equitable dynamic between museums and pre-service teachers can help to break down critical barriers that have traditionally held many teachers back from

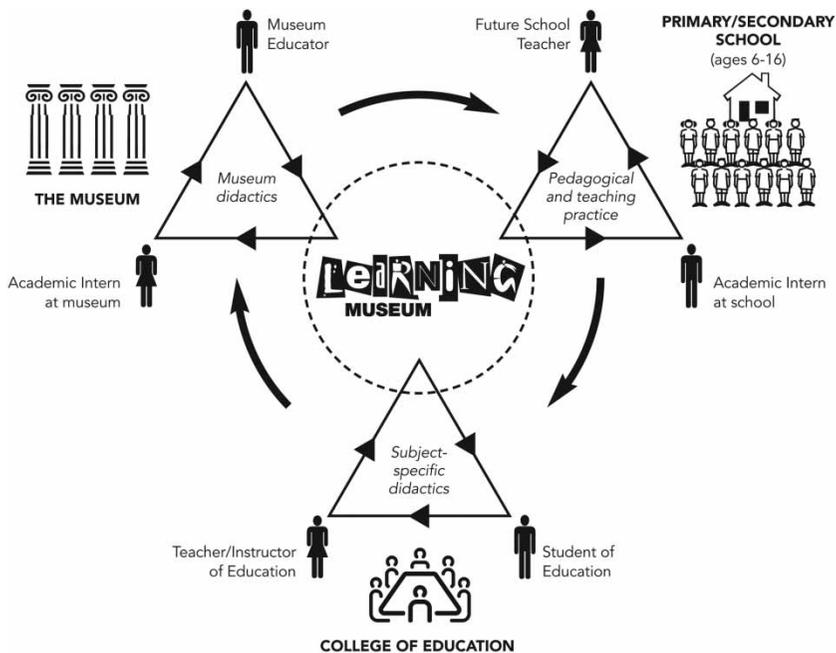


The pre-service students had great fun trying out a range of ways to involve the senses in the different educational programs. Photo: Knud Erik Christensen.

integrating museums into their teaching. Concrete knowledge and experience-based goals fall into place for teachers when visiting the museum with their pupils. The museums, in return, develop new perspectives on teaching, receive valuable feedback on their current pedagogical and didactic practice and put their established educational frameworks to the test. On a larger scale, the willingness of museums to put their practice to the test through such creative, interdisciplinary co-production can only further contribute to their relevancy and ability to affect real social change. As Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello wrote in the introduction to the summer 2013 issue of *JME*,

A successful, meaningful collaboration between two differing institutions is then largely about shared authority and acknowledgement of one another's skills, knowledge, and competencies. These collaborative partnerships need to constantly question "who is educating who" so that both parties have the experience of being "educators" and "learners" simultaneously throughout the collaborative process.¹⁵

The aim of it all is, of course, that Danish school children be met with active educators equipped to incorporate the museum into their teaching. An important and final objective of Learning Museum is to pass on our findings, our concept: How to plan educational programs for pre-service teachers? How



Collaboration between Colleges of Education and museums has multiple interfaces. The students have many different roles within this system, which brings the different institutions in contact with each other. This, in turn, results in the meeting of a wide range of various museum didactics, subject-specific didactics and pedagogical approaches. This whole system of exchanging roles and knowledge creates new sets of ideas and values. Illustration: Tine Seligmann.

will the students be involved? When and how should the participating institutions meet? In this way, the results and recommendations stemming from Learning Museum will be presented as a practice manual and an article collection in print and online (in English as well). In 2014 the concept of the platform of a national network of institutions and participants around Learning Museum¹⁶ will be incorporated in the making of expanded national network between museums and primary schools that are one of the outcomes of the government's reform of the primary school system in Denmark.

Notes

1. The project was supported by the Danish Agency for Culture and is coordinated by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde, Denmark, available at <http://www.learningmuseum.dk>; Selected documents are in English.

2. Throughout this document the term primary school refers to the Danish “folkeskole,” which provides schooling for children ages 6–16.
3. Venke Aure, Helene Illeris, and Hans Örtengren, eds., *Konsten som Lärenderesurs, syn på lärende, pedagogiske strategier och social inklusion på nordiska konstmuseer* (Skärhamn: Nordiska Akvarellmuseet, 2009).
4. John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *The Museum Experience* (Washington, DC: Whalesback Books, 1992); George E. Hein, *Learning in the Museum* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education. Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
5. Olga Dyste, Nana Bernhardt, and Line Esbjørn, *Dialogue-based Teaching. The Art Museum as Learning space* (Skoletjenesten, in collaboration with Fagbokforlaget Vigmostad & Bjørke AS/Norway, 2013).
6. Qualitative user survey, *How Do We Increase the Number of School Visits at the National Museum?* (The Danish National Museum/Anex: analysis, process development, consulting service, 2011).
7. Janette Griffin, “The Museum Education Mix: Students, Teachers and Museum Educators,” in *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*, ed. Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (National Museum of Australia, 2011), available at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JGriffin_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6.
8. Text is available in English online, <http://www.learningmuseum.dk>.
9. For more information about cases, interns and bachelors, see the digital material “More Museum on the Agenda. Would you like to contribute to the strengthening of multidisciplinary collaboration between museums, colleges of education, and primary schools?” available at <http://www.learningmuseum.dk>.
10. Ane Riis Svendsen og Ditte Marie Padgaard, “Geografi på arbejdersmuseet — nye åbninger og skæve vinkler” (Geography on The worker’s Museum learning angles and new openings), *Geografisk orientering* (Danish Journal of Geografi) 3 (2012): 542–544 also available at <http://www.learningmuseum.dk>.
11. Griffin, “The Museum Education Mix.”
12. Ben Garcia, “What We Do Best, Making the Case for the Museum Learning in its Own Right,” *Journal of Museum Education* 37 (2012): 49–50.
13. Griffin, “The Museum Education Mix.”
14. Brad King, “New Relationships with the Formal Educational Sector,” in *The Manual of Museum Learning*, ed. Barry Lord (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2007), 81.
15. Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, “Shared Authority: The Key to Museum Education as social Change,” *Journal of Museum Education* 38 (2013): 126.
16. Tine Seligmann, 2013, “Learning Museum: Learning and Creative Partnerships between Cultural and educational Institutions”, in *Best Practice 2. A tool to improve museum education internationally*. Emman Nardi & Cinzia Aggelini (eds), Edizioni Nuova Culture – Roma, published online at: <http://network.icom.museum/ceca/publications/best-practice/>.

About the Author

Tine Seligmann is curator and project manager at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, Denmark. Tine is Cand. phil in History of Art, University of Copenhagen and has additional course work in museum education training and a diploma in project management. As head of the educational department at the museum, Tine has 16 years of experience in educational programs for schools and institutions. She is editor and writer of a wide range of educational courses, teaching materials and articles on Contemporary Art expressions.