

BEST PRACTICE 2

A tool to improve
museum education internationally

Edited by Emma Nardi & Cinzia Angelini



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Learning Museum: learning and creative partnerships between cultural and educational institutions

Tine Seligmann*

Abstract

Learning Museum 2011-2013 is a nation-wide Danish developmental collaboration project involving 26 museums (cultural and natural history as well as art museums) and 13 colleges of education. The project provides students of education with unique opportunities to participate in training courses and academic internships at the country's museums. When students of education are made part of the museum space, new educational offerings and teaching resources take form. This user-driven aspect assists in creating innovative initiatives and products that provide enrichment for individuals and institutions surrounding the user himself – the future primary school teacher. Roles are exchanged and new sets of values and visions are created which ultimately strengthen the overall education of Danish primary school pupils. The essence of the project is to create and give inspiration to Creative partnerships and networks in Denmark, in the Nordic countries and internationally where multidisciplinary collaboration and sharing of knowledge are in focus. The goals are to make museums visible as institutions for knowledge sharing and education and to make museum education an integral element in the required curriculum for teacher educational programmes as well as integral in museums educational strategy and educational offerings. When students of education act as key points of knowledge exchange in museum educational departments, the teaching practice at the museum is strengthened and the students develop their professional and pedagogical competencies. In short, the collaboration gives the students methods and skills to apply in their own learning so that they can constantly develop from a lifelong learning perspective.

Keywords: creative partnerships & network, multidisciplinary collaboration, sharing of knowledge, exchange of roles and values, lifelong learning.

1. The conception and planning of the programme

Background

The background for the project *Learning Museum 2011-2013* (fig. 1) is that there is a need for better collaboration between the museum world and the educational sector as well as information about the unique opportunities offered through this collaboration. Many museums plan and offer courses for schools and introductory courses for professional teachers, but it's still few museums that offer training or internships to teach students from colleges of education. Traditionally, museums have an

educational programme which the schools use and the professional teachers are not involved in the development of the programmes. The teacher's role is secondary and passive when a school class visits a museum. The museum visit becomes, therefore, often a solitary experience that is not integrated into school curricula, before, during and after the visit. A Danish study has shown that elementary school teachers see museums as valuable learning environments, but rarely have enough knowledge of the museums' educational offerings or their collections. It has also shown that museum educators still need greater insight into the educational sector. In a qualitative user survey where a group of teachers were asked why they didn't use museums so much in the curriculum, common barriers for the teachers came to light:

tereotyping and habit: the teacher sticks to well-known school activities and habits. He or she may perceive the museum as dull and dusty;

inking to subject: the teacher sees museums as very specifically subject-related so why would a math teacher consider using a museum visit as part of his or her teaching? And museums use a different language to that used in schools;

xperienced enrichment: teachers lack convincing arguments to include a museum visit in their curriculum. A museum visit has to conform to the school curriculum and a visit has to contribute with something that cannot be created at the school;

iming: teachers may feel that subject-related offerings and exhibitions at the museums do not relate specifically to their current subject matter being treated in the classroom.



Fig. 1 - Project logo.

Project Objectives

The project aims to break these barriers and work with information development and knowledge sharing working toward the following objectives:

museums must be visible as institutions for knowledge and education;

museum education should eventually become integral element in the required curriculum for teacher educational programmes. Training courses and related tasks at the museum are to be exam-related;

collaboration with Colleges of Education is to become integral element of museum strategy and educational programmes;

the production of a practical manual, and an article collection with examples of good practice and a framework for courses, cooperation, etc.;

create a platform where all the museums and colleges of education in Denmark can share and develop knowledge about the concept of *Learning Museum*.

Organisation

There are 26 museums (cultural and natural history as well as art museums) and 13 colleges of education around the country involved in the project. In the selection of the museums, we have tried to put a museum from each category near the selected college of education. In the criteria for selection was that there should be either an established collaboration or a strong interest for the establishment of a collaboration process. At each institution there are one or two project participants associated, a museum educator or a trainer at the colleges with a variety of different professional backgrounds in

history, geography, religion or art. All partners, both the institutional leader and project participants have signed contracts with economic and substantive conditions and each institution gets a financial subsidy of five hours project work per month from 2011 to the end of 2013.

In the project group, we hold two workshops a year where we discuss goals, strategy, evaluation and achievement. We hear about each other's progress and invite external presenters who can contribute to the knowledge-sharing community surrounding the project. In addition to the meetings, all participants are kept up to speed by means of newsletters and the project's facebook group. The project manager maintains personal contact with project participants and facilitates individual communication and cooperation between the institutions in the different regions in the country.

Communication

Communication at various levels and through various media is an element of critical importance when handling a national project with many participants and cooperative partners placed round the country at different institutions. The communication strategy is - as the evaluation plan - part of the broader implementation strategy to be as visible as possible from the outset - not only during the active project phases. This visibility should provide long term support for the implementation - the process of going from "project" status to "concept" status which everyone can understand and make use of.

The communication strategy is to be considered in the early stage of the project. Therefore, we established an official website, a newsletter and a facebook group from the start. From here everyone can follow the outcome from the collaboration processes. A project identity and sense of community are also created by a logo. The project logo for *Learning Museum* connects the two words - learning and museum - in a personal colourful and playful way.

On the website www.learningmuseum.dk you will find all activities and how we do things in practice, along with articles and video interviews with interns and bachelor students. The newsletter has current themes which present the ongoing work in the project. Students can find information about how to become an academic intern at a museum and bachelor students can reap inspiration from hearing about how other bachelor students have found their empirical analysis in a museum context and so forth. You will also find information about Network Learning Museum, a network where all museums and teacher training colleges with associated contact persons may enrol.

A major national conference *Learning and Creative Partnerships between Cultural and Educational Institutions* was held in February 2013. Here the focus was on how museums and educational institutions can strengthen and develop each other through new forms of collaboration and knowledge sharing. The goal was to inform participants about the project and provide inspiration on how to collaborate cross-institutionally as well as to strengthen Network Learning Museum. To place the Conference at a time before the conclusion of the project gives us the opportunity to get a new number of museums and other teacher training colleges interested in the process of developing the concept of *Learning Museum*.

2. Carrying out the programme

Educational programmes

The collaboration between the institutions is organised around educational programmes:

subject-related specialist modules (history, art, science etc.) and pedagogical courses

Academic Internship at the Museum

The Bachelor's thesis

Subject-related specialist modules and pedagogical courses

The training courses can be related to any specialist module. These courses will vary according to the student's subject of specialization, chosen museum and year of study.

At the Museum

Upon the first meeting at the museum, the student gets an introduction to the museum as an educational institution promoting the spreading of knowledge and information. What does the museum stand for, what are its values and collaborative relations? Who works at the museum? What kind of collections are present (cultural or natural history artefacts, art, etc.). And most importantly: How does the museum plan its educational offerings for the different target groups in primary schools? After the introduction the student is given an assignment with a practical and theoretical focus. Students then work in groups with select parts of an exhibit or historical period. The group work is grounded in specific school curriculum requirements as well as specific subject-related and didactic considerations. The goal is to produce a rough draft of a teaching material or instructional tool to be used by primary school teachers and their pupils during a museum visit. Students may also be asked to take a critical stance to the museum's pre-existing educational offerings and available materials (fig. 2).



Fig. 2 - *At the Museum of fine arts the students work with role games in front of the paintings*
(Photo: Knud Erik Christensen).

At the College of education/museum

Once back at the college of education the students will continue working on an assignment and subsequently present their finished product upon a return visit to the museum. Alternatively, a museum educator may come out to the college to discuss pedagogical issues and the like relating to the product. In some instances, certain educational products will be so well-developed that museums will be able to readily incorporate them into their general educational offerings.

Duration

An introductory museum session can last from three hours to an entire day or be held over the course of several museum visits. This is agreed upon between the museum and the individual participants.

Collaboration

Museum educators and teachers of education responsible for providing subject-specific coursework, work together to coordinate how project assignments can most beneficially be incorporated into the students' current coursework before, during and after their museum visits. Contact between the

individual students and museum educators regarding the development of teaching materials continues throughout the course of the project collaboration.

I now know what museums have to offer schools and have obtained valuable knowledge of how to conduct my future pupils in the museum environment. Student of education.

Academic internship at the museum

When students of education come as interns at a museum, they develop a deeper insight into the institution's potential. There is more time for dialogue and discussion with educators and other professionals at the museums. They get the opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the development of museum learning materials and relevant subjects which can be applied in their academic projects and papers. They have time to observe teaching lessons with the museums' various target groups. Perhaps most importantly, they are presented with the opportunity to teach different target groups. The internship may also provide inspiration and kick start students' empirical data-gathering process for a bachelor's thesis. During the internship period, the students are charged with the task of developing teaching materials for the museum.

How a museum internship is incorporated into students' core requirements varies from college to college. A shorter museum internship can sometimes supplement students' student-teaching requirement (for example, 3-week and 7-week internships). With such an approach, student teachers can take their pupils to the museum and test out course offerings and/or materials which they, themselves have helped to develop.

Duration

The length of an internship depends upon museum availability and the agreed upon terms for the individual internship.

Collaboration

Students, museum educators and internship coordinators at the colleges plan each internship based on availability and capacity of the individual museum.

I got the opportunity to teach the same classes over several occasions. This helped me to develop my role as a teacher and see how my involvement and enthusiasm can affect the pupils' comprehension of a given subject. I also improved my IT skills. Intern student.

Bachelor's thesis

The museum is an ideal environment in which bachelor students can gather empirical data for a bachelor's thesis. In the bachelor thesis the student has to work with empirical evidence and pedagogical and didactic methods. If collaboration and an active dialogue with the museum in question are developed during the early phases of the thesis, the project focus will also have direct relevance for the museum's educational development work and the results can be applied actively in museum practice.

On the drawing (fig. 3) it becomes visible that collaboration between teaching education programmes and museums has a wide interface. The whole system of exchanging roles and knowledge creates new sets of ideas and values. The student takes on many different roles in this system that bring the different institutions in contact with each other.

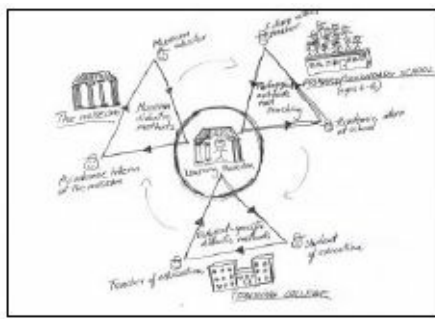


Fig. 3 - Drawing by Tine Seligmann.

An example could be how a specific exhibition can be mediated, how to use museum handouts etc. A thesis statement can be developed and related both in theory and practice to museale activities, such as the development of teaching materials. A close and productive dialogue with museum educators and other museum staff will provide the student with ample opportunity to gather information, exchange ideas and develop his/her knowledge on an academic, pedagogical and didactic level. The bachelor students can be perceived as the project researchers providing vital information on areas such as target groups, the use of museum handouts, learning environment, exhibitions and so forth. Such collaboration illustrates the teacher's role as a bridge builder between the school and the museum as an external learning space as well as the teacher's responsibility for the learning outcomes for the pupils. Many colleges of education even have introductory café meetings where cultural institutions are matched with interested students.

Contacting a museum early on in the process of choosing a subject for my thesis, made it possible to find out if the subject area also has relevance for the museum. That way, knowledge is generated which is mutually beneficial for all involved. Bachelor student.

In general a major motivation factor for the teacher students is to see that the knowledge they offer and products they contribute with can be used.

It is motivational:

- ↳ to be taken seriously
- ↳ to be challenged and be given responsibility
- ↳ to be met as an equal collaborative partner
- ↳ to have what one produces be used in practice

As an academic intern, I:

- ↳ have gained knowledge within my specific academic field
- ↳ have become more aware of my role as a teacher
- ↳ have become more aware of what teaching material should be able to achieve
- ↳ have developed my own creative abilities
- ↳ have learned to incorporate the aesthetic dimension into teaching
- ↳ have learned to apply my knowledge in an alternative learning environment

Cases

MATHEMATICS at a museum for art and design

Art and design museum Trapholt in Kolding, Denmark, has an exhibit profile characterized as a

meeting of art, modern design and artisanship. In collaboration with a mathematics class from University College Lillebælt, Denmark, the two institutions looked into how to use the museum as an environment for primary school mathematics teaching. The group received an introduction to the museum and its collections along with examples of relevant issues raised by the exhibits which could be applied in mathematics teaching. For example, the museum's architectural profile and furniture collection was taken into consideration. After the introduction, students went about on their own generating ideas and new perspectives. One challenge faced by the students was that it was prohibited to touch the museum objects. This posed a particular challenge in the execution of several ideas developed by the students concerning the measurement of objects within the exhibition space. The museum did, however, provide a number of chairs from their collection which could be handled. The collaboration resulted in the production of three teaching tools which can assist Trapholdt in facilitating mathematics teaching.

Assignment: How does one use the museum as an environment for primary school mathematics teaching?

Student of Education: I have been able to set the theoretical view that 'mathematics is in everything' into practice.

College of Education lecturer: My students understood that there are other sets of rules that apply when using the world outside the classroom. – This is an important point that I cannot always fully clarify in theory in the classroom.

Museum Educator: Some of the things the students suggested are so obvious and relevant that I am totally amazed why we have not done it before.

HISTORY & RELIGION at the cultural history museum

Three specialist modules from University College Lillebælt, Denmark set up collaboration with the open air museum, Funen Village in Odense. The day's objective was for the students to gain valuable insight into the museum as an institution and its approach to learning. The museum would, in turn, receive suggestions for educational offerings with strong didactic and theoretical foundation. The students were to produce a digital teaching tool which integrated text, images, sound and video along with follow-up activities (fig. 4). Another option was to produce a cross-disciplinary educational offering aimed at classes coming to Funen Village on a self-guided visit. These offerings incorporated the use of teaching kits containing a selection of materials including replicas of museum objects, the Village houses and a variety of other teaching tools. The students' suggestions were incorporated into the museum's regular course offerings.

Assignment: Produce a digital teaching tool aimed at classes coming to the museum on a self-guided visit.

Student of Education: It is super to carry out these assignments ... and constantly use theoretical concepts, and get to test them out in practice at the museum!

....It is great that we don't only go to a museum, but that we also really use it when we are out there...

Student of Education: I think that this has given me a unique opportunity, as a student, to take empirical and theoretical information and apply it in practice. This process has truly developed my own historical awareness.



Fig. 4 - *At the open-air museum the students, dressed in traditional peasant clothes, are preparing an App on the Danish peasant culture to school classes (Photo: Tine Seligmann).*

3. Evaluation and remedial process

The initial results of the museum courses, academic internships and the involvement of the bachelor students have already shown that students of education want “more museum” on the agenda!

Not content to settle for a simple guided tour, the students would rather use the museum proactively in their future teaching. The different cases and educational offerings they have produced show new learning initiatives which integrate a more casual, playful and sensitive approach to the collections in the museums in a very positive way. They see the museum from the children’s point of view and one could say it is a less intellectual approach with a sharper focus on pedagogical and didactic means. Combining the knowledge of the museum educator and museum curator along with the student’s competencies in the field of intermediary didactics and pedagogy has proven to be a good mix. The majority of students have also been very satisfied to learn more about the museums’ course offerings. However, the greatest motivational factor for students has clearly been the opportunity to apply their own thoughts and suggestions in practice as active project participants. This creates ownership, motivation and the desire to use the museums as an active part of their future work as school teachers.

This is, indeed, the essence of the project: to actively involve the students in the development of the museums’ course offerings and make the museum a productive learning space for the critical and involved user - namely, the future school teacher. For the museums, the collaboration has allowed them to update their knowledge of the teaching world, take their own course offerings under revision and, in so doing, better meet the needs and requirements of primary school curricula. The conversations that emerged during museum visits have proven to be of great value for museums and students alike.

Evaluation, what works?

From the beginning of the project we have established a continuous evaluation plan in order to ensure progress and project sustainability after the conclusion of the project period. What works?

The progressive evaluation plan contributes to long-term project implementation and gives us time to customize the project to realistic conditions and address issues such as, what can be done to optimize and where do we face obstacles? From the beginning, our evaluator has created questionnaires and focus interviews with all involved participants in the project. Before the project started we asked 80 students of education, teachers of education and the 40 participating museum what their expectations were.

The final year of the project will focus on and establish clearly-defined objectives concerning both the content and structure of student participation. How are students of education and their thoughts

and ideas to be actively incorporated into the various courses and collaborative partnerships? How should the connection between the instruction at colleges of education and the instruction at museums be relayed? When and how should the participating institutions meet? This material must be assembled in the form of a practical and operational implementation model for museums, colleges and students. As mentioned earlier, we will focus on Network Learning Museum, a network where all museums and participating colleges can join. An important part of the implementation is also the maintenance of a web platform to show project results and products.

And the future - A Shared Vision

Assessing the experiences shared by the students and other project participants, it is clear that there is developmental work ahead in the planning of museum visits as well as in the strengthening of collaboration between museums and colleges of education (fig. 5). The two institutions possess divergent institutional cultures and working methods which must be brought together in a mutually beneficial manner during collaboration. Needless to say, this requires time as well as a concerted effort and will to change if such collaboration is to flourish.



Fig. 5 - *New learning initiatives integrate a more playful and sensitive approach to the collections in the museums in a very positive way (Photo: Knud Erik Christensen).*

The heart of the project lies in an interdisciplinary, cross-institutional collaboration and sharing of knowledge, where individuals interact within open social systems. It is the various participating institutions, with their individual values and visions that create meaning and exert great influence upon the individual participants, project groups, as well as the project as a whole.

Learning Museum wants to define and develop a mutual vision for future collaboration between colleges and museums. Collaboration gives rise to new working cultures and alternative learning environments which are critical elements if the success of future collaboration is to be ensured post-project.

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. In return, Danish museums can, in the interest of creating more relevant course offerings, reap inspiration and practical knowledge from a collaborative partner who possesses a deep insight into the pedagogical needs and curriculum requirements of Danish primary schools.

The project is supported by the Danish Agency for Culture and is co-ordinated by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde, Denmark Tine Seligmann, Project Manager and Curator.

Website

www.learningmuseum.dk with English summary.

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