

The Museum as a Learning Environment for Future School Teachers

By Tine Seligmann, Curator and Project Manager, Learning Museum

Learning Museum 2011-2013 is a Danish nationwide interdisciplinary collaboration between 26 museums and 13 teaching colleges. The project provides students of education with unique opportunities to participate in training courses and academic internships at the country's museums. In December 2011, the results of the first assessment of the autumn activities were presented. In 2012, results continue to be assessed in the interest of lending inspiration, networking opportunities and the crossinstitutional exchanging of knowledge.

The initial results of the museum courses and academic internships have already shown that students of education want “more museum” on the agenda! Not content to settle for a simple guided tour, students would rather use the museum proactively in their future teaching. They've even contributed with such suggestions as developing and implementing digital learning initiatives at cultural history museums to be applied in the teaching of a variety of school subjects. This was, 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.

On a practical level, students of education and interns specializing in subjects such as, Danish, history, art and science have taken part in courses and workshops at the various participating museums. An example of one student activity has been to visit a specific exhibit and, from a pedagogical and analytical standpoint, develop supplementary digital or paper teaching materials for specific user groups. This task has resulted in the production of completely new supplementary museum teaching materials as well as those intended as improvements upon pre-existing materials.

The students' projects and ideas are thoroughly discussed and subsequently presented to the museums' educational staff. Several of the tasks have proven relevant in student exam preparation fulfilling specific core requirements within the set teacher-training curriculum. Through these visits, students have also, on a more general level, been introduced to the museums' various collections and course offerings.

In the students own words:

“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.”

“I now know what museums have to offer primary schools and have obtained valuable insight into how to conduct pupils on a museum visit.”

“Teaching and museum work was a good and relevant combination which allowed me to put theory into practice.”



The Role of the Museum

Among core project objectives are establishing a clearer definition of the museum's role in primary schools, the schools' role at the museum and in so doing draw attention to the mutual benefits and learning opportunities that museum teaching can create for both institutions. The museum visits have helped to introduce students to museums' learning potential in a number of areas. Under the auspices of Learning Museum, collaborative museum work has been applied by students within the following subjects of specialization: history, religion, Danish, science, and art. The incorporation of museums into the teaching of these subjects has required both the development of interdisciplinary lines of thinking as well as the coordination of subject-specific methodologies and approaches to instruction. This has made it possible for future school teachers to more easily bring classroom and museum practice together as

well as apply their subject-specific methodologies within the museum environment. In addition, incorporating preparatory work in the classroom previous to a museum visit as well as follow-up work after the fact, has reinforced the ties between classroom and museum teaching within the various school subjects and helped to further unlock the museum's potential as a supplementary learning environment.

The majority of students have 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. 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.



Academic internship at the museum

One of the project's central elements is to focus on the college students' opportunities to carry out academic internships at the museums. This particular element, like the other project initiatives, is intended to help create stronger working relationships between museums and local primary schools. These internships have been set up so that students can incorporate them into their required student-teaching internship period. This enables them to take their pupils on a museum visit and test out the teaching methods and courses with which they've become acquainted or have perhaps even developed themselves. The internships also provide the students with ample opportunity to gather empirical data for their bachelor's thesis work. These museum-related projects have put theory into practice in a variety of unexpected ways, thereby paving new pathways for the



teaching profession. The long term goals of internship collaboration in the project are to establish permanent course offerings and museum internship opportunities as an integral part of the teacher-training curriculum and museum teaching practice.

A Shared Vision

Assessing the experiences shared by the students and other project participants, it is clear that there is much developmental work ahead in the planning of museum visits as well as in the strengthening of collaboration between museums and teaching colleges. The two institutions possess greatly 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.

Be it intentional or not, this is quite possibly the greatest barrier to overcome for both parties. Prioritizing the necessary time and resources to carry out such collaboration as well as opening museum doors to new sources of inspiration is, admittedly, a risk however, one that can positively contribu-

te to the development of museum educational-practice. The key is to 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? What should the resulting product of such collaboration be? How should the connection between the instruction at the teaching colleges and the instruction at museums be relayed? When and how should the participating institutions meet? 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 teaching 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.

Info:

Learning Museum 2011-2013 is coordinated by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde, Denmark with Support from the Danish Agency for Culture.

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