

A GREAT DAY OUT: MAKING THE BEST OF YOUR MUSEUM VISIT

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Museum education programmes offer opportunities for enriching knowledge, skills and understandings, changing attitudes and values, enhancing enjoyment and creativity. Museum experiences can transform 'traditional conceptions of learning' to embrace collaborative and community initiatives, e-learning and local partnership.¹ Recent research, however, suggests that classroom teachers themselves might contribute to more purposeful museum learning.² Teachers can be more proactive in negotiating meaningful museum experiences and extending them in their own classrooms and beyond. This article draws on teaching observations and interviews from research in 16 New Zealand and North American museums to propose 20 strategies classroom teachers could adopt to enhance the learning provided by museum educators.

PROMISE AND PRACTICE IN MUSEUM EDUCATION

Quality programmes draw on a wealth of institutional and human resources

Museum experiences can complement classroom teaching, informing enhanced learning through collaborations between teachers, education officers, caregivers and students. Museum educators draw on diverse backgrounds of teaching, curatorial, art history, arts administration or art practice. Their different experiences inform the broad range of stimulating, knowledge-rich and critically literate experiences they can provide. They can embrace students' ideas and provide rich experiences outside their classroom lives while simultaneously providing professional development for teachers.³

These experiences can familiarise, acculturate and nurture first-hand engagements with artefacts – but do we exploit their potentials fully? In 2006, over 600,000 New Zealand students enjoyed LEOTC experiences from over 60 contracted providers.⁴ Though 'not much short of the national school enrolment',⁵ this number did not represent a corresponding breadth of engagement. Many schools do not visit museums,⁶ and LEOTC services have experienced a recent decline in access.⁷ Anecdotal evidence suggests some visits are one-off experiences, little related to classroom programmes. Museums provide quality services, but how can teachers themselves capitalise on them more purposefully and profitably?

A survey of practice: research aims and rationale

Changing patterns of use suggest different strategies may be required for encouraging more purposeful museum visitation. This paper will suggest that classroom teachers themselves have much to contribute to the development of richer museum, and associated classroom, learning experiences. In doing so it draws on a research project developed through 2009 and 2010. The project sought to identify the ways that effective arts teaching models in museum settings might best inform teachers' own classroom practices. It gathered data through a broad spectrum survey that included museum visits, resource analysis, discussions with museum educators, observations of teaching sessions, and meetings with stakeholders including teacher advisory panels in 16 art museum education programmes in the United States and New Zealand. These combined observations suggest a range of interrelating strategies

classroom teachers could adopt to inform more profitable classroom learning, in visual arts and across the wider curriculum, from the museum visits they currently enjoy.

BUILDING PURPOSEFUL MUSEUM LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Engage with a sense of purpose tailored to the character of the museum

Quality experiences are built on clearly framed philosophies, principles and goals. Both tacit and explicit principles are provided in *The New Zealand Curriculum*.⁸ The Ministry of Education's requirements in its "Learning Experiences Outside the Classroom Provider Guide" lists core principles for building shared goals for all participants for interactive learning with different tools, objects and artefacts.⁹

The diverse collections and individually tailored practices of each museum may require specifically framed agendas. Teachers can draw on goals from museum education programmes. Those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, for example, are achieved through diverse pedagogies for the visual or tactile analysis of original artefacts, inclusive and sharing learning, interactive engagement, finding group and personal relevance in learning, and informing independent skills for life-long enjoyment, delight and cultural understanding.¹⁰

Minimise risk factors

Any participant – students, parent/caregiver supporters, members of the public, and even teachers themselves – has the potential to compromise the museum experience. In one teaching observation, an educator carefully established her expectations with a small group of new-entrant children, and then took them into the gallery to talk about early Māori domestic practices. The parents and teacher went to the museum café, returned to the front of the *wharehau*, sat down and sipped their coffees. They challenged protocols for appropriate behaviours both at the *wharehau* and the museum. In other instances, educators noted inappropriate interjections (especially on sensitive cultural issues), disruptive conversations or inappropriate management of children, by parents or teachers. Some simple safety strategies include:

Use museum protocol materials. Though almost every museum surveyed supplied schools with comprehensive information on their expectations and protocols in hard copy and on websites, many claimed these resources remained unused, and that only regular participants seemed familiar with expectations.

Pre-arrange expectations and roles for all participants. In some sessions observed in the research, teachers and caregivers seemed at a loss what to do. Teachers can play a proactive role in managing student behaviour, organising students into groups, moving them between activities.¹¹ They can meet with educators to clarify procedures and roles prior to a visit, with all caregivers to establish expectations and appoint roles as group leaders, with instructions in writing, allocating practical, useful tasks like distributing lunches, collecting bags, guiding children to the cloakroom or guiding learning conversations with small groups.

Pre-negotiate visits to promote diverse, quality, multidimensional, learner-focused experiences

LEOTC research verifies the value of pre-visit negotiation.¹² Most providers supply comprehensive pre-visit information on risk-management, maps, bussing arrangements, parking, caregiver support, or cloakroom arrangements.¹³ Most websites provide extensive free downloadable teaching resources to inform visits. The "Guggenheim Guidelines for Planning Visits" pdf resource, for example, supports programme design; their complementary "Inquiry Checklist" pdf provides suggestions for developing open-question technique strategies. Pre-visit preparation is informed through links for *Current Exhibition Previews*, *Arts Curriculum Online* and a database of selected artworks from the New York, Bilbao, Venice and Berlin collections. Guggenheim resource kits include image downloads, contextual material, and teaching and learning pathways. Teachers can draw on an extensive range of thoroughly researched, scholarly and user-friendly resources developed through focus 'lenses' of media, place, meaning, character, genre or narrative.¹⁴

Pre-negotiated engagements proved meaningful when the museum learning was related to that of the classroom. This is consistent with the 2010 LEOTC findings.¹⁵ The survey found polarised policy and practice in this area. At the Asian Arts Museum of San Francisco, most visits are chosen from a prepared programme seen to be appropriate for working with unfamiliar cultural content and the docent facilitation model employed there.¹⁶ Auckland Museum found joint planning more attractive to lower-decile schools.¹⁷ At the Dunedin Public art Gallery, however, every visit is individually negotiated against the broader classroom programme to build on prior class learning and inform longer-term learning experiences and curriculum goals.¹⁸ Teachers can make excessive demands of museum educators. One observation saw Getty Centre educators asked to lead 108 students through the learning tasks outlined in a teacher-prepared 18-page worksheet requiring close study of 15 art objects (exhibited in different parts of the museum) in a 60-minute visit.¹⁹

Use all institutional facilities

Asked what he remembered after an overnight stay at the museum, one child answered “breakfast at the café.” This was a positive learning outcome. Enjoyment and acculturation are as important as the cognitive benefits of museum visiting. The museum environment itself can impact on learning experiences. The Richard Meier-designed Getty Centre Museum in Los Angeles realises a vision of the museum itself as an artwork. The tram-ride from car park up to the museum complex physically and psychologically separates the aesthetic experience from the world below. The discrete displays in each gallery encourage close-focus and in-depth learning engagements. The central garden is a commissioned artwork by Robert Irwin. The buildings are interspersed with restful garden and piazza areas and panoramic views across Los Angeles or Malibu, or framed views within the complex. Experiencing these areas is an important part of each school visit. The Getty complex’s active contribution to learning is a practical realisation of the Reggio Emilia notion of the environment as the third educator.

Capitalise on quality museum resources

Many museums offer extensive, clearly presented and well-illustrated resources to inform independent class learning. In most they are free of charge. At the Art Institute of Chicago, teachers can access extensive loan materials onsite through the attractive, well-appointed Crown Educator Resource Center.²⁰ Through the online “Borrow Materials” link, teachers can access collection- or theme-based teaching manuals, art historical and artist resources, poster packets and videos. The “Collections” database allows teachers to search groupings by subject, resource type, pictorial category, curriculum subject area or lesson plan. The resources include fulsome historical contextualisation, artist and work studies, detailed, curriculum-linked lesson plans and activities, glossaries, timelines, maps, bibliographies and image lists. Their scholarly quality reflects the Institute’s agenda of empowering teachers and schools. They are designed to inform classroom programmes that may develop quite independently of the Institute visit or tour. Most Crown Center users access its resources online. Using the “My Collections” link, teachers and students can make their own collections by selecting artworks from Institute collections and adding their own notes to create student resources or virtual exhibitions.²¹ Other museums also offer online resource access and embrace media like facebook, youtube, ArtBabble, itunes or Mac applications into their resourcing strategies.

Through the MFA Boston *Educators Online* site teachers can access 360,000 objects, with reproductions of 150,000.²² Though this initiative was developed in collaboration with teachers and specifically for teacher use, it is open-ended and accessible also for children of almost any age. Museums provide great resources: use them.

Generating opportunities for linking and connecting the museum experience back to the class programme

How can teachers sustain what they learn in museums beyond the visit itself, taking the museum experience ‘home’ to inform longer-term individual or class engagement? Educators at Rotorua Museum give every child a small, brightly coloured sticker to wear, inviting others to ‘Ask me to tell you what I learned in the Rotorua Museum today.’ Classes visiting the Museum of Transport and Technology in Auckland are issued with a digital camera or video

camera for children to document their visit. Many art galleries allow this, provided the documentation depicts the visitors and works together.

LEOTC providers encourage teachers to establish clear links between the museum learning, the learning intentions of the visit, and the objectives of the broader classroom programme by referring back to the 'big idea(s)' or 'big question(s)' introduced at the beginning of the visit, and asking students what new thoughts, ideas or knowledge they could apply to these questions now, and relating this to their own lives or classroom learning.²³ Though LEOTC providers pose these questions, they work best when teachers proactively meld them into their classroom learning before and after the museum experience itself.

Seize opportunities for multi-visit participation

Repeat visits acculturate and encourage depth learning.²⁴ A Year 1 and 2 class observed at the Govett Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth was enjoying its fourth visit in six months. For some children new to school this was a first visit, for others it was their fourth. The gallery was familiar territory. Children knew the place, the locations of cloakrooms, toilets, and gallery and class spaces. They knew and were comfortable interacting with gallery staff. They were familiar with museum protocols – no running, shouting or touching. Most importantly, they felt comfortable responding, talking, making and acting amongst works in the gallery, and prepared to take risks when talking about art. These children were acculturated, aware and active engagers. Some North American museums offer programmes combining outreach school visits with museum-based programmes.²⁵

Develop partnership programmes to promote extended engagements with art and art-world networks

Some North American museum education teams broker learning partnerships that synergise community resources to broaden teachers' and childrens' views of art-world engagements. The Guggenheim "Learning Through Art Initiative" is an artists-in-schools programme. Teachers and artists collaborate to develop cross-curricular inquiry learning engagements and hands-on art-making explorations. Teachers are closely supported in the development and critique of inquiry plans, and the museum offers opportunities for teachers to share these, together with their own evaluations of their effectiveness, on the education website. This programme helps students build important critical thinking, art and literacy skills. Placing artists in schools puts children in the company of artists, has them working in adult contexts and validates or legitimises art as a worthy life pursuit. Schools currently pay \$US7000 for this. Where schools are from low-income areas, the museum takes a part-payment from the school and fundraises the remainder.

Close mentoring partnerships are less common in New Zealand, but those like the one being forged between Monte Cecilia School and The Pah Homestead in Auckland offer rich opportunities for extended collaborations.

Engaging learning experiences are often thematic

Thematic classroom programmes complement curriculum integration for holistic learning. Thematic explorations enhance the cohesive melding of individual, class and museum learning. In museums, thematic pathways provide links between sometimes diverse collections of objects. These investigations are generally pre-negotiated to inform broader class programmes in ways that are consistent with both curriculum and local community requirements. "Learning Through Art" explorations at the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York guide children through themes like Communities Around the World; Faces, Masks, Hats and Headdresses; A Look at Animals; or Observing the Four Seasons. At the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, themes of cultural identity, spiritual belief, change and transcultural interaction provide accessible introductions to the diverse worlds of Asia.

Quality programmes foster somatic, sensory engagements and pose evaluative questions

Immediately experienced somatic engagements encourage children to move through and around art objects, touch them, weigh, smell, listen to, even taste them. The Robert Irwin Garden at the Getty Center is an artwork with its own dedicated education programme. Challenging the conventional 'look and don't touch' axiom of museum behaviour invites provocative opportunities to extend learning beyond observational, descriptive or socio-historical engagements. 'Is a garden an artwork?' 'Which of these is a work of art?' At the Oakland Museum of California, children cast their votes against a Native American object, a woven work, or an object made from grass. At the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, John Neumegen challenges children to make choices: 'The gallery is on fire – which work will you save?' 'You are culling the collections: choose the first work to throw on the skip.' 'What does this work mean for you?' 'How does it make you feel?' provoke enthusiastic debates or invite personal reflection. These are aesthetic engagements; provocative, thoughtful and evaluative, and high-order learning experiences.

EMPLOYING DEDICATED TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING WITH OBJECTS

Quality museum learning benefits from interactive learning

Interactive learning experiences are engaging, and provide accessible opportunities for applying knowledge, transferring learning to new contexts, or inventive problem-solving. At the Govett Brewster, dance and role play invite children to respond to artworks experientially, emotionally and empathetically. Play encourages quality learning. Most museums surveyed embraced interactive activities into their learning. The DPAG, Govett Brewster and Puke Ariki in New Plymouth and Te Papa all provide classroom spaces to enhance gallery learning through art-making, or role play or dance interpretations relating to gallery learning. Most United States museums had similar facilities, and some have dedicated spaces for exhibiting children's works. All of these can transfer to classroom contexts.

Many museums maintain interactive experiences for public audiences. At the DPAG, children can enjoy a range of age-dedicated 'art hunt' activities designed to promote exploring, close looking, interpreting and articulating personal responses to questions or riddles. At Getty Villa, children can climb right inside an antique grain-storage jar, make rubbings for vase decoration, explore tactile qualities in 'feelie' boxes, or recreate their own antique theatre with a range of props and costumes against a silhouette screen. The Natural History Museum in New York offers a dramatic team role-play engagement in a 'race for the Pole.' Te Papa's Mixing Room attracts engaging and challenging multi-media interactions.

Quality museum-based learning is realised through inclusive transactional pedagogies

Learning with objects invites strategies different from those of teaching with text.²⁶ Inquiry learning encourages children to make diverse responses and interpretations in relation to the facts of objects, enhances cross-curricular learning connections, and benefits literacy and broader learning skills.²⁷ All museums surveyed employed transactional inquiry pedagogies consistent with the constructivist philosophies of New Zealand and North American curricular constructs. Within this commitment, however, lie different theoretical paradigms, approaches and outcomes.

Inquiry is a learned skill. The Guggenheim web resource guides the development of teachers' own inquiry strategies through a three-step sequence.²⁸ Through step 1, 'Find – an inquiry plan,' teachers can access a range of prepared inquiry pathways. Having trialed exemplary materials, teachers are guided to 'Create – your own inquiry plan.' A step-by-step planning demonstration leads from a curricular theme to a selection of art technique and artist, into developing questions to guide observational and interpretive engagements. Having developed their inquiry pathway, teachers are invited to 'Share – your inquiry plan' for museum staff critique and advice. The best get added to the Guggenheim database. Online "Classroom Troubleshooting Tips" provide guidance for initiating question-and-response sequences, encouraging close observation, embracing diverse contributions, guiding legitimate interpretations, extending conversations to elicit fuller explanations, eliciting valid evidence for interpretations, and drawing conversational inquiries to a conclusion.²⁹

Quality learning builds on appropriate pedagogies: Visual Thinking Strategies

The Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) project embraced by the Museum of Fine Arts Boston and Boston Public Schools guides conversational engagements through a sequence of three basic questions: 'What is going on in the picture?' opens up the discussion; 'What do you see that makes you say that?' asks for evidence from the objects; 'What can you find?' gives students the opportunity to look further and stretch their visual and critical thinking abilities.³⁰ Teachers support the engagement by paraphrasing and linking responses, pointing to features under discussion, maintaining neutrality and guiding depth – 15 minute – engagements.³¹ This encourages close scrutiny, description, and sharing and justifying interpretations, and it empowers both shared and individual appreciations. These skills are transferable to other learning and other aspects of daily life.

VTS claims to answer the teacher problem of 'I don't know anything about art.' Certainly it appears to have been transformative for teachers, students and school communities.³² It has been promoted as a school curriculum, and as a teaching method that can develop critical thinking, communication and visual literacy skills; engages rigorous examination and meaning-making through visual art; increases observation, evidential reasoning, and speculative abilities; facilitates conversational, respectful, democratic, collaborative problem-solving class interactions; nurtures language skills; and nurtures growth in all students, from challenged and non-English-language learners to high achievers.³³

... though not all learning is open-ended – pedagogies in debate

A place for cognitive transmission. Though popular, VTS has its limitations. Senior students, for example, require more definitive historical, contextual, biographical or theoretical knowledge about art objects and ideas. Some knowledge may be negotiable, but some is not, and valid understandings often need to be supported by evidence beyond the work itself. Children's own experiences might encourage them to misinterpret what they see. At the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, for example, children interpret signs like swastikas in Buddhist iconographies in ways that differ radically from those of the social, spiritual or historical contexts that informed the works' own generation and use. The museum needs to support the development of legitimate understandings by referring to evidence that may lie beyond the artwork. They do this by focusing learning experience and discussions on contextual fact more than on interpretation or response.

For similar reasons, educators at the Art Institute of Chicago favour a balance between open-ended negotiations between art objects and children, and prepared, academically informed delivery drawing on sound historical, biographical or media knowledge. Maintaining a balance between negotiated interpretations and valid knowledge about artworks contributes to more reliably legitimate understandings of the works. Educators develop informed learning pathways through a framework of interrelated cognitive learning skills:³⁴

Questioning and Investigating	Comparing and Connecting
Reflecting and Responding	Observing and Describing

Teachers can use these entrées selectively or non-sequentially. The model complements the 4-strand ('Arts Making,' 'Arts Literacy,' 'Interpretation and Evaluation,' 'Making Connections') Chicago Public Schools arts curriculum and favours inter-curricular subject integration to enhance historical and cultural contextualisation. It adapts readily to level-specific learning requirements of elementary and secondary school contexts, and provides a pluralist and culturally inclusive model to serve a broad range of community interests.

Quality museum learning develops through appropriate pedagogies: critical thinking in visual art experiences

Inquiry strategies at City Gallery Wellington have drawn on the United Kingdom 'enquire programme'.³⁵ Helen Lloyd describes critical thinking as a strategy for 'developing active, reflective and questioning critical thinking skills for visual arts engagements'.³⁶ She cites diverse benefits, including critical reflection, questioning, challenging, investigating problems, discovering, analysing, classifying, comparing, drawing conclusions, hypothesising, predicting and connection-making. Open critical enquiry engagements can be facilitated through questions that engage looking and analysing, explaining or interpreting: 'What?' 'When?' 'Who?' 'How?' 'Why?'³⁷ In practice, Lloyd develops searching questions through categories of meaning, ideas, contexts, values, opinions, beliefs, intentions, feelings and narratives.³⁸ A question sequence might follow: 'What can you see?' 'What does it remind you of?' 'How does it make you feel?'³⁹ 'What if?' questions encourage thoughtful and imaginative discourse; in relation to a Yayoi Kusama installation: 'What if ... the dots were not dots, but holes you could put your hands inside and feel something, what might you feel? What if ... you had a switch that could turn the sculptures on so that they can move? How might they move?'⁴⁰ Critical thinking informs close scrutiny and description of children's experiences of artworks, and encourages searching questions about how artworks might be conceived, made, transported or owned, and discussions about aesthetic and artistic ideas.⁴¹ Critical thinking strategies are easily adopted into classroom learning exchanges to promote the 'thinking' key competency of *The New Zealand Curriculum*.⁴²

Open pedagogies challenge through imaginative engagement

An art gallery is a bug-free zone ... For John Neumegen at Dunedin Public Art Gallery, imaginative challenges provide a segue between classroom subject focus and accessible engagements in the gallery.⁴³ School themes like dinosaurs, fairy tales or bugs are often difficult to relate to the gallery exhibition programme. Challenging children to find insects, dragons or dinosaurs amongst the artworks encourages them to explore the exhibitions, look with a searching eye, and make inventive associations between the smeared paint of a Judy Millar painting and a slimy snail trail on the pavement, or between a glittering installation by Reuben Paterson and the iridescent surface of a butterfly wing or the scales on a dragon. These provide an entrée into questions about the art objects themselves: 'What do you think the artist had in mind when she made this work?' develops the conversation into a deeper encounter.⁴⁴

Quality museum experiences allow space for enriching subjective responses through reflection and contemplation

However sociable the debates they provoke, aesthetic responses are inevitably subjective, individually experienced. Mostly teachers seem to expect intensive, information-packed engagements at the museum, but this is often at the expense of richer appreciations of artefacts. Thoughtful responses require time for each child to reflect on objects themselves, in their own ways, in relation to their own cognitive stock or sensible dispositions, as they form their own evaluative judgements and responses to the works they experience. They need 'a space in which [each] will act by his own light to his own ends ... To offer a pregnant cultural fact and let the viewer work at it is surely more tactful and stimulating than explicit interpretation?'⁴⁵ Allowing time and opportunity for the crystallisation of individually reflective responses against the pressure for intense cognitive engagement emerged as a key issue during this research project.

THE QUALITY OF MUSEUM SERVICES CAN BE MEASURED AND EVALUATED

How do we know if museum education programmes are successful? *Implicit* or *tacit* approval is indicated through positive questionnaire evaluations⁴⁶ and repeat visits. During a conversation with stakeholders, members of the Art Institute of Chicago's teacher advisory panel agreed that museum learning contributes positively to childrens' learning, informs integrated cross-curricular links and enhances literary skills.

As the teachers described their own relationships with the education team, the benefits of multiple visits, collaborative partnerships and customised activities for developing a rich synthesis between museum and school classrooms became apparent. However, what became clearly evident was that positive negotiated pathways began not with the museum, but with the classroom teachers themselves. Teachers identified the gaps in their own art knowledge, and cross-curricular links with areas like literacy or sciences, and museums provided resources for 'filling in' the art knowledge and providing something of a springboard into learning about art for its own ends and values. One teacher noted that her fourth-grade class came to the Institute four times a year; enjoying 'shorter' teacher-led 90-minute visits, and focusing the art engagements through learning in the social sciences. Her visit focus and the resources she used were negotiated prior to each visit. Her school has a particular museum focus – it is called a Museum Academy – and each grade-level class is allocated a different museum through the Chicago "Museums in the Park" arrangement; hers is the Institute. They see only three or four art objects, in only two rooms, in each visit, and really synthesise what they learn into the broader classroom learning unit. The visit experience can be developed into an appropriate art-making experience like printmaking back in the classroom.

Some teachers found the museum website useful for pre-visit preparation around specific works of art – one had set up a gallery in his classroom so children could walk around and learn how to behave and engage in a gallery space. By seeing works at half- or quarter-scale on the smart-board, they could explore ideas about how we engage with artworks. Prior to their museum visit, the children had to find an art object relevant to them, then find it online, reproduce it, and then prepare a piece of work explaining its personal relevance. Mastery of technology was critical in achieving this. Extending the museum experience back in the classroom, using reproductions of works children had seen in the original, around 'what if?' propositions was a useful way of extending learning. All agreed on the benefits of proactive teacher participation in developing close relationships. These inform more specifically customised activities that can further enrich children and empower teachers to extend their role in self-conducted tours, and in children's independent dispositions to positive museum learning.

Museum learning offers first-hand, inquiring engagements with real art objects; it informs and empowers teachers for developing their own museum and class-based art learning engagements; and it favours dispositions for lifelong engagements in the arts. This was confirmed in an informal observation during a Sunday afternoon visit to the Art Institute of Chicago several days after the research visits. The Institute was crowded. Huge numbers of family groups filled every gallery and corridor. Children and parents were enthusiastically engaged close-up with art objects of every kind, scrutinising closely, pointing excitedly and most of all talking, arguing, comparing, sharing their experiences as they moved around the museum. They were thoroughly acculturated, knowing and inquiring, confirming the positive role of museum learning for informing broader life engagements in the arts.

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