



PROFESSIONAL  
MUSEUM  
AND  
HERITAGE  
SERIES

# MUSEUM & GALLERY EDUCATION

A MANUAL OF GOOD PRACTICE

EDITED BY  
Hazel Moffat AND  
Vicky Woollard

FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

**Museum and gallery  
education: a manual  
of good practice**

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## FOREWORD

Many of us concerned with the promotion of museum education have long regretted that the substantial 1973 UNESCO *Museums and Monuments* series bestseller *Museums, Imagination and Education* (UNESCO, Paris) co-authored by some of the world's leading museum education practitioners, has long been out of print, though it is of course still readily available in museum and general libraries around the world. Far worse was the fact that the serious international financial problems of the late 1970s meant that the follow-up to this book, examining and promoting the museum's potential in more informal learning, was never formally published. However, that proposed additional manual, based on very different case studies covering 13 countries across the world, *Museums as an Educational Instrument: A Study for UNESCO on Museums as Out-of-school Activity*, was nevertheless completed in 1978 and very widely distributed in duplicated form (UNESCO Ref. ED.78/WS/7).

This new manual is therefore a very welcome, indeed vital, addition to the international literature of museums and gallery education. It brings both a practical and a philosophical perspective to what an increasing body of both museum professionals and educators see as a central function of museums. The focus is very much on education as a central and vital role of museums and galleries, and on the development and promotion of specialist expertise and services in the field. This approach to education in museums has become increasingly accepted over the past half century or so. We have certainly moved on from the days of the early 1960s, when the then Education Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) voted to dissolve itself because of irreconcilable ideological differences between traditionalist curators and guide-lecturers on the one hand and the professional educators of the children's museum and museum education services movements, insisting on a child-centred view of museum education, on the other.

The ICOM International Committee for Education and Cultural Action (CECA), established as a replacement for the dissolved committee in 1963, has promoted the modern view of museum education reflected in the key UNESCO and UK studies cited above. However, there are still very many museums and galleries, indeed whole countries, where education is still regarded as no more than the provision of formal – often very academic – lectures or guided tours. Even more cynical and worrying is the view, found in some more commercially oriented museums, that education should be seen as no

more than a revenue-earning element of the museum's commercial operations, an extension of marketing and promotion.

Drawing on a range of internationally respected authors and their practical experiences in museum and gallery education, this new book, *Museum and Gallery Education: A Manual of Good Practice*, through both its main texts and its supporting materials – summaries of key points, references, bibliography, glossary and address list – should serve as a benchmark for museum education development and provision for many years to come. The main chapters and case studies offer much to specialists, such as museum education staff and students, and to wider audiences including museum directors, managers, curators and policymakers in both cultural and educational services.

Patrick J. Boylan  
Professor of Heritage Policy and Management  
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London



## **PREFACE**

Museums and galleries make our world accessible, whether they are displaying the life of people remote in space and time, the work of immediate predecessors, the natural history of local and more distant environments or the creativity of present-day artists and craftspeople. The very collections can excite wonder, pleasure and curiosity.

However, visitors do not automatically get access to the meanings embedded in each item by simply looking or touching, where this is possible. Many forms of interpretation, from the ubiquitous label to the particular juxtaposition of objects and specimens and a variety of audiovisual resources, can contribute to visitors' understanding and enjoyment. Increasingly, interpretation is taking into account the varying learning needs and styles of visitors, as educators and audience advocates are involved in exhibition planning teams.

As well as the interpretation available at all times in the exhibition spaces, education programmes can add considerably to the enjoyment, insights, knowledge, skills and capabilities of young and old alike. What is also special about museums' and galleries' capacity for facilitating learning is that they can appeal not only to the many different styles of learning attractive to all age ranges but also to many people's desire to relate what they see to their own particular experiences. In other words, learning in museums and galleries or in their outreach programmes is not simply about acquiring a body of knowledge or specific skills, although individuals may choose to do both of these things. It is also about providing the freedom for people to make sense of their own life experiences through their personal responses to individual items or whole collections. These responses could be to do with tastes, emotions or memories triggered by what is absorbed through their senses.

Over the past two centuries, museums and galleries have seen the steady development of education practice. From the simple beginnings of the guided tour, museums and galleries had begun to encourage school visits and to loan collections by the end of the 19th century. Now, museum and gallery education embraces many disciplines and practices. Some have evolved out of the museum context itself, such as exhibition design or visitor studies. Others have been borrowed and developed from other fields of study and research such as psychology or from the commercial world, marketing and sponsorship. As can be seen from the chapters and case studies that follow, education in any museum or gallery, anywhere in the world, can incorporate face-to-face teaching, the use of interpretative materials such as handling



collections, activities for all ages and interests, and the opportunity to design exhibitions.

Some practitioners may well argue that the term 'education' is redundant, as the emphasis should be towards visitors being in control of their own learning, with the museum professional's role being to ensure that the context and content of the collections inspire and bring about knowledge and understanding. However, many museums and galleries are still engaged in education by using a whole range of strategies to lead the visitor to make connections in the displays.

For many of the authors in this book, education is central to the activities and policies of their institutions. They are the fortunate few. In the majority of museums and galleries, education is still considered an accessory, there only on occasions and at the periphery. Educational staff are not included in debates or in the decision-making process. This situation limits the opportunities for learning from the very collections which had been gathered to help us understand the past and present world. Furthermore, a failure to use a collection as an educational resource sets the museum or gallery apart from the community it serves, encouraging the view that it is irrelevant or – far worse – unnecessary.

The UK is often thought to have a forward-looking approach to museum and gallery education, but during 1994/5 one of the largest-ever surveys of museums and galleries found that over half did not offer any educational service at all. The report, *A Common Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom* (1997), found that those which did were scattered haphazardly across the UK and were varied in both quality and quantity of provision. This report made a very strong argument for the need for investment in both financial and staff terms. We support those aims and hope that this book contributes to generally raising awareness of the value of museums and galleries to society.

Hazel Moffat  
Vicky Woollard  
July 1999

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We would first like to thank all those who came from some 30 countries to attend the British Council seminars on museum and gallery education in 1996 and 1997, in London. They shared a wealth of experience with us. To the seminar delegates who contributed to this manual we owe a particular debt of thanks. We should also like to thank most warmly those colleagues in the UK who contributed to the seminars and have written chapters. We are grateful to Professor Patrick Boylan who, as well as writing the Foreword, commented constructively on a draft of the manual.

Work such as this does not emerge in isolation. We should like to acknowledge the books written and edited by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, which have done much to identify key issues in museum and gallery education and have played a part in making many of us more reflective practitioners. We are grateful to the British Council not only for inviting us to run the museum and gallery education seminars, but also for contributing to the administrative costs of preparing the manual. Finally, we thank our families for their forbearance and support when deadlines loomed.

Hazel Moffat  
Vicky Woollard

## **ABOUT THE GENERAL EDITORS**

**Hazel Moffat** writes, advises and lectures on museum and gallery education. Formerly an HM Inspector, with national responsibility for museum education, she has served as a council member of the Association of Independent Museums, is an honorary member of the Group for Education in Museums and a member of the International Council of Museums and the American Association of Museums. She co-directed the British Council seminars on museum and gallery education in 1996 and 1997.

**Vicky Woollard** is a lecturer in the Department of Arts Policy and Management, City University, London, and a museum education consultant to individual museums and related agencies. She previously spent 18 years in museum education at three London museums: the Horniman, the Museum of London and the Geffrye. She is a committee member of the Group for Education in Museums and, in 1996 and 1997, was co-director of the British Council seminars on education in museums and galleries.

# **Chapter I MAKING THIS MANUAL WORK FOR YOU**

Hazel Moffat  
and  
Vicky Woollard

This book is called a manual because of both its practical and philosophical use to anyone interested in museum and gallery education. It explains what has been done to develop educational possibilities in museums and galleries, why staff have chosen to work in particular ways and the outcomes of their work. It is not a catalogue of easy successes; in many cases it shows the painstaking work of building common goals with colleagues and the many other agencies who have responsibility for education, while still catering for the needs of existing and potential visitors. Nor is this manual like the kind of car manual that recommends the correct way of working on a precise make of car with very specific tools to achieve guaranteed outcomes. Instead, it encompasses a wealth of experience gained by people who have worked in very different circumstances with very diverse collections, but who nevertheless have similar commitments to two goals: enabling museums and galleries to fulfil their educational mission; and producing work of the best quality possible.

It is hoped that this book will encourage practitioners to enter the debate of what is 'good practice', not only for the profession but also for the visitor. While acknowledging that there is no single 'right way' to develop education practice, the examples of good practice featured here have been chosen to highlight processes, strategies and materials which have been seen to work and which, above all, have left members of the public satisfied with the learning experiences on offer. We believe that the process of thinking about and developing good practice in museum and gallery education in this manual is enhanced by two factors:

- The experiences of museum and gallery education in a wide range of countries where many challenges are shared, but where the needs of different communities provide particular contexts for educators.
- The cross-fertilisation of ideas where educators not only have to work with a great diversity of collections, but also with contemporary artists and craftspeople. This develops varied ways of understanding and responding to the past, to recently produced work and to work in progress.

The examples of good practice have been designed to encourage reflection about the applicability of theories and the diversity of



practice. It is hoped that this habit of reflection will enable you to be selective, to reconsider existing practice and to make decisions about how possible changes can be made.

The manual shows how any museum or gallery can establish sound foundations for fulfilling the educational aspect of its mission. These foundations depend on many factors, which are the main themes of this book:

- Developing a policy for an education service at the outset. The process of doing so and the common aims reinforced by the policy can enable priorities to be agreed to make the best use of limited staff time and other resources (see Chapter 2).
- Ensuring that exhibition planning takes learning needs into account while developing additional learning programmes and support materials (see Chapters 3 and 4).
- Identifying potential visitors (audiences) and responding to their diverse learning needs (see Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8).
- Accepting the need for evaluation in order to check that aims have been achieved and to find out if any improvements are necessary (see Chapter 9).
- Determining the staff's training needs and using a variety of training techniques to satisfy them (see Chapter 10).
- Responding to local and national policies and, where possible, playing a part in influencing them (see Chapter 11).
- Appreciating the value of international links to learn from others' achievements and problems, and finding ways to strengthen those links (see Chapter 12).

## **Finding routes through the manual**

The chapters reflect the main themes of the book, as described above. Response to the chapter theme, its problems and successes form the body of each chapter which concludes with a list of key points and recommended texts. Five of the chapters are illustrated with additional case studies, many of them from contemporary art galleries.

In addition to the main themes, several subsidiary themes are included. Many main and subsidiary themes are found in more than one chapter or case study and these are listed below, with brief outlines of the main points:

## **Relating theory to practice**

The projects described in this manual are underpinned by various theories, such as those summarised in Hein and Alexander (1998), to

help clarify and strengthen the role of education in museums. Here are some examples of how theories have been applied to learning and public culture.

- People learn in different ways and therefore have different learning needs. The implications of this for diversity in exhibition design is central to Chapter 3.
- Learning can be stimulated through different forms of interaction where several senses are engaged. Interaction, both with exhibits and with members of small groups such as families, is an important dimension in the potential for learning described in Chapter 7. Chapter 4 discusses how a range of interactive support materials can extend the way that people learn about exhibits.
- Learning can be enhanced through comparisons. The application of this theory to museum and gallery staff's own learning is the theme of Chapter 12.
- Communities have a key part to play in the interpretation of their heritage and of art forms produced by others. They are no longer treated simply as the recipients of culture whose material remains are interpreted only by museum and gallery staff. The ways in which different ethnic groups can work with museums and galleries to give their points of view are covered in Chapter 5. An outreach programme which empowers groups of local people to share their histories was developed by the National Museum of Colombia and features in Chapter 8. Case Study 3 shows how a contemporary art gallery worked with builders to learn about their responses to new exhibitions, while Case Study 4 shows how different communities were encouraged to respond to sensitive issues.

### **Developing new audiences**

Museums and galleries must be continually aware of the make-up and size of their audience. Education services in museums and galleries can play a significant part in attracting new audiences, whether by targeting groups with characteristics in common, such as cultural minorities, or by attracting individuals through an imaginative and mixed programme of activities.

- Taking the decision to develop a new audience needs to be placed in the broader context of the education policy and the overall aims and objectives of the museum or gallery itself. Chapter 2 demonstrates the need for careful examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation before embarking upon such a project.



- Ways of establishing contacts with specific groups and determining their interests and needs are the main focus of Chapters 5 and 8, and Case Studies 3 and 4. They also feature in Chapter 4 and Case Study 1.
- One method of attracting visitors is to accommodate a range of learning styles in the exhibitions, as described in Chapter 3.

### ***Enabling visitors to make their own meanings***

Following post-modernist thinking, some museums and their staff are reconsidering how stories are told through displays, exhibitions and other material. Opportunities are being made to allow several authors to create different texts using the same material (the collections) and sometimes those authors come from the general visiting public. In this book we see a number of examples of this:

- Chapter 8 describes how local people using everyday objects from the past help to redefine their communities.
- In Case Study 1, children were asked to select and interpret the collections at the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum.
- Such interpretation can be done in implicit ways, as seen in Chapter 4 where the staff believe in visitors being given every opportunity to make their own conclusions from the evidence put before them.
- Social interaction between families, which can enable them to make their own meanings, is discussed in Chapter 7.

### ***Working with people with physical, cognitive and sensory disabilities***

Many museums and galleries have worked over a number of years with groups and individuals who are disabled or who have special educational needs. Increasingly, governments require all museums and galleries to improve access to buildings and services. In the UK, for example, such requirements are made in the Disability Discrimination Act and this applies, of course, to education provision in museums and galleries. Appropriate strategies are needed to understand the particular needs of people with physical, cognitive and sensory disabilities and to develop suitable educational materials and programmes for them.

- Ways of identifying the needs of children with visual impairments, developing programmes and resources, and working with pupils' families and specialist agencies are included in Chapter 4.
- Liaison with specialist agencies can contribute to museum and gallery staff's professional development in responding to the needs of people with disabilities, as shown in Chapter 10.

- The advantages of learning from expertise developed in other countries is included in Chapter 12.
- Basic facilities necessary for visitors with disabilities are included in Chapter 7.

### ***Creating new resources for education***

A major part of museum education work is interpreting the collections in ways which will attract and develop the interests of a wide-ranging public and be appropriate to their intellectual, emotional and physical needs. Devising support materials, be they worksheets or other audiovisual aids, demands staff time and expertise. None of these materials can be developed without prior research nor should they be expected to have a long life. All materials need constant evaluation and frequent updating. There is a wealth of examples in the chapters and case studies, including:

- replicas and herb gardens (Chapter 4)
- materials made primarily for outreach work such as the Museum-in-a-Box project in Botswana (Case Study 5), and oral history tapes and CD-ROMs in South Australia (Case Study 6)
- materials for use with family groups (Chapter 7).

### ***New technologies***

New technologies offer many opportunities for communication in the various aspects of a museum's or gallery's functions. Exhibitions can incorporate computers to provide additional information, engage the visitor in some interaction to provoke thought, and increase understanding. Visitors can also 'visit' museums via the Internet to gain an overview of the collections as well as look more thoroughly at records. Behind the scenes, museum and gallery professionals can communicate across the world using faxes, e-mail and video conferencing. Though some authors have made reference to information technology (IT), it should be noted that the world of hi-tech education is still not available to many small museums and galleries.

- Schools are the one particular visitor group which has been targeted for IT projects. The Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Case Study 1 is the first Dutch museum to have created a special website for pupils. The Vasa Museum in Sweden (Chapter 4) encourages children to take part in an ongoing conversation about their visit by e-mail.
- To create such complex communication systems a range of skills and

knowledge is needed. Case Study 6 lists a number of different agencies involved.

- Chapter 9 looks at the significance of computer packages in delivering accurate and complex data for the evaluation of a service.
- The importance of disseminating information internationally to colleagues through the Internet is discussed in Chapter 12.

### ***Working in partnership***

Working in partnership with other organisations has become a necessity for many museums and galleries, not only for reasons of financial prudence but because of a belief that partnership enriches all those who contribute. Partnerships vary according to the characteristics of each partner and the individual aims and objectives each wishes to accomplish. Some partnerships can be purely financial, exchanging money for knowledge, staff time or publicity; others can involve a pooling of expertise, resources and solutions which benefit all equally. We see through the chapters and case studies a number of partnerships working:

- between museums and schools, as in Chapter 4
- between museums and community groups, as in Chapters 5 and 8
- between one museum and another, as in the exchange programmes discussed in Chapter 12.

### ***Managing people, finances and resources***

Management is concerned with providing mechanisms and approaches to enable people to carry out their jobs in an efficient, effective and economic way. This involves funding programmes, allocating responsibilities to other staff and maximising opportunities appropriate to the available resources. It is important that museum educators take this aspect of their work seriously and that they ensure their management skills are continually reviewed to tackle the changes and challenges in the museum world today.

- Management is concerned with delivering policy and Chapter 2 looks at the process and purpose of policymaking in great detail.
- A number of case studies outline their aims and objectives for either projects or for the gallery or museum as a whole (see Case Studies 2 and 4). Having clear objectives enables staff to assess the short- and long-term benefits as well as highlighting weakness; see Chapter 6 and Case Study 1 for good examples.



- With clear objectives, it is easier to evaluate the service. Chapter 9 looks at this area in detail and demonstrates the advantages.
- The success of some educational or multidisciplinary teams shows how small groups of people can accomplish so much more than individuals, not just in terms of production but, more importantly, in creating more imaginative and better-planned projects. This is fundamental to the exhibition work discussed in Chapter 3 and Case Study 6, and is also highlighted in Chapters 2 and 12.
- Management is concerned with maintaining a skilled and competent staff and Chapter 10 looks at a range of strategies to accomplish this.
- Funding and staffing projects with limited resources is a common factor across the world and Case Study 6 shows how ideas can be adapted in order to work on a limited budget, while Chapter 12 demonstrates a number of ways in which individuals can raise funds for travel abroad.
- Raising finances can involve a range of partners, be they commercial businesses (Chapter 3) or government agencies (Case Study 6).

### ***Projects relevant to smaller museums***

The examples of museum and gallery learning in this manual all originate in large museums and galleries. However, many of the suggestions are applicable to small museums and galleries where, for example, there is no education specialist on the staff or where the whole institution is staffed by volunteers.

- Whatever the size of a museum or gallery in terms of staffing or collection, an education policy is essential to clarify priorities, as described in Chapter 2.
- Choosing more than one way of displaying the collections is also essential in order to cater for the different learning needs of visitors. Aspects of the different styles of exhibitions described in Chapter 3 are therefore useful for smaller institutions.
- Additional learning resources can be developed to supplement some elements of the displays. Ideas can be selected from those given in Chapters 4, 6 and 7.
- Evaluating whatever learning strategies are used in the exhibitions and supplementary material will benefit small as well as larger museums and galleries (see Chapter 9).
- All staff, whether salaried or volunteers, need to make a commitment to continued professional development. Examples of a wide range of training opportunities are given in Chapter 10 and 12.