

Making Your Own Museum case study



Summary

The Making Your Own Museum project was aimed at raising understanding of museums in local schools. It took place during 2006/07 in Telford as part of the Telford Culture Zone.



The Culture Zone is part of the DCMS Cultural Hub project, funded through the Arts Council.

Ironbridge Gorge Museum ran the 11-week project. It also involved a Culture Zone partner, Shropshire Archives, which delivered a session on census records. Ludlow Museum Resource Centre was an external partner.

So far 313 students between year 5 and year 7 have successfully completed the project.

Background

Telford is a diverse area and the schools within the Culture Zone reflect this. They range from large town schools with four classes per year to small rural schools with three classes in total.

Ironbridge Gorge Museum is a large cultural organisation and a very popular tourist attraction. However, 2005 research by Arts Index West Midlands showed it was not being used by many people within the local area. Research showed that out of 482 respondents, 90 per cent had travelled over 50 miles to visit the attraction. Only 3.4 per cent travelled less than 20 miles, from within the Telford locality. This suggests that children could be made more aware of cultural experiences on their doorstep.

Key issues

Our own questionnaires from the start of the project showed opinions from the children themselves that museums were primarily about old objects and for tourists.

By the end of the project the answers reflected a shift to museums as being about past, present and future, and as being more accessible to a wider range of people.

What we did

The project aimed to change perceptions of what museums are and what they do. This was achieved by:

- learning about why and how museums preserve certain objects
- thinking about how our objects today will one day be old
- questioning what is worth preserving

Shropshire Archives delivered a session looking at census records of the area to give children a sense of local history.

Children then went on to design their own personal exhibit in a shoebox, thinking about which objects they could choose to represent certain aspects of themselves and their personality.

They learnt about branding and advertised their own museum. They did this through designing promotional material. The children eventually acted as curators for their own museum.

This process helped explain some reasons behind:

- why museums preserve objects
- why this is important for the future, by making it personal to the children themselves

Key Outcomes

The main outcome was that each child got to experience designing, making and running their own museum exhibit.

They were also able to handle real museum objects, and learnt about how to preserve and document them for the future.

They visited a museum to look at how objects are stored when they are not on display. They learnt how to look at original documents on a microfilm reader and to gain historical understanding from this research.

Our evaluation questionnaires showed a shift in perceptions in children participating in the project.

Forty-two per cent of children wrote that they had learnt how to make and run a museum. Eighty-six per cent wrote they had a better understanding of museums from taking part in the projects. Seventy-two per cent stated that after the project they felt more interested in museums than before.

Impact

- a typical child enjoyed the project and learnt about themselves as well as the topic
- they achieved satisfaction from showing the work they had done to their parents and peers
- they learnt about what museums do and how they can be useful learning environments
- they left the project with a better knowledge of, and more interest in, museums than before
- some children remarked they had learnt that museums were fun and not boring!

Resources

On average the project cost (including a trip to Ludlow) was £300 per class for 11 weeks. This works out at just under £1 per child per session. However staff costs are not included.

The project has resulted in:

- physical objects such as a handling collection
learning resources
- teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) packs

Who was involved

Jodie McConnell and Rachel Hunter from the education department at Ironbridge Gorge Museum were involved.

Liz Young from Shropshire Archives delivered one session as part of the project.

Staff from Ludlow Resource Centre and Museum gave a behind-the-scenes tour of how they conserve objects in different ways, both natural and social history collections.

Barriers and how they were overcome

Most projects were very successful, with lots of support from class teachers.

However we did note that some teachers who were less supportive or interested in the project did have a detrimental effect on their class's participation in the project.

Some perceptual barriers at the start of what museums were about were soon overcome as children understood the practical and involved nature of the sessions.

Critical success factors

The project was mainly successful due to input from all practitioners, teachers and children involved. The success can be measured in the final outcome and in the very positive feedback from children and teachers who took part in the project.

How would you do it better?

By running this project with several different schools, we have been able to improve on it each time. The main development has been to try and highlight the importance of teacher involvement. This has been achieved by stressing that work may need to be

finished off during normal lesson time, and giving teachers more creative input into the end product.

The project is currently being adapted for younger children aged 5-7, to increase the range of children who can access it.

Key contact

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