The Creative Process of Museum Educators & New Approaches to Museum Learning

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About the Author

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Executive Summary

It’s one thing to sit down and to make something and be creative, but it’s another thing to reflect on your experience, because it’s through that self-reflection that you really grow and come to new understandings.¹

Through my Churchill Fellowship, I aimed to better understand the creative process of museum educators and highlight examples of innovative programming.² By its nature, museum education is collaborative, collective and collegiate. Audiences are central to the work, and extensive research is conducted to better understand and meet their needs, and ideally exceed their expectations. Ironically, museum educators are so adept at supporting the creativity of others that their own creative contribution often goes overlooked.

The majority of programming formats - talks, tours, workshops, projects and courses - are well-established and used by museum educators all over the world. Over time, however, programmes can harden into fixed orthodoxy, and path dependency can blinker museum educators to alternatives. This risk is particularly pertinent to the UK cultural sector, which is currently being buffeted by economic austerity, restricted arts provision in formal education, and shifting audience demands. In amongst this flux, museum educators need to be flexible in their thinking and experimental in their programming to keep pace with the rate of change.

To address my aims, I visited five US cultural institutions to interview staff and observe programmes.³ At each, I focussed on three priorities: the programmes (what makes them innovative); the Learning staff (how they generate and develop ideas); and the organisational context (the conditions that enable museum educators to do their best work). My findings are presented in two sections: the first deconstructs the creative process and identifies key characteristics of the individual, the organisation, ideas generation, and ideas development; the second presents examples of innovative practice and illustrates what is possible when the creative components converge.

I conclude that the creative process is intrinsic and vital to museum education; it underpins the practice and fuels innovation in programming. A heightened awareness of one’s own creative process, developed through self-reflection and peer-led critique, equips practitioners to further improve and develop their work. As museums become more deliberately social and audience-centric in their approach, the expertise and creativity of Learning staff increases in value. If museum educators broaden their horizons from the departmental to the institutional, and step up to the challenge of leading organisational change, they are well-placed to define the future of museum practice.

¹ Jessica Fuentes, DMA, interviewed via Skype 28 Oct 2016 (43 / 48:12)
² A note on terminology - I use Education and Learning interchangeably. Education is the older phrase; it fell out of favour due to its association with school-based education. Learning is felt to be more active, although neither term fully captures the social, enjoyable and creative aspects of engaging with museums. I also use museum and gallery interchangeably. I am referring to museums of art, craft and design.
Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of Learning in museums and galleries in the UK, including some of the pressures currently facing the sector. I look specifically at the use of audience research to evidence the impact of arts engagement, and the role of museum educators in devising programmes and supporting museum-wide initiatives. I set out the aims and objectives for my Fellowship, and give some background on the development of my research tools - a set of interview questions and templates created in partnership with Imagination Lancaster. I conclude with a summary of the five US cultural organisations that form the heart of my research, outlining my motivations for visiting each one.

Background

Education and Learning departments are well-established within museums and galleries, both in the UK and internationally. What started as fairly informal engagement with visitors through talks and tours in the early 20th century, grew substantially over the 1970s-80s as artistic and pedagogic practice came together, championing experiential and experimental approaches to working with audiences. In the UK, state-funded arts investment since the mid-1990s has often come with a social slant. Established in 1994, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), has pumped billions of pounds into arts infrastructure and programming. HLF has always required grant recipients to define the benefits of their projects to the general public, an obligation usually delegated to Education/Learning departments.

The first decade of this century saw a boom in new cultural institutions. Tate Modern opened in 2000, and quickly became a destination for art-lovers, curious art-agnostics and tourists alike. In the same year, The New Art Gallery Walsall opened, the first of many high quality, ambitious new galleries across the country. It was followed by BALTIC Gateshead (2002), Middlesbrough Museum of Modern Art (2007), Lightbox Woking (2007), Nottingham Contemporary (2009), Firstsite, Hepworth Wakefield, and Turner Contemporary (all 2011). Because regional galleries can’t rely on the international tourist traffic that passes through London, they have had to become part of their local communities. Again, Education/Learning departments have played a vital role in diversifying the audience profile and embedding new galleries in their specific locality.

Challenges and opportunities facing the UK cultural sector

This impressive period of growth and expansion had to end at some point, and that point was 2008 (nb. site development projects are juggernauts, so new galleries were continuing to open after this date). The economic recession, combined with government austerity measures and slashed local authority budgets, put museums and galleries under increased financial pressure, sometimes even resulting in closure. A whole raft of community services also shrunk or disappeared, such as

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5 Karen Raney (ed.), *Engage 35: Twenty-Five Years of Gallery Education*, p.7
6 [www.hlf.org.uk/about-us](http://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us)
SureStarts (for young parents), youth centres, and day-centres for older people. Museum and gallery education departments often work closely with audiences through the mechanism of this social infrastructure and many long-standing partnerships ended when services closed.

Changes to the National Curriculum have had an impact on how museums and galleries work with schools. The new system favours the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), which prioritises Maths, Science and English curricula, squeezing out Art & Design, Design & Technology, Dance, Media Studies, Drama, Music and Performing. The Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) has reported a 21% drop in arts GCSE entries from 2010 to 2016.8 CLA also revealed a huge drop in the Design and Technology offer; there were 25% fewer teachers and 23% fewer teaching hours from 2010 to 2015.9 The devaluing of arts subjects in formal education affects not just school visits to galleries now, but how the cultural sector will be shaped as these young people become adults.

While the current backdrop might be looking distinctly dystopian, there have also been some positive changes. Those many years of investment in museum programming have resulted in high audience expectations: families want to know what’s available to them when they arrive; young people expect to join youth collectives and co-devise peer-led projects; friends meet for lunch in the cafe; and for some, museum shops are destinations in their own right. Over the past 20 years, museums and galleries have adapted to welcome a broader audience, and in turn that audience now expects more of museums. People want to interact, to be inspired and have fun, to recognise their own experiences and perspectives, and to see the diversity and complexity of life outside the museum walls reflected in the programming within. To remain relevant, learning programmes must be flexible and responsive to changing audience needs.

**Museum educators and audience research**

Learning teams, irrespective of size, design programmes for all ages and audiences. Generally speaking, there is an offer for schools, adults, families and young people, as well as targeted community projects. While larger teams often have staff responsible for individual audiences, in smaller organisations, the solitary Learning staff member will: research the collections; create the programmes; develop content with partners; lead talks and tours; support workshop delivery; evaluate the offer; report to funders; and spend a fair bit of time under tables picking up gluestick lids. Variety is both the blessing and the curse of the role - it’s never the same day twice, which keeps it interesting, but the workload can feel relentless, because no matter how much you do, there is always more you could be doing.

Museum education is a people-oriented profession, and most research and writing on the subject is devoted to audiences. To secure funding, the impact of the work must be evidenced and the argument must be made, time and again, that the arts are of value to people’s lives. You could build an entire museum out of audience engagement reports. Topics include: learning styles; creativity in children; the benefits to health and well-being; the importance of object-based learning; and the financial contribution of the cultural sector to the economy, to name just a few. An enormous amount of energy has been expended on understanding audiences so that we may meet their needs more effectively.

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Audience research, combined with a shared understanding of museum education practice, has led to a fairly well-established approach to programming. Talks, tours, workshops, courses and short-term projects are the basic building blocks. Within this framework, there is potential for fantastic originality and creativity, but these structures can also become fixed orthodoxy. With little time or headspace to imagine alternatives, and working in a time of uncertain funding, the temptation can be to stick with what works. A programme that was fit-for-purpose when it launched may no longer be as effective five or six years later. As a result of the recent changes in formal education, arts funding, and audience expectations, our programmes are chasing a moving target and we can’t afford to rely too heavily on previous successes.

Given that museum educators are specialists in creativity and dedicated to helping others tap into their own, we rarely turn that focus on ourselves. We are well-versed in presenting the benefits of arts engagement, but are less accustomed to championing our own creative contribution that made engagement possible. Having a deeper understanding of one’s own creative process has many advantages. It’s an asset to know: when to work alone or with others; when to sleep on a problem or persevere; where to look for inspiration; how to filter, refine and finesse ideas; and how to channel a new idea into action. Museum educators are working in a changing and challenging context, and programming must be innovative and responsive to keep up. Investing time in our own creativity and reflecting on our own process can help us meet those demands.

Churchill Fellowship: aims and objectives

My aims were to better understand the creative process of museum educators and highlight examples of innovative programming. To meet these aims, I studied five innovative cultural organisations in the US: Dallas Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art Denver; Indianapolis Museum of Art; Columbus Museum of Art; and Museum Hack in New York. In each case, my objective was to answer the following questions and identify commonalities across organisations:

- Innovative programming: How is current practice being challenged and reshaped?
- Learning staff: Who are the people behind these programmes? How do they generate and develop ideas?
- Organisational context: How is Learning understood and positioned within the organisation?

Approach and methods

At each organisation, I observed programme delivery and interviewed staff. Due to the complexities of scheduling such a trip (five cities over a four-week period in September 2016), I couldn’t be too selective about which programmes would be available during my visit, but I endeavoured to see as much as possible. While my primary interviews were with museum educators, I was also keen to gain from their colleagues’ perspectives. The size of the team and their availability influenced the number of interviewees at each place, which ranged from one (Museum Hack) to eight (Columbus Museum of Art).

For my interviews with museum educators, I wanted to get to the core of the creative process - a notoriously coy and elusive subject. Baldly asking, ‘what is your creative process?’ was unlikely to elicit the depth of answer I was hoping for, so it was necessary to get creative myself, which required enlisting the help of others. I first met researchers from ImaginationLancaster at a conference in 2014. They run ‘an open and exploratory design-led research centre at Lancaster University’, and
generously agreed to help me develop interview tools. This support was made possible as part of their research project, Leapfrog, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.\textsuperscript{10}

In the US, I conducted ‘Leapfrog’ interviews with seven museum educators, focusing on one or two Learning staff in each of the five organisations. I conducted a further 16 interviews, ranging from 30-70 minutes, with museum staff from the five organisations as well as other recommended museum education specialists. These interviews were less structured, but the emphasis remained on the creative process and my three priority areas (innovative programming, Learning staff, and organisational context).

To develop my Leapfrog interviews, I had three full-day workshops with the ImaginationLancaster team. The first session was to prototype the format. In preparation, I translated my areas of interest into research questions:

- How can museum educators better understand their creative process?
- How can that greater understanding improve and inform programming?

We discussed each and devised eight sub-questions:

- How do museum educators reflect on their process?
- What initiates the creative process? (ie. where do ideas come from?)
- What is an individual’s personal process? (ie. specific techniques)
- How do museum educators make their creative process as effective as possible?
- How does the personal process relate to group process?
- How is the development process (from idea to programme) evaluated and improved?
- How is the programme evaluated and improved?
- What ‘environmental’ factors impact effective programming? (+ / -)

We then did a series of ‘sprints’, brainstorming ideas for tools that could explore each question. Our draft tools fell into two categories - examining the creative process within an individual (solitary, internal) and between individuals (social, group). We condensed our drafts into two prototypes: the first tool asks interviewees to list six values that they bring to their organisation, and then measure how creative each value is; the second tool asks interviewees to list four programmes that they have created, and then position them as coordinates on a matrix. To go deeper, interviewees are then asked to use hexagons (an alternative post-it tool developed in a previous ImaginationLancaster project) to show the step-by-step process of creating two of their programmes.

In late July, I met the ImaginationLancaster team again and fed back what I had learnt from my trial interviews conducted in the interim. We refined the prototypes to produce the final tools. We also added a third tool, ‘a metaphor for my personal creative process’, to be completed pre-interview. In November, we focussed on how the tools had been used in the US and how to distil the data to reach key headlines.

\textsuperscript{10} See Appendices for full interview format and associated tools.
Overview of US Organisations

Over the course of 31 days in the US, I visited 27 cultural institutions, observed 20 events, and interviewed 23 museum and gallery professionals. My central purpose was to gain a good understanding of a single museum (or start-up, in the case of Museum Hack) in each of the five cities on my itinerary. I also made time to visit other cultural venues, including a children’s museum, design museum, science museums, and social history museums.

Before sharing my findings, I will briefly introduce each of the five organisations and why I selected them. I deliberately sought out interesting practice in different parts of the US and avoided the very large museums that bookend the country (such as the Getty or the Met), because I believe smaller places are ‘fleet of foot’ and able to respond quicker to change.

Dallas Museum of Art (DMA)

I first discovered DMA online about five years ago when I was looking for good examples of visitor-focused museum practice. DMA had just published *Ignite the Power of Art, Advancing Visitor Engagement in Museums*, the fruit of an extraordinary seven years (2003-2010) of audience development research. In the late 1990s, the museum had declining revenues and an annual attendance of 337,000, nowhere near its capacity. John R Lane was appointed Director in 1999 and, alongside highly-respected educationalist, Deputy Director Bonnie Pitman, the focus of the museum shifted and steps were taken to address the “inhospitable” and “slightly depressing” perception of DMA held by Dallas locals.

In January 2003, DMA celebrated its centenary by remaining open for 100 consecutive hours and running an enormous programme of 150 events. This marathon celebration was attended by 45,000 visitors. In 2008, the Centre for Creative Connections (C3) opened – a whopping 1,100sqm (12,000sqft) of interactive galleries and a learning environment situated at the core of the building. In 2010, annual audience figures reached one million for the first time, and this was before free admission was reinstated in 2013.

This success story, driven by a genuine commitment to audiences, made DMA a priority for my Churchill Fellowship. I was keen to see the legacy of such intensive research, six years on. I made email contact in early 2015, outlining my project and ambition to visit. Unfortunately, it is sometimes possible to be too organised, and a lot can change over 18 months. My lead contact left the museum, and a key member of her team went on maternity leave. Consequently, the focus of my trip became C3 rather than the broader Learning department. However, this change of plan didn’t detract from the warm welcome I received from the C3 team. As hoped, I met creative, inspiring museum educators and saw wonderful examples of innovative programming.

Leapfrog interview:
Jessica Fuentes, Manager of Gallery Interpretation and the Center for Creative Connections

Additional interview:
Leah Hanson, Manager of Family and Early Years Programs

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11 See ‘Places, People & Programmes’ on page 35 for full details.
Museum of Contemporary Art Denver (MCA)

MCA Denver is the youngest and smallest of the museums I visited. It’s dedicated solely to contemporary art practice and doesn’t hold a permanent collection. Established in 1996 as the first home for contemporary art in Denver, the museum itself, by British architect David Adjaye, opened in 2007. I stumbled across the MCA website a few years ago and loved their humour and creative energy. In 2009, Adam Lerner was appointed Director. Prior to his appointment, he had built a successful reputation for programming Mixed Taste: Tag Team Lectures on Unrelated Topics, a format that continued in the museum’s regular programme, produced by Sarah Kate Baie, Director of Programs.¹³

I often mention these talks as an example of museum learning at its best – funny, surprising and engaging. The structure is beautifully simple: two speakers give a short presentation on their specialist subject, often wildly disparate (Gospel Music and Zebra Sharks for example), and at the end, the speakers and audience identify links. Humour is a theme that runs across many of MCA’s offers; for example, their evening programme, Black Sheep Fridays, has included ‘Sommelier Pirates’ (dress like a pirate and learn how to talk about wine) and ‘Presidential Waffling’ (eat waffles and watch clips from old presidential debates). Rich, complex material is also available alongside these more playful examples. The annual series, Feminism & Co., ‘explores contemporary culture through issues relating to women and gender’. It has included such disparate topics as ‘Activism: Women + Hunger’, ‘Married to the Military’, and ‘Infidelity: New Perspectives’. The whole MCA programme is so smart and feels bang up to date. For these reasons, and many more, I was thrilled to include MCA on my Churchill Fellowship itinerary.

Leapfrog Interview:
Sarah Kate Baie, Director of Programs

Additional Interviews:
Adam Lerner, Director
Clayton Kenner, Director of Marketing and Communications
Molly Nuanes, Program Producer

Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA)

The IMA is the largest museum I visited; its main building is 61,316 sqm (660,000 sqft) and it sits on 152 acres of land. It extends well beyond the art collections and includes a 100 acre park, greenhouse, garden, pavilions, and two historic houses. The site periodically features temporary installations, like a mini-golf course, where each hole has been created by a different local artist. IMA also hosts a pre-school, St Mary’s Child Center, that makes daily use of the collections and grounds to inspire teaching.

In April 2015, I chanced upon an interview in the Guardian¹⁴ with Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, Director of Interpretation, Media and Evaluation at the IMA.¹⁵ I was particularly struck by her statement: “The museum’s shift towards a more visitor-centred approach has been possible because of a number of different initiatives. First, the implementation of non-traditional programming [my emphasis].

¹³ After 10 very successful years, Adam and Sarah felt Mixed Taste had run its course and 2016/17 is its final season.
¹⁵ Silvia Filippini-Fantoni left IMA in December 2016 for a new role at the North Carolina Museum of Art.
We’ve been progressively moving away from more traditional approaches, such as talks and symposiums, in favour of more fun and playful experiences that support participation, social interaction and creativity.” Everything about this comment chimes with my research interests. Some interesting examples of the IMA approach include ‘B-Movie Bingo’ (watch bad movies and collect clichés on a bingo card to win prizes), ‘Cereal Cinema’ (family movie mornings) and ‘The Office of Art Grievances/Resolutions’ (file a complaint against art that will be processed and addressed by a museum official).

It’s clear from the audience research section of the IMA website that the museum works hard to complete the virtuous circle of using evaluation to inform programming. What I hadn’t fully realised until my visit is the extent to which audience research benefits all aspects of the museum’s mission. The Guardian article concludes with Filippini-Fantoni’s advice, “don’t think for the visitor; ask the visitors what they think!” It is amazing what can be achieved when that guidance is taken to heart.

Leapfrog Interviews:
Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, Director of Interpretation, Media and Evaluation
Jennifer Todd, Manager of Docents

Additional Interviews:
Charles Venable, Director
Heidi Davis-Soylu, Director of Academic Engagement and Learning Research

Columbus Museum of Art (CMA)

CMA was established in 1878, and was the oldest museum I visited. Its permanent collection is relatively small but has some wonderful star objects, such as Edward Hopper’s Morning Sun, 1952, and Alexej Jawlensky’s Schokko with Red Hat, 1909. In 2007, the museum launched a site development and endowment project with the goal of raising $80m. This campaign supported the Chase Center for Creativity, opened in 2011 - 1,700sqm (18,000sqft) dedicated to learning programmes and exhibitions. Its prominence puts active engagement at the centre of the visitor experience and says a lot about how the organisation values learning. In 2015, the site development was completed when new galleries, restaurant and shop were opened in the Margaret M. Walter Wing.

The core purpose of Learning at CMA can be summed up in one word – creativity. Cindy Foley, Executive Deputy Director for Learning and Experience, has given an engaging TED talk16 on the subject titled, Teaching art or teaching to think like an artist. She argues that an understanding of creativity needs to move beyond artistic skill. When ‘teaching for creativity’, there are three habits to foster: comfort with ambiguity; ideas generation; and transdisciplinary research (ie. research that serves curiosity). At CMA, audiences aren’t just encouraged to be creative, but to also understand what creativity is and why it’s important.

Leapfrog Interviews:
Cindy Foley, Executive Deputy Director for Learning and Experience
Merilee Mostov, Chief Engagement Officer

Additional Interviews:
Michael Martz, Board member

16 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcFRfJb2ONk
Museum Hack (MH)

Museum Hack isn’t an art museum but a start-up. Its raison d’être is to devise ‘subversive, non-traditional museum tours’ for millennials, and more recently it has diversified into audience development and company team building. I wanted to include Museum Hack because it is so different from museums. I was intrigued by a business that could take something as fundamental as a museum tour, add a twist, and successfully reach a large demographic of savvy 20-somethings hungry for new experiences. Their tours are fast-paced, filled with juicy gossip and humour, and tailored to suit each group’s interests.

The story of Museum Hack’s creation is well documented. Its Founder and CEO, Nick Gray, was taken to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on a romantic date back in 2011, and his companion told him stories about the artworks that animated the museum in a way he’d never previously experienced. Gray’s new obsession with the Met inspired him to lead tours for his friends. Word got out about this new approach and it snowballed. A business major, Gray recognised the opportunity and in 2013 Museum Hack was founded. Regular tours are now available in San Francisco and Washington DC, and bespoke consultation to museums is in demand across the US and as far afield as New Zealand. They are clearly meeting a need and providing museums with something they feel is missing.

During my visit, I tagged along for two different experiences of the Met – an Un-highlights tour and a VIP Night tour. My guide to the Museum Hack way was Ethan Angelica, who has been with the company almost since its very beginning. I was his shadow for two days and he was incredibly generous with his time, insights and bagels.

Leapfrog interview:
Ethan Angelica, Tour Guide VIP Partnerships

17 http://museumhack.com/nick-gray/
Findings

My first aim was to understand the creative process of museum educators; I wanted to know how top museum educators create and develop their programmes, and the interview data I collected in the US formed the basis of my findings. Interviewees gave amazing insights into their practice, elicited by the structured interview formats, and I have tried to use their own words as much as possible. I have built the resulting framework as a means of interpreting the data and presenting it in a way that will be of practical use to other museum educators.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the creative process in four parts:
- Attributes of the individual: what are the character traits of successful museum educators?
- Ideas generation: how do museum educators think about and manipulate ideas?
- Ideas development: what other factors come into play as new ideas are developed?
- Characteristics of the organisation: what conditions enable museum educators to thrive and do their best work?

My second aim was to highlight examples of innovative learning programming. In the second section of this chapter, I share brief case studies from each of the five US organisations. These two complementary sections - creative process and innovative programming - illustrate the cause and effect of creativity in museum learning practice. The first section *deconstructs* creativity, identifying its component parts, and the second section demonstrates what is possible when these creative elements converge.

The Creative Process of Museum Educators

1.1 ATTRIBUTES OF THE INDIVIDUAL: What are the character traits of successful museum educators?

Over the course of my US trip, I became increasingly aware of the need to separate the mindset of the museum educators I was meeting from their actions and behaviours. I wanted to bring replicable examples back to the UK, so it was necessary to distinguish what top museum educators do, which felt more achievable, from how top museum educators think, which is possibly more challenging to cultivate.

For this first part of the creative process, I focus on mindset, and for ideas generation and development, I focus on behaviours. Both are necessary, as the mindset drives the behaviours, and I hope the distinction will assist self-reflection. I believe the first two pairings - Empathy & Listening, and Curiosity & Passion - are fundamental for delivering creative learning programmes, and it takes the second two pairings - Drive & Adaptability, and Resilience & Courage - to look beyond current ways of working and develop practice further.
ATTRIBUTES OF THE INDIVIDUAL
- Empathy & Listening
- Curiosity & Passion
- Drive & Adaptability
- Resilience & Courage

IDEAS GENERATION
- Generate an abundance of ideas
- Keep a critical distance
- Improve and hone to make good ideas great
- Accept failure as part of experimentation
- Find the right time and context for new ideas

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ORGANISATION
- Learning is central to the museum’s mission
- A culture of change creates new possibilities
- Learning methodologies influence other departments

IDEAS DEVELOPMENT
- Be receptive and responsive to audiences
- Collaboration: embrace diversity & resist groupthink
- Take inspiration from outside the sector
- Set targets and test outcomes

THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF MUSEUM EDUCATORS
Empathy & Listening

Museum education is a people-focussed profession, so it stands to reason that practitioners are highly empathetic and value the importance of active listening. In order to genuinely connect with others and understand their perspective, it’s necessary to put ego and preconceptions to one side - there is more to listening than just waiting for a gap to make your own point.

I feel like listening is a really important skill that’s under-rated... I learned really early that listening is the first stage of empathy and then empathy gives you that understanding to approach the world... I think that’s what makes a good teacher because you have to be able to see your students’ lives, where they’re coming from and what they’re bringing to the table if you’re going to be able to teach them well.18

Listening is so important to get into what is going on with people... I can listen to someone going through a crisis and really hear that and go through the process of helping them solve that... For tour guides, that’s important, because you’re fully responding to what’s in front of you. If you’re not getting that empathetic feeling, it can turn on a dime. Ideally, you’re listening so hard to what’s happening in the group, that anything that happens is something that you can quickly respond to.19

Curiosity & Passion

Museums educators like to learn and love what they do. There is a huge appetite for exploring new places and ideas, accumulating rich and varied experiences, and sharing their passions with others.

Curiosity is the first step to being creative. My job is built around it, I wouldn’t be successful in my job if I wasn’t curious. Curious about what’s happening here and other places.20

We are passionately curious, so we don’t stop... and we don’t turn off. There is a constant thirst for more-more-more-more-more... When I’m standing in front of you in a museum, doing this. I feel like I’m fulfilling the core of what I believe in as a human being.21

I like travelling a lot, and not just to museums, but travelling in general... I’m an historian by training... I haven’t touched a history book in 20 years, but [travel] forces me to think about history... It also makes me think about meeting new people... I’ve lived in different countries, so I think it makes me more open as a person to other cultures, other ideas.22

Drive & Adaptability

A consequence of being curious and highly motivated is that museum educators are constantly striving to improve both their practice and their programmes. Self-reflection is key to questioning everything and resisting settling into comfortable habits. To be able to respond rapidly to change, adaptability is vital.

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18 Jessica Fuentes, DMA, interviewed 6 Sep 2016, (08 / 43:28)
19 Ethan Angelica, Museum Hack, interviewed 2 Oct 2016 (41 / 21:00)
20 Merilee Mostov, CMA, interviewed 23 Sept 2016 (30 / 37:11)
21 Ethan Angelica, Museum Hack, interviewed 2 Oct 2016 (41 / 08:00)
22 Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, IMA, interviewed 16 Sept 2016 (19 / 76:42)
I do need to think about, ‘is this still the right thing?’ Or are there some things that we’ve just kept doing because we always do them, that maybe aren’t the best anymore?23

I think it’s definitely something that keeps me satisfied - never being satisfied with the place that you’re at and always wanting to improve. Knowing that our visitorship is changing and has changed, knowing that society/culture is always moving forward and people want different kinds of experiences and trying to stay relevant.24

I’m that obnoxious question-asker... I’ve never stopped. From the day I started working here in a whole different position, I was asking ‘why are we doing that?’ and people were saying, ‘that’s the way it’s always done’, and that’s a red flag for me. When someone says, ‘that’s the way it’s always done’, I think ooooh, there’s a problem there, we need to dig in to find out... We all do this in the world as human beings, we fall back on habits. We can’t go through the world if everything we do we have to rethink every day, but what happens is if we don’t once in a while set up systems where we reflect on those habits, then those habits become more archaic and they don’t function to help us anymore.25

You can do something that’s a success, but then you can’t just stick with that and keep doing it... This creative attitude and this attitude of positive change means that things are constantly being re-evaluated, and you can’t just have one good idea, you have to come up with the next idea, the next idea, it has to keep on moving like that.26

Resilience & Courage

Change is a double-edged sword; it is both energising and frightening at the same time. It can lead to fantastic innovation but in the early stages it will be met by resistance and fear. Museum educators who are changing attitudes and introducing new approaches have to demonstrate tenacity and the courage of their convictions to push ideas forward, and this requirement sometimes has to go against the more dominant tendency towards conciliation.

As a field... we tend to be a lot of women and we don’t have the confidence. The irony is, I always want to preamble everything and say, ‘I’m not an expert’, but I have confidence about what I’m doing. I do feel like we’re doing the right thing... the most creative work that I do is the vision work... it can be incredibly challenging until... I understand where I’m going, but this is where people are pushing back, they don’t like it... It’s understanding the level of politics that can come with vision-based work... we tend to be very humble, and sometimes that backfires on us, with curators or other individuals who might, to your face, say one thing, but almost immediately are in absolute outrage that you’re going to do something which they see as threatening.27

I think being Italian, I grew up in a world where confrontation is a lot more on the surface than it is in other cultures... I actually fight the fight, so I think that that has helped. And I think now, after three years, there is less resistance and people have started seeing the value and the benefit of it... I push my staff, I push them to places where they are not comfortable,

23 Leah Hanson, DMA, interviewed 9 Sep 2016 (09 / 67:32)
24 Jessica Fuentes, DMA, interviewed via Skype 28 Oct 2016 (43 / 54:08)
25 Merilee Mostov, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (30 / 01.00)
26 Jeff Sims, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (32 / 32:00)
27 Cindy Foley, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (31 / 39:12, 54:10 & 59:42)
and they probably don’t like me for that for a little while but ultimately I think they respect that I push them to think about things differently and to do things that they’ve not done before.  

1.2 IDEAS GENERATION: how do museum educators think about and manipulate new ideas?

The internet is awash with articles asking the immortal question, ‘where do good ideas come from?’, and it also provides plenty of theories and possible answers. The established rhetoric around ideas generation recommends experimentation, breaking routines, encouraging unexpected associations and risking failure, all of which is consistent with the interview data I collected. What unifies the five components of ideas generation identified below is the importance of time - a valuable resource that can often feel in scarce supply. However, the more we understand and appreciate the process of ideas generation, the more likely we are to prioritise it within our hectic schedules. In the UK, an increased awareness could be encouraged through more peer-led networking that focuses on the practitioner. Within our organisations, we could take a leaf from the tech start-up book, and build more play, experimentation and tinkering into the delivery of our roles.

Generate an abundance of ideas

The best ideas are rarely waiting for us on the surface. In order to unearth something genuinely new, it’s necessary to generate a lot of ideas and then sift through them to find the gold.

To get to a new idea that has value, you’ve got to go through a lot of ideas.

As a writer, you’re taught, ‘okay, write down all of your ideas, and then all the ones that came to you quickly and easily, throw those away and start again. That next round of ideas is where your true creative ideas are going to come from, because they’re not going to be easy, and they’re not going to be the place that you go to right away’. The same is true of creativity, you can’t just get to innovative ideas, because you have to see what are the ideas that come quickly and easily and they’re the first thing I think of - because they’re the first things that 90% of people are going to think of if they’re presented with the same challenges - so how do we pursue the next round of those ideas? It’s cliché now, but you have to kill your darlings.

Keep a critical distance

Ego can get in the way of ideas generation. If every idea that’s presented to others has an umbilical link back to one’s own identity, it’s painful when those ideas are cut down. By keeping a critical distance and treating ideas like objects that are distinct from one’s self, more ideas and better ideas will be generated.

I propose a model of constant feedback from the visitors, so the point is you should not get attached to any of these ideas really very much, because the audience feedback might be

28 Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, IMA, interviewed 16 Sep 2016 (19 / 45:00 & 64:00)
29 Merilee Mostov, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (30 / 47:00)
30 Sarah Kate Baie, MCA Denver, interviewed 9 Sep 2016 (10 / 56:05)
[that] it’s not really what they want or care about. So don’t feel too attached to an idea... If I’m proposing a user-feedback model, then I need to accept the fact that some of these ideas will never make it beyond the creative stage, and that’s okay.\(^\text{31}\)

If you don’t give yourself permission to fail, then there is less room to take risks [and] find new ideas. Failure can be as simple as I throw out 10 ideas to my team - if they say, ‘they all suck’, I don’t internalise it, but others find that terrible.\(^\text{32}\)

**Improve and hone to make good ideas great**

It isn’t enough to generate a lot of ideas, it’s just as important to be able to identify and shape the good ones. This is especially true of innovation, where there is no established roadmap to follow and museum educators are forging a new path. This part of the process is a delicate balancing act between rigour and flexibility; ideas often have to be tightened and refined to improve them, but the thinking has to remain supple and open to alternatives.

Sometimes it’s the problem that the idea can be great but the execution sucks. I want to find something that makes the execution work as well, so bringing in feedback serves that function... just bringing it down to reality... and getting input from different people and the final user... Part of it to me is a process of simplification, because I think as human beings we tend to start with very complex ideas and if you don’t have checks throughout the process, you will execute a very complex idea.\(^\text{33}\)

For a new programme, [planning] is so much more amorphous. It’s like holding a bowl of jello, instead of something in bowl, because you can’t get your arms around it, it’s always about to fall... you get into collaborations and then something happens and you have to go back... What about this is important? How can we make sure we’re true to the concept of the event? What can fall away? Who can we work with so we keep true to that?\(^\text{34}\)

[Molly] has [the teens] brainstorm all the ideas for a programme that they’d like to do... and they have to present them to me... I take out a 2x2 graph, and plot them - one axis is edgy versus safe, and one axis is new versus been done before... Usually most of them fall on the ‘been done before and safe’... And of course they all want to be edgy and new. ‘Okay great, so let’s throw those ideas out and come back to me with some new ones’. That gives them the freedom... and they come back with the craziest shit. Last year, they did a rap battles opening where everything was a double entendre... rappers were wrapping gifts while they would rap, it was very fun, so they always come up with ideas that are really great.\(^\text{35}\)

[It’s a good idea] if it freaks you out a little bit - that’s a good sign - or if it seems just on that edge of being, ‘there’s no way we could pull that off’, like, ‘you know what? - let’s give it a try’.\(^\text{36}\)

\(^{31}\) Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, IMA, interviewed 19 Sep 2016 (26 / 29:53)

\(^{32}\) Merilee Mostov, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (30 / 45:15)

\(^{33}\) Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, IMA, interviewed 19 Sep 2016 (26 / 55:00)

\(^{34}\) Sarah Kate Baie, MCA Denver, interviewed 12 Sep 2016 (13 / 73:03)

\(^{35}\) Ibid, interviewed 9 Sep 2016 (10 / 54:36)

\(^{36}\) Jeff Sims, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (32 / 40:26)
Accept failure as part of experimentation

Despite all the preparation and planning, not every new idea is going to hit the mark with audiences or meet its intended strategic outcomes. Museum educators take calculated risks with innovative programming, and are aiming for success, but are sanguine when it doesn’t work out - everything is a learning opportunity.

I always give a lot of credit to Merilee and Cindy both, because they’ve really done a lot of work to create the space where me and my other colleagues can come up with an idea and we have the space to try it out, and without that fear of, if it’s a failure, it’s okay, it means we’ve learnt something and can move it into the next project.37

I guess we really think of C3 as a testing ground. Even though we’re going to have a prototyping space within C3, we really see the space as a whole as a place to try new things and to not necessarily be afraid of failure, to not always put things out in their most perfect form, but to know that, ‘okay, if this didn’t work for a couple of weeks, let’s revamp it and try again’.38

When you look at Museum Hack, it’s about taking risks, and it’s about ‘no failure, only feedback’… Everyone freaks out when they get their first one-star review or refund request. I remember the very first tour I gave, I got a five star review and two refund requests, and the email I got from [the director] was, ‘you clearly did something… I don’t know what you did, but apparently you did something because someone loved it and two people hated it’.39

I work in an institution that makes me feel like I can risk creatively without killing myself if it doesn’t work… I don’t have a problem to say, ‘this didn’t work’, I think a lot of people do... It doesn’t mean the idea was terrible: it might not have been the right context; it might not have been the best implementation; it might be this idea would work better in a different situation; but if it didn’t work, it didn’t work.40

Find the right time and context for new ideas

When a surfeit of ideas is generated to address a particular issue, the ideas that don’t make the cut might be the perfect solution at another time or for another programme. When appropriate, ideas can be recycled and repurposed. Timing plays an important role at MCA Denver, where the programme taps into the zeitgeist and reflects contemporary culture.

Perhaps it’s not the right idea, but you might come back to it another time.41

I could go a million different ways with so many things… Those other things may not happen - I may not get to them, I may. I’m not thinking too long about those other things, I know that they’ll come back whenever they need to.42

37 Ibid (32 / 07:00)
38 Jessica Fuentes, DMA, interviewed 6 Sep 2016 (08 / 49:00)
39 Ethan Angelica, Museum Hack, interviewed 2 Oct 2016 (41 / 84:50)
40 Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, IMA, interviewed 19 Sep 2016 (26 / 27:34)
41 Merilee Mostov, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (30 / 47:00)
42 Heidi Davis-Soylu, IMA, interviewed 19 Sep 2016 (24 / 26:21)
[DMA Bingo] was born out of just wanting to experiment and try new things. We were combining successful things that we’d done before... It was fed, or thought of, through ideas that we’d had before.\textsuperscript{43}

For ‘Art Meets Beast’, we produced this moment right as the ‘nose to tail’ movement was taking off in America; people were feeling they needed to use all parts of the animal, they wanted to be very conscious about their consumption of meat... That’s another reason why we wouldn’t produce the programme again today, because that moment’s come and gone; it’s not so ‘now’ anymore.... The world can really shift in [a short period of time], 12 weeks isn’t a lot really in the museum world but it’s enough time that something can happen that you’re no longer relevant to the conversation.\textsuperscript{44}

1.3
IDEAS DEVELOPMENT: what other factors come into play as new ideas are developed?

During this phase of the creative process, ideas are further tested, modified and improved, often with the input of others. Audience research, collaboration and evaluation are all important aspects of ideas development (identified below), and they are also common topics of discussion in museum education. However, like the proverbial piece of string, it is difficult to quantify how much of this work is enough. For example, evaluation can range from a tick-box form that is filled out by participants and then put on a shelf never to be looked at again, to an integrated audience development plan that informs strategic planning for the whole organisation. We know the principles of working with others, setting targets and testing outcomes, but the true value lies in the extent to which they are practiced.

Be receptive and responsive to audiences

Museum educators are generally recognised as the audience specialists in their organisations, and a lot of time and energy is invested in understanding who comes through the door and who doesn’t. Increasingly, audience input is being sought to fine-tune all aspects of museum programming. Informal observation, alongside more structured evaluation, provides museum educators with valuable data on how programmes can be improved and developed.

Before, it was top down; the museum was positioned as experts and then figure out how to deliver content to the public, which was very undefined at that time. We didn’t really know who our visitors were... So the big change is now we do know who comes to visit, we have done the research, we know about their motivations for coming... So we know that people are coming in groups - a lot of the visitors I deal with, they’re coming because their family is in town, or they’re on a date, or something like that. It’s a social experience for them; they’re not necessarily coming to learn about art.\textsuperscript{45}

Most [visitors] are from the local community, so there’s more of an incentive to be more mindful and try to respond to the needs of the community... We [use] motivation as a way to think about and segment our audience, but we went into this segmentation study with this

\textsuperscript{43} Jessica Fuentes, DMA, interviewed via Skype 28 Oct 2016 (43 / 67:03)
\textsuperscript{44} Sarah Kate Baie, MCA Denver, interviewed 12 Sep 2016 (14 / 11:30 & 13:29)
\textsuperscript{45} Jeff Sims, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (32 / 27:15)
company and they said, ‘okay, I like your Falk\textsuperscript{46} model... [but] your context is too limiting’. The Falk model applies specifically to museum-like institutions, and in a city like Indianapolis and in today’s society, you are not just in competition with other museums, they are wider, they are cinemas, Netflix, restaurants, festivals, beer gardens, all sorts of leisure time activities... That’s your competition, so you need to think about your motivation in a slightly wider sense.\textsuperscript{47}

We did a big overhaul of the Art Spot about two years ago because one of the things that I was noticing, from the things that people were creating, was that they weren’t really making the connections that we wanted them to with the works of art... I thought about the kinds of things that people make in the space already... jewellery... small animals... people... houses, and when we choose the works of art for that space, we try to think of those kinds of things to use as inspiration, so they can see it and think, ‘oh, I can do something like that’.\textsuperscript{48}

Collaboration: embrace diversity & resist groupthink

Working with people with different worldviews enhances creativity and improves programming. Homogenous conversations between like-minded individuals will only ever result in narrow solutions, so museum educators, wanting to challenge their point of view and better meet audience needs, seek out a diverse range of perspectives. Holding different viewpoints within a group is a creative strength, as long as the ideas generation process is robust. The Orwell-inspired term ‘groupthink’ refers to the dangers of negative group dynamics, where dissent is suppressed, alternative suggestions are dismissed out of hand, and new thinking has little chance to surface. In this context, creativity is hindered. Collaboration is so highly prized in museum education that we don’t often acknowledge its constraints. The examples below illustrate the benefits and pitfalls of working creatively with others.

The more we think alike, the less innovative and risky the ideas will be. Because we come from similar backgrounds, we have a similarity in our thinking, and we will say, ‘oh that’s a good idea, yeah, I like that idea’, versus someone who has a very different life experience, or is a different age, or race, gender, identity, might say, ‘well, I understand where you’re coming from, but from my world view, that’s a very elite perspective, what if we were to...’ And that might create a rub at first, but it also will get us to a much better space... This is happening now with the Autism community. We have to get comfortable saying ‘we don’t know what you need’... The problem with museums is, we say, ‘museums are for everyone’, but have we really, really looked at what inclusivity really looks like for each of these groups?... We need them to influence and encourage and help us design, so the relationship has to come first before we can roll out a programme... What’s innovative isn’t the programmes necessarily, it’s the relationship and how we’re evolving.\textsuperscript{49}

We strive as much as possible to include women and artists of colour in the exhibition programme, and local artists too, so those often interlock and overlap as well... I’ll see lots of people of colour in the galleries, and I think that’s pretty great, because I don’t know if that’s

\textsuperscript{46} John H Falk is a world-renowned researcher and academic who specialises in ‘free-choice learning’ in settings such as museums. He has published numerous books on the museum visitor experience, often working in collaboration with Lynn Dierking. Falk and Dierking’s work was cited by several interviewees as an influence on their practice.

\textsuperscript{47} Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, IMA, interviewed 16 Sep 2016 (19 / 18:15 & 22:20)

\textsuperscript{48} Jessica Fuentes, DMA, interviewed 6 Sep 2016 (08 / 11:30)

\textsuperscript{49} Cindy Foley, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (31 / 88:22 & 90:45)
true of all museums. I think that because we are a contemporary art museum, and we’re showing work that’s more innovative - it’s not more accessible, it’s less accessible sometimes - but because it’s made by a spectrum of artists who represent what the population actually looks like, I think people see themselves in the work more.\(^{50}\)

We’re very comfortable coming up with lots of ideas, the threat is when you’re in a room with individuals who take the first thing you say as something we’re going to start doing tomorrow. So I think the challenge for me is knowing what audience to begin that ideation process with, in order to start narrowing and honing in what we want to focus on, and then bring that to the table for people who will need to follow it.\(^{51}\)

We used to have brainstorming at the Denver Art Museum, and... the ideas would start flowing, it would get to the point where somebody pitched an idea that made everybody laugh, and we’d know we’d gone too far... Now, [at MCA] when we get to the point in a brainstorm where we make everybody laugh, we know we’re about to get onto something, we need to push it a little bit further... It’s very hard to get the innovative concept in an initial brainstorming. [There’s] a moment where people’s input becomes really important, because people have so many vast experiences that they can... contribute in a way that elevates the event. But the innovative idea, the innovative germ of the idea, can almost never come out of that process.\(^{52}\)

**Take inspiration from outside the sector**

Museum educators are cultural magpies, collecting bits of inspiration from a huge variety of sources. Anything can trigger a new idea or approach, which could lead to new programming. Looking outside the museum sector is one of the best ways to reinvigorate thinking and practice.

Stepping away from ‘we know’ to ‘what can we learn’... That’s been a shift for me, I have museum books, but also comedy books, to look at structures that are the opposite of museums.\(^{53}\)

I listen to podcasts, that’s something new that I consume voraciously now... Planet Money is about economics, which is fascinating... they explore some component of contemporary culture but they use the lens of economics as a way to look at it. My friend Nicky does a podcast called Gastropod, it’s about food and culture. There’s a podcast called Pop Culture Happy Hour, which is just about current things that are happening in film, movies, television shows, music, awards shows, things that are right now... they’ll offer a really broad perspective on things that perhaps you hadn’t thought of. Radio Lab is my favourite all-time podcast... it’s so well researched and so thoughtfully laid out.\(^{54}\)

Not too long after I got here, I ran into a book called ‘New World Kids’... [the authors] posit that, just like children go to school and learn the alphabet and numbers... that there’s a creativity alphabet that they need to know too... we actually had a summer camp that was based on these ideas, it was for four- and five-year-olds, and every day we focussed on a

\(^{50}\) Sarah Kate Baie, MCA Denver, interviewed 12 Sep 2016 (14 / 38:37)
\(^{51}\) Cindy Foley, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (31 / 55:00)
\(^{52}\) Sarah Kate Baie, MCA Denver, interviewed 12 Sep 2016 (14 / 01:31)
\(^{53}\) Cindy Foley, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (31 / 18:27)
\(^{54}\) Sarah Kate Baie, MCA Denver, interviewed 12 Sep 2016 (14 / 07:05 & 09:02)
different element of the sensory alphabet... we would bring people in from the community...
It wasn’t just artists… a police officer came once and talked to us about… why shapes were
important in his job, and I loved that because for four- and five-year-olds, they’re like, ‘well
yeah, of course, everyone’s creative’, but I think for me as a teacher, it really made me stop
and think about how these different jobs, that I might have first said, ‘well that’s not very
creative’, it’s just manifesting in a different way.55

Set targets and test outcomes

Without targets, how do you define and measure success? Without clear outcomes, how do you
know what you want to achieve, or if you’ve achieved it? Directionless programming is akin to a
rudderless boat - it might be merrily bobbing about in fine weather, but it isn’t really going
anywhere. By keeping a weather eye on their programmes, and using audience data to check they’re
still on course, top museum educators can accurately modify their offers to keep pace with changing
audience needs and achieve their goals.

Some of the decisions that have been made inside this institution in the past four years, that
lead to us doing different things in our programming, have been, ‘we’re going to believe the
statistics, we’re going to believe the data’, as opposed to take the data and go ‘wow’ and put
that aside and go on the way we’ve been doing for 133 years as an institution.56

Four years ago, we determined that teens… are the primary youth audience that we want to
reach out to as a museum.... Our ‘Failure Lab’ is twelve students who come from a diverse
selection of high schools all over the city... We do about six or seven [teen events] a year, and
these range from events like our Teen Art Show... to things like Festivus Maximus, which is
our summer carnival for teens... This past year we introduced a scholarship programme
where we give out $20,000 in college scholarships to kids who present a project which
demonstrates a willingness to risk failure. [In 2013] 1,500 teens came to the museum. The
next year, we went free for everyone 18 and under... our attendance increased to 4,600
kids... From there, we grew to 7,300 kids the following year, so it continued to grow, and
then this past year, we had just shy of 9,000 kids.57

‘Gameshow’ was probably the most interesting successful failure that I think we did... We
had this idea to do a live gameshow where we’d work with a lot of local artists and musicians
and comedians... to put on a live stage show where we bring audience members up on stage
to compete in creative challenges... We did six of those across two years. And they were a
blast, we loved doing it... The thinking behind the show really hit all of the elements of
creative thinking that were important to us... so we thought, ‘okay, we’re golden, we’ve got
it’. But as the show went on, the audience didn’t see it that way, The audience was really
reacting to it like they would any other comedy show. There was a lot of alcohol, probably
too much... It was real messy... We took all the things that worked, and looked at the things
that didn’t work, and then that’s how Connector series was born. We wanted to keep
working with as many different kinds of creative practitioners as we could, looking for
creativity not just in visual art, but in comedy and music and theatre. We moved the

55 Leah Hanson, DMA, interviewed 6 Sep 2016 (09 / 16:00)
56 Charles Venable, IMA interviewed 15 Sep 2016 (18 / 06:22)
57 Sarah Kate Baie, MCA Denver, interviewed 9 Sep 2016 (10 / 11:40 & 19:13)
programme; instead of being a Thursday or Friday night thing, we put it in the afternoon on Saturdays, so... it keeps it from being like a nightclub scene.58

1.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ORGANISATION: what conditions enable museum educators to thrive and do their best work?

A priority of my Churchill Fellowship was to gain a better understanding of how the broader organisational context enables high-quality museum learning practice. I had anticipated a halo of support around Learning staff, with senior management encouraging new approaches and removing obstacles, but essentially remaining at arm’s length. I hadn’t anticipated the status of learning being elevated to the point where its methodology is integrated across the museum, changing the working culture and redefining the institution’s relationship with audiences.

The forces driving this change are financial and audience-based; shrinking budgets and shifting expectations are putting museum leaders in a tight spot, necessitating a re-evaluation of the purpose and direction of their institutions. Consequently, they are looking to Learning colleagues for inspiration. The pressures facing US museum directors are shared by their UK equivalents, which makes these successful, audience-centric models especially pertinent to the British cultural sector.

Learning is central to the museum’s mission

Increasingly, museums are embracing the social aspects of audience engagement. Senior management is becoming more savvy and harnessing audience development to increase attendance and revenue. They are actively repositioning their organisations as places to socialise and engage. In this context, the expertise of Learning staff comes into its own. When the definition of learning is expanded to incorporate social outcomes, it can take a much greater role in furthering a museum’s mission.

I don’t think of the museum as about the exhibitions centrally, or even objects centrally, and then everything else, like... making it more accessible [and] using the objects to engage with communities... I think of the museum as a machine for creating meaning in people’s lives and we do that sometimes through exhibitions and sometimes through what other people might call education, or what I might call live activities. And so therefore, in many ways, what other people might consider education... [is] as important in my mind as the exhibition programme, and that’s why our education programme, it doesn’t have to relate to our exhibitions, it doesn’t have to be a way of furthering our understanding of our exhibitions, to me that just seems silly... This is a platform for us to do interesting things, if we can do something interesting, then why do we have to tie it to an object or an exhibition?59

The big revolution that you have to be willing to evoke, the tipping point is when you stop saying, ‘but they only come for the food, they’re never in the galleries’. When you turn that around and say, ‘it doesn’t make any difference, they’re here’. They’re getting something from us that is improving their lives, enriching their lives in some way, and it doesn’t always have to be about art. For some people, it will never be about the art. If you can get past that, I think you can do almost anything you want, you’ll have an audience... Our mission is no

58 Jeff Sim, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (32 / 09:40 & 16:15)
59 Adam Lerner, Director, MCA Denver, interviewed 9 Sep 2016 (11 / 02:00)
longer to be a treasure house, it’s just not, it’s about people. Our mission statement is to enrich lives, to create exceptional experiences with art and nature. That’s pretty revolutionary for a museum that its mission statement used to be like everybody else’s, to collect great art and to care for it and exhibit it forever.\textsuperscript{60}

A culture of change creates new possibilities

Change at organisational level can be externally-driven (for example, responding to socio-political and economic influences), or internally-motivated (such as taking on capital build projects, recruiting a new director, restructuring staff, or refocusing the mission). The disruption can be destabilising, but it also creates opportunities for Learning staff to shift their role in the organisation: a new director at IMA led to improved working with audiences; and site-development projects at DMA and CMA resulted in suites of galleries devoted to Learning programming.\textsuperscript{61} Museum Hack and MCA Denver view change as fundamental to their brand and ethos.

We’ve actually written into the top of our mission statement ‘innovation’, that we don’t want to be a traditionalist in the old way, to keep the old world, but we always want to be changing for the better, mainly keeping up with the audience.\textsuperscript{62}

Museum Hack has to pivot, while we’re not only helping people make more cool things, for those people who are doing the cool things, how do we help build our business so we… show them how to be innovative in their marketing, in their calendaring, in their development work?... How do we systematise those things and offer them to museums as a marketing plan or as creating corporate team building structures or creating a young patrons’ scheme?\textsuperscript{63}

I would say that [the director] would see the brand as always moving forward, always trying to find what’s new in the community. And to be honest, sometimes he proposes ideas that bristle me because it’s not a natural place that I want to live in - the unknown - that’s very uncomfortable for most people. So he’ll pitch an idea and I won’t like it. Sometimes I’ll push back, sometimes I’ll trust him, sometimes I’ll try to figure out why I don’t like it - it is because it’s going into that space that’s new, unknown or untested?\textsuperscript{64}

Learning methodologies influence other departments

When Learning breaks out of its departmental silo, it can have a positive impact across an organisation. Others teams can benefit from Learning’s rigorous approach to programme evaluation and development, and its ability to effectively target different audiences. In some instances, programming itself has been devolved (albeit with guidance) to other teams. For Learning’s influence to spread, the necessary change in mindset has to occur on both sides - other departments need to recognise its value, and Learning staff need to take a less territorial stance. When it’s done well, Learning’s position is enhanced, not diminished.

\textsuperscript{60} Charles Venable, Director, IMA, interviewed 15 Sep 2016 (18 / 43:30)

\textsuperscript{61} Major changes at IMA and CMA are the subject of case studies in Section 2. See 2.3 and 2.4 respectively.

\textsuperscript{62} Charles Venable, IMA, interviewed 15 Sep 2016 (18 / 62:03)

\textsuperscript{63} Ethan Angelica, Museum Hack, interviewed 2 Oct 2016 (41 / 120:30)

\textsuperscript{64} Sarah Kate Baie, MCA Denver, interviewed 9 Sep 2016 (10 / 58:31)
"I would have never probably pushed beyond my department if it weren’t for Jessica Luke. She began to train us to think evaluatively, which means not making assumptions, looking for ‘what’s the change we want to see take place?’... Now we sit in development meetings, talking about a fundraiser, and we’re like, ‘How are we going to assess whether we met our outcomes?’ So in some ways, the behaviours that we learnt as a department started to merge out, and then other groups began to ask similar questions... There was a Board meeting in which [the role of Learning] shifted. We brought Jessica Luke in to work with them, [and they] said, ‘we feel this needs to shift from a departmental initiative to an institutional initiative’. Within a year, my job description and title had changed, it changed from that point on."  

We made a change that a lot of institutions haven’t - programming is not the responsibility of the Learning department. Here, programming is the responsibility of everyone in the institution, so we have programming coming out of our Curatorial department, out of our Development department, out of our Director’s office, of course our department, my Experience team, they lead the yoga programmes. We insisted every programme has to have outcomes, we would like for them to be learning outcomes, sometimes they’re institutional outcomes.  

One of our goals along the way has always been for C3 to affect what’s happening in the rest of the museum as a whole. We see 18,500 visitors a month in C3 alone... So we know that what we’re doing here is working and successful and is really particularly successful with first time visitors, so to bring some of the things that we’re doing [to the other galleries], to make those galleries more approachable, and to make a connection between what we’re doing here and there, so that they’re not such isolated places, has always been something that we wanted to do."  

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65 Cindy Foley, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (31 / 12:30)  
66 Ibid (31 / 21:33)  
67 Jessica Fuentes, DMA, interviewed 6 Sep 2016 (08 / 56:00)
The creative process is the hard work that goes on behind the scenes, and the rewards of that labour can be found in the resulting innovative programmes. In this section, I share one example from each organisation, demonstrating the immense creative potential that exists within Learning.

2.1 CREATIVE USES OF EVALUATION (DMA)

Jessica Fuentes is the Manager of Gallery Interpretation and the Center for Creative Connections (C3) at Dallas Museum of Art. Her commitment to evaluation is extraordinary; during our interviews, she spoke repeatedly about how she uses her findings to improve programming.

I think I became really interested in evaluation through my [MA research] with my daughter, and the ways that we gathered data and what data is helpful... here in this space [C3], in any way that I can, I’m trying to glean something from what visitors are leaving behind. When appropriate, we do straight evaluations of the gallery table activities. When we first switched to doing that kind of activity, I did a six-month study of the activities... Every Saturday for three hours, we’d do an observation, just tracking people and how much time they spent, ages and group size, and if they’re on task. Then, every four or five people, we’d ask them a list of five questions to get at the heart of their motivation, like, ‘why are you doing this?’, ‘what motivated you to sit down?’

The example that really stood out for me was the use of actual evaluation material as content for programming and resources, something I’d never seen before. A single painting, *Starry Crown*, 1987, was the inspiration for a project that spanned almost three years.

In the work of art there’s three women, and there’s a string that’s being passed between them. The three women are the mother, aunt, and another relative of the painter [John Biggers], and it’s a lot about how wisdom and knowledge and traditions are passed down orally through generations... We asked a question related to this work of art... ‘What is a piece of wisdom that an important woman has shared with you in your life?’... Over two and a half years, we collected 11,000 pieces of knowledge, but then what? What do you do with it?... My first thought with this was, ‘we can make books, and we can give them out to people’... There’s really great wisdom and these are really fun and funny and heartfelt and sad and terrible, the whole gamut of emotions and we should be sharing this. So... we decided to work with this writer [Kendra Greene] who could curate the books for us...

We’ve given books of them back out to visitors, and September 16th for Late Night [Kendra] is going to do a performance, talking about what we’ve learnt from all of this wisdom. There’s going to be two iterations of the performance; the first one is called ‘Do, Don’t, Always, Never’, and it’s all about... where wisdom comes from... the second performance that evening will be a ‘P.S.’ and it’s called, P.S. Sex, God, Politics and Salty Language, and it’s all the things we can’t share at the earlier session.

68 Ibid (08 / 17:20)
69 Do, Don’t, Always, Never can be viewed online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d18nG-o1GM0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d18nG-o1GM0)
70 Jessica Fuentes, DMA, interviewed 6 Sep 2016 (08 / 30:00)
I had intended to focus on *Igniting the Power of Art* while at DMA. It seems that staff changes and restructuring have diluted the use of that exact model, although audience research is still clearly a vital part of the museum’s learning culture.

Jessica’s creative use of evaluation material shows what is possible when the hold of ‘functional fixedness’ is broken. Functional fixedness\(^{71}\) occurs when an object is perceived as having limited and specific uses, leading the observer to disregard potential alternative uses. Jessica saw the evaluation material as more than just a data set, and identified a rich source of content for further programming. This example is a useful reminder that inspiration may be right in front of us, we just have to learn to recognise it.

### 2.2 FOCUS ON CONTEMPORARY CULTURE (MCA DENVER)

It’s fairly safe to say that MCA is not your typical art museum. The organisation is predicated on breaking the mould and seeks to engage with contemporary culture as directly as possible. The tone of the museum is set by its director, Adam Lerner, who tirelessly questions his own assumptions and pushes against the perceived wisdom of museum practice, resulting in exciting and innovative practice.

> I can literally feel my taste change as I work with artists like Mark Mothersbaugh... and that makes me realise that we value our eye so much as curators that we think that it’s a solid thing, and in fact, no, it’s just because we condition ourselves continually and reinforce that taste and those limits within it. And I really think we need to force ourselves outside of that to be more interesting.\(^{72}\)

Sarah Kate Baie, Head of Programs, draws inspiration from a broad range of sources and thinks holistically about audiences and how they could relate to the museum through her programmes. Without the obligation to tie all activities directly to the exhibitions, the scope of her programmes is wide open.

> Museums have not embraced the role of being a lifestyle brand in the way other brands do... Patagonia [is] an outdoor clothing maker... The catalogues don’t talk at all about the clothes; they tell the stories about the people who wear the clothes... So they have these free yoga classes at their store down the street, and they invite people in for hot chocolate, they do all these things that are ultimately about selling clothes, but they’re not directly about selling clothes.

> So the analogue, if you’re looking at museums, they’re not saying ‘go into the galleries, if you don’t look at that painting right now, I have failed in my job, because you’re not connecting to the art, and my job is to get you to look at that goddamn painting!’ Which is like, ‘buy these pants’. They’re saying, ‘no, come into the store, have some hot chocolate, read about this person who just did this amazing climb that we sponsored’, and museums don’t do that, they only care about that one moment, where somebody is looking at the art, without the whole view of the person.

> I care about the whole person. I care about somebody that wants to come and listen to a band on a Wednesday night and not walk into the gallery and look at it at all, because I believe that part of you is building a deeper connection to the museum and if you start to

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\(^{71}\) See [https://www.britannica.com/topic/thought#toc275928](https://www.britannica.com/topic/thought#toc275928) for a definition of functional fixedness.

\(^{72}\) Adam Lerner, MCA Denver, interviewed 9 Sep 2016 (11 / 34:20)
think about the museum as a place to recreate, to hang out with your friends, have a drink, to enjoy the evening, then you really come back again to maybe go to a lecture, or listen to a performance... Our belief is that we are a place that’s about the art on the wall, that’s the reason that we exist, but that we have a value in the community that’s far beyond that.

[An example of innovative programming, Art Meets Beast] was about bison and the history of bison in the American West... We started by getting a [dead] bison from a rancher... A local butcher... narrated what [a master] butcher was doing, before a live audience, as he broke down the bison from being a full carcass to the individual parts. He talked about the different part of meat, what they look like, why they taste different, and what they are, which no-one in audience had ever really seen before... Seven chefs came that night... and then the next night we had a seven-course bison feast with the parts of the bison... We brought in an expert to talk about how slaughterhouses have changed and why that’s important... A local farmer talked about farming practices; we brought in an art historian to talk about the art of the hunt and that was some of the first kind of art that humans made, to document the hunt... I knew [that] food was a really accessible lens to allow a lot of [people] into a much broader part of cultural history. So you can use this narrow thing - food - to access this bigger thing which is, why are we the way we are? Why is the place we live in the way it is?

This approach has had a substantial impact on my thinking. Prior to the Churchill Fellowship, I believed that the absolute and unquestionable foundation of my work was engaging audiences with collections and exhibitions. I have learnt from MCA Denver that all assumptions - especially the deeply-rooted ones - must be challenged, and that this process is a fantastic catalyst for new ways of working. I have also learnt that opening up programming to other influences requires a great deal of skill and rigour to remain ‘on brand’. Being free to programme anything comes with the associated risk of creating a diffuse and unwieldy offer. To be successful, a different set of parameters (not reliant on exhibitions) is required to frame the thinking. Sarah’s focus is contemporary culture and her programmes are consistent with the overall museum’s identity - innovative, challenging and playful. With the recent upheavals in the UK affecting both education and arts funding, now is the perfect time to question our assumptions, seek alternatives, and look outside the sector for inspiration.

2.3 RADICAL RETHINKING OF EXHIBITION DEVELOPMENT (IMA)

When Charles Venable took on the role of director at IMA, he was tasked by his Board with making some radical changes in order to achieve long-term sustainability for the institution.

When I was hired four years ago, the Board knew... that they needed to get a director who was willing to take some risks and be willing to change the traditional nature of this institution, in all kinds of ways, in order to reposition us for a more modern sensibility of what our role is, what our mission is. How are we going to attract a larger audience? How are we also going to get more and younger donors who are excited about this institution?... For us, it’s all about philanthropy and earned income, I’m going to have to more than double both of those income streams here in 10 years.

73 Sarah Kate Baie, MCA Denver, interviewed 9 Sep 2016 (10 / 39:32)
74 Ibid (10 / 03:34)
75 Charles Venable, IMA, interviewed 15 Sep 2016 (18 / 08:18 & 09:57)
As part of this process, exhibition development has been totally redesigned, and the overarching responsibility has been reassigned from curatorial departments to interpretation. Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, Director of Interpretation, Media and Evaluation, created and implemented a new approach, dubbed ‘The Big Idea’. Within this structure, audience evaluation and research is fed directly into the planning process, and clear outcomes for audience satisfaction and learning are set and measured. This has been a difficult and challenging adjustment for some in the museum, but the results are starting to pay off.

I created a department of research and evaluation, which didn’t exist before... So my department... was charged with coming up with a process for developing exhibitions that would make them more interesting and accessible to our audience. So we looked at other examples and incorporated the user-centricity aspect of it, so now we have a more interdisciplinary process where multiple voices are taken into account... There’s a curator, designer, an evaluator, an interpretation specialist, and then a project manager. We all meet as a group, and then we make decisions together about all aspects of the show, not just the interpretation aspects.  

The Big Idea is the bible of the exhibition... it’s basically the reference point, it tells you what we want people to take away from the experience, what are the outcomes of the show. Those are not just learning outcomes, they can be behavioural outcomes or emotional outcomes... We use them to develop a checklist, a design, an interpretation plan, to develop content, to develop marketing, we use it really as a reference for everything.  

The outcomes have been positive, we’ve seen satisfaction levels going up for exhibitions... We’ve seen that people take away more of what we want them to take away in terms of outcomes. We’re a lot more deliberate in the way we tell the story than before... We also think more carefully about how to structure the story and about how much people can digest and build up on information, rather than just ‘this is all of it’. That means that certain messages come across a lot more efficiently than we did in the past. So we measure outcomes through a post-visit interview... Progressively, we’re seeing higher and higher percentages, and reaching more depth as well. Sometimes in the early days, some outcomes were 70%, and now you have 80s and 90s, and then you also have the ones that were zero up to 30% and 40%. So it’s not just the top ones, but it’s also making sure that the secondary stories come across.  

Silvia’s work at IMA illustrates two important aspects of ideas development: set targets and test outcomes; and be receptive and responsive to audiences. What sets IMA apart from other art museums is the extent to which these principles are employed. Rather than assume or second-guess how audiences might respond, they ask and then listen. Rather than leave evaluation reports on the shelf, they use data to actively inform all programming, spanning learning, interpretation and exhibition development. Their approach is systematic and integrated, and it makes efficient use of available resources, serving as an excellent example to UK museums of what can be achieved through audience-centric practice.

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76 Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, IMA, interviewed 16 Sep 2016 (19 / 02:59)  
77 Ibid (19 / 07:11)  
78 Ibid (19 / 16:33)
2.4 LEARNING DRIVES THE MUSEUM’S MISSION (CMA)

CMA has undergone wholesale change over the past decade. A site development project, combined with the need to increase the museum’s endowment, led to a ‘root and branch’ rethinking of the institution. Director Nannette V. Maciejunes looked to her team for inspiration. Cindy Foley, who was Director of Education at the time, saw the opportunity to lead change in her organisation and took it. Stepping into a visionary role is a daunting task, but the necessity for change freed the museum to work and think in different ways.

When I started here, we were in the first throes of a conversation about a capital campaign, but in addition to that, Nanette knew that we couldn’t just make it about a building, that wouldn’t work in this community... it had to be about a reinvention of sorts... She began to lean on those of us in the institution, ‘what should we do?’ The big question - ‘What is the purpose of Learning here?’ - that led to six months of real discussion about what people value.

I began to articulate some ways in which I felt we could become more meaningful and quickly some of those ideas really began to solidify. Now, it wasn’t threatening at that time, because it was the way we were going to frame education... It became threatening for the institution, not the community, but the institution. We lost all of our curators over this 10-year period, none of them are still here. I think we put into question what is the purpose and value of a museum in the 21st century; is it about curatorial content, or is it about meaning-making, experience, and possibly even our own creativity? 

Innovation doesn’t come without change, so it’s getting everyone else within the institution comfortable with change... I’d say that’s what happened to us, we had to change because we didn’t have an option not to in order to be sustainable moving forward... you look at some of these companies that have been able to reinvent, like Polaroid, you either acknowledge the change that is happening in the world in which we live, and respond to that, or not.

Creative Producer, Jeff Sims, has been at the museum for 17 years, and can speak from first-hand experience about how much the museum’s culture has altered:

About mid-way through my time that I’ve been at the museum is when Cindy started, and we really started to make this change from being the traditional kind of education department that was about telling visitors what we think they should know, and then really turning that completely around, and us becoming more about asking visitors to tell us what they think, and bring their experiences and understandings to us.

The attitude of Columbus towards the museum has changed dramatically in such a positive way, where it’s now a place where people really feel like the museum cares about them, is interested in them, is welcoming to them, and it’s inclusive. That’s evident now. I feel like the administration and supporters of the museum feel like, ‘okay, that’s a change that needed to happen’ It’s the difference between us being this weird, off-putting isolated cultural institution that people say, ‘yeah, I love the museum, I don’t go, but I love that it’s here’. We

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79 Cindy Foley, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (31 / 06:17)
80 Ibid (31 / 110:00)
81 Jeff Sims, CMA, interviewed 23 Sep 2016 (32 / 01:12)
CMA’s new lease of life demonstrates the ripple effect of best practice. What started as a great idea in the Learning department spread out across the museum, which then changed its relationship with the city. This in turn led to a national profile, and now CMA is recognised internationally as an exemplar of audience-centric programming and community engagement. Their growing influence has built gradually over a 10-year period and shows what is possible with consistent leadership from the top.

2.5 REIMAGINING PROGRAMMING FOR ADULTS (Museum Hack)

Museum programming for children and young people is interactive, inventive, and playful. The same cannot always be said for adult programming. Late night events and film screenings are new approaches that target a younger adult audience, but structured engagement is still often geared towards the more conservative end of the spectrum - knowledge acquisition from experts. For some adults, this is perfect; for millennials (aged c21-35), this is the kiss of death and why they don’t visit museums. Museum Hack successfully identified this gap in the market and capitalised on it. The company has reimagined museum tours and built a loyal following through social media. Tour guide VIP Partnerships, Ethan Angelica, loves museums and is passionate about his work; he explains how great storytelling and a genuine interest in others form the bedrock of Museum Hack’s approach.

*The audience that I bring in likes to learn things, likes to get inside scoop stuff, but for them, the idea of coming to something that is framed as an educational experience, first and foremost, is not going to be appealing, because we’ve all graduated from college already, and we’re done with that. While museums can be inherently educational spaces, our approach is to say, ‘nope, that’s going to be secondary’. That’s why we’re all tour guides, we’re not museum educators. That’s why the experience is gamified.*

*We did a tour for 118 probation officers from New York State, who are not people who come to museums... We asked... ‘what was the thing that was the best part of it for you?’ and they said, ‘the personality of the guide was the thing that we connected to most in the experience’, because they connected to the museum through us. So having a strong sense of self, and who you are, and what your quirks are, and what you love, I think it personalises the experience for someone who is not ‘there’. They see me not being a voice of authority, not being a voice of [the] institution.*

*I think people are often surprised, a lot of people think, ‘oh yeah, I can give a fun, silly, goofy tour’. Yeah, you can give a fun, silly goofy tour, but now come out on your tour; now make fun of your own receding hairline; talk about when you were six years old; talk about the thing that happened with your Mum; and make it relevant to the experience that’s going on. There’s a vulnerability and a scariness there. It’s a hard thing to have to do. When I created the Big Gay Met Tour, I was like, ‘I’m coming out to the world kids!’... the first couple of times I did it, it was scary.*

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82 Ibid (32 / 28:55)
83 Ethan Angelica, Museum Hack, interviewed 2 Oct 2016 (41 / 03:40)
84 Ibid (41 / 08:30)
85 Ibid (41 / 58:18)
I want museums to be creative spaces, I think they need to be. I think if they’re going to continue to serve the population that is growing, they need to think about things in an experiential sense... I’m hoping that we act as a polar pull to start pulling people towards doing premium innovative adult programming that is subversive and cool. In the three years I’ve been here, I’m seeing that happen... so we’re hopefully starting to move the dial and encourage people to be more creative in their spaces, with us or on their own. 86

I don’t begrudge Museum Hack their success - they work hard and they deserve it - however, I do think it’s interesting that Learning departments in museums haven’t been able to identify and address this gap for themselves. For me, it highlights insufficient investment in experimental and innovative practice, which is possibly a consequence of prioritising programme delivery and chasing visitor figures. This again raises the importance of time and how it is allocated. An enhanced understanding of the creative process and a greater appreciation of its value would lead to a redistribution of resource, with more time given to research, evaluation, analysis, planning, and development. This would result in higher quality and innovative programming, and more targeted engagement with audiences.

86 Ibid (41 / 110:03 & 121:42)
Conclusions

My findings confirm that the creative process is intrinsic and vital to museum education practice; this result meets the first aim of my Fellowship. I don’t claim that identified traits, such as curiosity and adaptability, are unique to the sector, but that they are shared by other creative disciplines. We are adept at providing logistical and administrative support to enable others’ creativity, and this can overshadow our own contribution as originators of new thinking. There is a creative tension inherent to the role; it requires a degree of humility to remain open and receptive to others’ ideas, and yet it also demands strong convictions and confidence to push for innovations in programming and drive change in museum practice.

A particular strength of museum educators is our genuine interest in other people. This trait spans all four parts of the creative process discussed in my findings, and is manifest in many ways: we demonstrate empathy and active listening to support our peers and connect with visitors; we invest emotional energy in building strong working partnerships; we champion collaborative practice; we value audience feedback and evaluation; and we care deeply about the impact of our work on people’s lives. This predisposition is a valuable asset as museums move towards more audience-centric modes of practice.

There is plenty to be learnt from those working at the top of their game. The practitioners I met seemed unable to rest on their laurels; they demonstrated an extraordinary appetite for change and were constantly looking to improve, frequently revisiting and challenging any baseline assumptions. So as well as reflecting current practice, my findings also reveal the ambition required to progress sector development.

My second aim was to identify examples of innovative programming, and my findings far exceeded my expectations. Reading about US practice online doesn’t compare with meeting the staff and hearing about their thinking and motivations. I came to see their innovations as the tip of the iceberg. While there’s much inspiration to be gained from their programming, to really learn from their successes, it’s necessary to also examine the creative process that lies beneath. It would be difficult to learn about change from only looking at the effects and not considering the cause.

I had anticipated that organisational support would take the form of senior management championing the work of museum educators, but at a departmental level. I should have aimed higher. I discovered examples of learning methodology fully integrated at institutional level, spearheading a museum’s mission, and contributing significantly to its renaissance. Both in the US and the UK, museum directors and trustees are facing increasing financial pressures and shifting audience expectations, motivating the need to change. This shift is creating fantastic opportunities for Learning staff - but only if we take them. We are in a strong position to challenge outdated perceptions of our remit, promote the social and experiential aspects of audience engagement, and provide leadership for institutional change.
Recommendations

There is so much to be learnt from looking to the US for examples of innovative practice. Even though work of a high calibre is happening in the UK, I felt greater inspiration was to be had from stepping outside my daily working context. In this chapter I recommend actions that could help strengthen and develop museum education in the UK; they are drawn from my findings, and I recognise that for some practitioners, they are already existing ways of working.

For the sector

- Museum educators have many opportunities to share practice, but rarely face having their work thoroughly challenged or critiqued. We need more hard surfaces to push our ideas against in order to sharpen our thinking and progress our work. This could be addressed through a peer-led critical network.
- As audience specialists, our role is central to the future of museums, but the terminology (education, learning) doesn’t accurately reflect the broad scope of our contribution. A small consultation project could unearth alternatives that would help reposition ‘museum education’ within our organisations.
- Inter-departmental professional development training schemes would encourage the cross-pollination of subject expertise. Learning and Curatorial in particular have a lot to learn from each other’s methodologies and perspectives. Interesting collaborations could also happen with Marketing and Development colleagues.

For heads of department (Learning)

- Support calculated risks and dedicate resources (time, budget, materials, and space) to experimentation. If staff fear the consequences of failure, they will be reluctant to try anything new. Encourage curiosity and champion untested ideas.
- Audit programmes regularly to ensure they remain fit for purpose: trial new offers; refresh or refocus existing offers that need adapting; and cull outdated offers that no longer exceed audience expectations.
- The pressure to meet income and visitor figure targets can lead to a mushrooming of programme delivery and leave staff feeling like automatons. It is essential to claw back time for reflection, specifically to develop creative practice and ensure evaluation is folded back into programming. Other priorities can feel more pressing, but it’s a false economy to consider reflection expendable.

For museum educators

- Invest time in your own creative process - understand it better, develop its strengths, and articulate its importance. Know when and how you do your best work.
- Question everything - regularly challenge your own assumptions; take on daunting projects that stretch your abilities; and introduce external influences to shake up entrenched practice.
- Lead change - have the courage of your own convictions; gain support from sympathetic peers; actively campaign to bring colleagues and stakeholders with you; and persevere when you meet resistance.
I have created a range of resources to help progress these recommendations:

- This report also doubles as a toolkit. By considering the individual components of the creative process, it’s possible to pinpoint areas that require attention: Am I making the most of audience research? What assumptions are affecting my judgement? What inspiration could I take from outside the sector?
- The Leapfrog interview format can be used by anyone wanting to explore the creative process. It was essential to my US interviews, and gave me wonderful insights into the practice of my UK peers.
- I started my blog, Kiwi Loose in Museums, in May 2016 to share my learning and find others interested in ideas generation and development. It’s been very useful for clarifying my thinking and I’ve generated dozens of posts on a wide variety of topics associated with the creative process.

The Churchill Fellowship has transformed how I think about museum education. I look forward to putting this amazing experience into practice by experimenting with programming, and setting up a peer-led group to further explore the creative process and the intricacies of programme development. Moving forward, I want to keep hold of how I felt on my immediate return from the US - that the world is our oyster, our potential is limitless, and anything is possible, as long as we make it so.
**Reading List**

**Books, Catalogues and Journals**


Norris, Linda, and Rainey Tisdale, *Creativity in Museum Practice*, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA, 2014


**Online Articles and Publications**


http://ojs.lboro.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/DATE/article/view/1531


Pratt, Andy C., and Doris Ruth Eikhof, Keith Sawyer, Robert D. Austin, Peter Johnson, Martyn Straw, Patrik Wikstrom, Jie Ren, Filip Lau, Mikkel Brok-Kristensen, with an introductory essay by Brian Moeran, ‘Opinions: All about Creativity and Innovation’, *Journal of Business Anthropology*, 4(2): 228-297, Fall 2015


Blogs

Art Museum Teaching  https://artmuseumteaching.com/
Createquity  http://createquity.com/
Design Thinking for Museums  https://designthinkingformuseums.net/
Museum 2.0  http://museumtwo.blogspot.co.uk/

Websites

American Alliance of Museums  http://www.aam-us.org/
Cultural Learning Alliance  https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/
engage  http://engage.org/
IDEO  https://www.ideo.com/eu
ImaginationLancaster  http://imagination.lancs.ac.uk/
Columbus Museum of Art  https://www.columbusmuseum.org/
Dallas Museum of Art  https://www.dma.org/
Indianapolis Museum of Art  http://www.imamuseum.org/
Museum Hack  https://museumhack.com/
Museum of Contemporary Art Denver  http://mcadenver.org/
### Places, People & Programmes

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<th>Places visited</th>
<th>People met (*interviewed)</th>
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<td>Spotlight tour Pop-up Art Spot &amp; Tote bags First Tuesdays: Space Odyssey (Star Warp marionette performance, Space Explorers family tour, Story Time, art-making activities) Arturo and Me workshop on colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas World Aquarium</td>
<td>Leah Hanson - Manager of Family and Early Years Programs (*)</td>
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<td>Nasher Sculpture Center</td>
<td>Kerry Butcher - C3 co-ordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Old Red Museum</td>
<td>Cassie Summers - volunteer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perot Nature and Science Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sixth Floor Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MCA Denver</strong></td>
<td>Sarah Kate Baie, Director of Programs (<em>) Adam Lerner, Director (</em>)</td>
<td>B Side Thursdays Molly Bounds’ Zine Festival Meow Wolf talk at Industry, part of Start-Up week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clyfford Still Museum</td>
<td>Clayton Kenner, Director of Marketing and Communications (*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denver Art Museum</td>
<td>Molly Nuanes, Program Producer (*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denver Botanic Gardens (Walker Art Center sculpture exhibition)</td>
<td>Karl Kister, Board member Lisa Robinson, Board member Sarah Skeen, Photgrapher</td>
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<tr>
<td>History Colorado</td>
<td>Sarah Wambold, Director of Digital Media, Clyfford Still Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Molly Brown’s House</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Indianapolis Museum of Art</strong></td>
<td>Silvia Filippini-Fantoni, Director of Interpretation, Media and Evaluation (*)</td>
<td>Building Access By Design Conference Docent Training session Teen Open Studio Creative Mornings (inaugural) Museum on the Move - Good Neighbours of Central Ohio, outreach event at Goodale Park Open Studio session for families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eiteljorg Museum</td>
<td>Charles Venable, Director (*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indiana History Center</td>
<td>Heidi Davis-Soylu, Director of Academic Engagement and Learning Research (*)</td>
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<td>Indiana State Museum</td>
<td>Jennifer Todd, Manager of Docents (*)</td>
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<td>The Children’s Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Columbus Museum of Art</strong></td>
<td>Cindy Foley, Executive Deputy Director for Learning and Experience (<em>) Jennifer Lehe, Manager for Strategic Teacher and School Partnerships (</em>) Cat Lynch, Lead teaching artist and Coordinator for Young Child Programs (<em>) Michael Martz, Board member (</em>) Merilee Mostov, Chief Engagement Officer (<em>) Sarah Rogers, Deputy Director for Institutional Advancement (</em>) Jeff Sims, Creative Producer (<em>) Molly Uline-Olmstead, Manager for Studio Programs (</em>) Michael Voll, Co-ordinator for Teen Programs</td>
<td>Building Access By Design Conference Docent Training session Teen Open Studio Creative Mornings (inaugural) Museum on the Move - Good Neighbours of Central Ohio, outreach event at Goodale Park Open Studio session for families</td>
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<td>COSI</td>
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<td>Wexner Center for the Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Places visited</td>
<td>People met (*interviewed)</td>
<td>Programmes attended</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Museum Hack (NY)</td>
<td>Ethan Angelica, Tour Guide VIP Partnerships (*)</td>
<td>‘Object Observation’ session, led by Sonnet at Newark Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn Museum</td>
<td>Sarah Schultz, independent curator &amp; educator (*)</td>
<td>Hard Times tour at Tenement Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper-Hewitt Museum</td>
<td>Wendy Woon, Deputy Director for Education, MoMA</td>
<td>Un-Highlights &amp; VIP Tours of the Met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoMA</td>
<td>Radiah Harper, previously Vice-Director for Education &amp; Program Development, Brooklyn</td>
<td>Nina Simon ‘The Art of Relevance’ Book Launch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Museum</td>
<td>Museum (*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newark Museum</td>
<td>Brian Hogarth, Director, Leadership in Museum Education, Bank Street College (*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenement Museum</td>
<td>Sonnet Takahisa, Deputy Director of Education, Newark Museum (*)</td>
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<td>Whitney Museum</td>
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Appendices

Leapfrog Interview Format

Tool 1: A metaphor for my personal creative process

Tool 2: My value to the organisation

Tool 3: Project mapping matrix
### Leapfrog Interview Format

1. INDIVIDUAL / INTERNAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PRE-INTERVIEW</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Select a postcard or draw an image that is a metaphor for your personal creative process. Include a brief summary of why you chose that image.</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOOL 1, emailed in advance.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>VALUES AND CREATIVITY</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do you bring value to your organisation - what qualities / skills / experience / abilities do you have / use?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open discussion</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>VALUES AND CREATIVITY</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the six key values that you bring to your organisation?</td>
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<td>OR: Name six fundamental aspects of your job.</td>
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<tr>
<td>List in TOOL 2 (value/creativity)</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>VALUES AND CREATIVITY</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How creative is each value? Rank each along the scale in any way you choose.</td>
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<tr>
<td>List in TOOL 2 (value/creativity)</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>VALUES AND CREATIVITY</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Why have you ranked each in that way?</td>
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<td>Open discussion</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>CREATIVE PROCESS TOOL</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Describe a way of finding out about the creative process of a museum educator, from before the idea is created and up to the point where the programme is confirmed and advertised. <em>(This can be expressed in any way that suits the interviewee. They might create a question, a task, an object, an activity, or something else).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open discussion &amp; making activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask interviewee to provide ‘materials for a conversation around creativity’.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CREATIVE PROCESS TOOL</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prompt one - think about ideas - people - prototyping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prompt two - give a project example - how would you find out about the creative process that led to its development?</td>
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<td>Bring large paper and pens.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>CREATIVE PROCESS TOOL</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Let’s use it.</td>
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<td>Use tool as designed by interviewee</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>CREATIVE PROCESS TOOL</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Annotate – what are the triggers for new thinking? Where are the key moments in the creative process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open discussion Notes</td>
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</table>
### Tried & Tested vs. Innovative

Thinking about programmes that you’ve had a key role in devising. Select:
- **TWO examples that are tried and tested** (well-established, popular and work well)
- **TWO examples that are innovative** (reflecting new approaches)

Provide a brief summary/overview of each.

Reflecting on these four examples, I want you to put them on a matrix, considering two axes of influence. I would like one axis to be risk - high to low, and we’ll discuss what that means to you in a minute. What would you like to be on the other axis?

What does risk mean to you? How would you think about something being high risk or low risk?

Position your four programme examples on the matrix.

What are your reasons for those co-ordinates?

### Development Process – Compare & Contrast

Select ONE tried and tested and ONE innovative example.
- Map how each programme/project was developed, using the hexagons/post-its. Track from the initial idea to its development and the final outputs.
- Reflecting across the two, annotate moments of:
  - Surprise/Interest
  - Innovation

Consider different forms of innovation – how would these map to the two examples? (radical / disruptive / incremental)
A metaphor for my personal creative process

Why?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My value to the organisation qualities/ skills/ experience/ abilities</th>
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<td>How creative is this part of my job? indicate on the scale, be playful</td>
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<th>Less</th>
<th>More</th>
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<td>6</td>
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www.leapfrog.tools