

Curious Curators



Evaluation Report June 2017



MUSEUM *of the*
HISTORY
SCIENCE



Museum of
Natural History

ASHMOLEAN
MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

PittRivers
MUSEUM
Anthropology and World Archaeology



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Curious Curators Evaluation Report

June 2017

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1. Overview

This was a joint project between the four Oxford University museums, funded by the OUMP Board's Innovation Fund. Taking part were the primary education officers from each museum; Helen Pooley, Museum of History of Science (MHS); Clare Coleman, Ashmolean; Chris Jarvis, Oxford Museum of Natural History (OUMNH); and Rebecca Mcvean, Pitt Rivers Museum. The project experimented with cross-museum collaboration in the delivery of sessions to primary schools. It aimed to target a range of schools in the city and further afield, with a particular focus on schools with a high proportion of pupils in economic and socially deprived areas.

2. Project Details

a) Funding: £5000 from the OUMP Board's Innovation Fund

b) Start date: July 2016
End date: March 2017

c) Project Leader: Helen Pooley (Education Officer , Museum of History of Science)
Project partners: Clare Coleman (Education Officer, Ashmolean), Chris Jarvis (Education Officer, Museum of Natural History), and Rebecca Mcvean (Education Officer, Pitt Rivers)

d) Project Aims:

To target visits from a range of primary schools in the city and further afield, in the county

To experiment with cross-museum collaboration with delivery of sessions to primary schools

To experiment with a new model for providing extended project work for primary curriculum enrichment

3. Project Summary and Anticipated outcomes

Background

Curious Curators was the name of the final project designed and delivered by Carly Smith Huggins when she was an HLF trainee. This excellent project used objects and paintings from the Ashmolean to build strong enquiry, research and literacy skills for primary children.

In 2014, Clare Coleman at the Ashmolean trialled a shorter version of Carly's project with Year 4 children from the Blackbird Academy Trust. Each class had two visits to the Ashmolean lasting about an hour and a half. During the first visit, Clare introduced the children to six superstar objects and paintings and demonstrated a wide range of ways to engage with an object. The class was then split into 6 smaller groups to work on objects or paintings, which were decided on by rolling a dice containing 6 different images. If the object had already been chosen by another group they could roll again to select an object.

The aim of the second visit was for children to come back to the museum and take on the role of expert. They could choose to be a curator, a teacher, a museum educator or themselves. Their task was to research their object/painting back at school and respond through dance/drama/poetry/quizzes/presentations or any other inspiring way to engage their audience. The audience could be just the class or family members by invitation.

The Updated Curious Curators Session

Clare's work with the children from Blackbird Academy Trust formed the basis of a Curious Curators session which has been offered by all four of the Oxford University Museums. The sessions all focus on a key object -or objects- in each museum and follow a common structure. During the first session, children are invited to reflect of the nature of museums and the range of jobs which are undertaken in them. They are then shown a wide range of ways to engage with one or more objects. At the end of the session, they are allocated an object to research in pre-determined groups. Children are then issued with the challenge, back in school, of undertaking further research and preparing a presentation which will engage and inform their classmates. After they have done this they are then invited back to the museum for a second session in which they share their presentations and prepare questions for a question and answer session with an expert (either a curator or conservator) back at the museum.

Anticipated Learning Outcomes

Children will

- use objects and paintings to build strong enquiry, research and presentation skills
- have the opportunity to develop skills necessary to work in a team
- develop their understanding of how museums work and the different jobs people do in museums
- develop confidence in learning from objects

Social Outcomes

Creating stronger communities by

- reaching children in schools which have a significant proportion of pupils from areas of social and economic deprivation.
- reaching children in schools from outside the city centre and developing links with Oxfordshire schools



4. Key Outcomes – metrics

a) Sessions delivered

- 28 taught sessions
- Attended by 420 Year 4 and Year 5 children
- 7 Primary schools took part in the project: Rose Hill, Bayard's Hill, New Hinksey, Cutteslowe, West Oxford, St Andrews and St John Fisher.

b) Comments

The museums delivered 28 out of the 32 planned number of sessions. The shortfall was as a result of one of the museums struggling to recruit a second partner school, despite multiple approaches to schools. Most of the museums had some initial issues recruiting schools, particularly those outside of Oxford. We think part of the reason may be the cost of transport to schools, (schools close to the city centre can generally use public transport to access the museums). In future projects we would consider funding transport to schools from further afield.

5. Key Outcomes – children

At the end of each session, children were given a questionnaire to allow for the collection and analysis of quantitative data. 259 questionnaires were returned (representing 62% of children who participated).

Children who took place in the first 4 sessions delivered in September at MHS, were invited to comment on their experiences rather than give scores.

The statements which prompted the highest scores (4 or 5 / 5) from the children themselves were:

I want to bring my friends and family here (83%)

I have discovered things I didn't know before (79%) with 2 museums scoring 98% and 100% respectively

I feel confident about finding out about objects in museums (75%)

The statements which prompted the lowest scores from children were:

I now know more about museums and the different jobs people do... (62%)

I have learnt more about how to work with others in a team (60%)

It is noticeable that children's own perception of their learning varied slightly from that of their teachers.

At the Ashmolean, when one of the children was asked about the low score they had given to learning in a team, they replied that they already knew how to work well in a team. It

may also be the case that if the skills inherent in teamwork had been broken down and explained to them they may have recognised their own learning more.

Some children, however, who filled out the written questionnaires were aware of what they had learnt from working in a team:

I learnt that people can express themselves and work together

That even if you're not with your friends and think it's going to go wrong it turns out good (Cutteslowe Year 4/5 pupils)

Learning about the museums and different jobs received the lowest score from the children, despite many positive comments from children about the experience of being able to question a member of museum staff. This was also echoed in the teachers' evaluation scores. It may well have been because that this was not the main focus of the sessions, and something we could have made more of. It could also have been that the focus of questioning was more about the objects rather than the actual job that the museum professionals did. Nonetheless a significant number of children (62%) did feel they had learnt about museums and the people who work here.

I learnt the most from Stephen [the curator]! (Cutteslowe year 4/5 pupil)

We didn't ask the children in the questionnaire to specifically score the development of their enquiry, research and presentation skills, however many of the comments we collated suggested that children had the opportunity to do this. In particular, doing the presentation in front of peers, in a semi-formal setting was a significant learning experience for many:

'I learnt that you just have to have courage!' (Cutteslowe Year 4/5 pupil)

Children also had the opportunity to develop listening skills:

I learnt from the poems {created by classmates} about all of the objects (Cutteslowe Year 4/5 pupil)



6. Key Outcomes – teachers

10 questionnaires were returned from 14 teachers (representing 71% of teachers who took part)

Teachers responded very positively to the sessions and were in agreement that key learning objectives had been met.

All teachers gave a score of 4 or more out of 5 to the following statements:

Overall what did you think of the project

The children were able to develop their research and enquiry skills

The children were able to develop their presentation skills

The children developed confidence in learning from objects

Of the teachers who responded, 56% felt the children had developed a better understanding of the jobs people do in museums.

Relevance to the curriculum seemed a key consideration amongst teachers:

‘We based our English work around the project and covered all of our speaking and listening objectives through the group work and presenting. Yr 4 Teacher West Oxford Primary

Teachers were also able to take ownership of the parts of the sessions which took place at school, and shape them so that they were relevant to their topics of study. One teacher from Cutteslowe, for example decided that the children should do their presentations as poems since that was what they were studying at school.

Some of the education officers also adapted the content of the sessions to fit topics.

‘St Andrews wanted to link the presentations to classroom topics. This meant I worked with the teachers to select object to reflect Mythical Creatures and Ancient Egypt. I think it made it more meaningful and justifiable for the school. It also felt more like a partnership...’ Primary Education Officer Pitt Rivers

They also clearly felt that children had benefited from the opportunity to carry out research and to present their findings.

It was fantastic seeing the children present to a group of adults so confidently about something they knew nothing about previously’ Year 4 Teacher, West Oxford Primary

Teachers were also pleased that the children had an opportunity to deliver their presentations in a different environment to school.

‘The pupils were so excited about visiting the Museum and doing a presentation in the space. Teachers felt it was a special experience which they would always remember’ Rebecca Mcvean, Pitt Rivers

7. Key Outcomes – education officers and museums

Social Outcomes

One of our key objectives in doing the project was to reach children in schools which have a significant proportion of pupils from areas of social and economic deprivation. We were able to meet these objectives across each of the four museums.

Rose Hill and Bayards Hill Primary Schools are located in the 20% most deprived areas in England according to the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation.

5 out of the 7 schools were from places highlighted by Oxford city council as 'Regeneration Areas' (Cutteslowe, Barton, Headington and the Rose Hill). Another school known to have links with families from travelling communities.

'This small class of 22 children from New Hinksey, had at least 10 travellers and the class teacher reported that many of the children were school refusers or had low attendance.'
Clare Coleman, Ashmolean

'Bayards Hill were new visitors for us' *Clare Coleman, Ashmolean*

'It was wonderful to be able to establish a relationship with the deputies and teachers at Cutteslowe Primary and West Oxford Community School' *Helen Pooley, MHS*

'The project helped to strengthen links with a school which has had a number of new staff in recent years' *Chris Jarvis, OUMNH*

We had also been hoping to reach children from outside the city centre and develop links with Oxfordshire schools. Unfortunately, despite contacting a number of schools in Bicester, Wantage, Carterton and other outlying areas, we were unable to secure a school from any of these areas.

We believe that this is related to transport costs; we were asking school to make two visits to the museum in a three week period which we believe many were reluctant or unable to cover. Given the current economic difficulties facing many schools nationally, this may be something which we need to give further thought to when developing future projects. A single visit model might be more attractive to schools from further afield, possibly combined with outreach.

Cross Collaboration

All of the Primary Education Officers agreed that they had benefitted from cross museum collaboration in the delivery of primary school sessions

'Working with other education officers was stimulating and provided for a creative dynamic in developing the sessions.' *Chris Jarvis, OUMNH*

'Working with other colleagues helped us to see what schools we are working with on projects' *Rebecca Mcvean*

As a result of this project, we have agreed to embark on a mapping exercise to identify which schools we would like to work with in the future as well as establishing who we have been working with over the past two years.

Legacy

This project allowed each museum to develop a number of educational resources which will be re-used in future sessions, as well as to hire a professional photographer to take images across the museums. The project has also resulted in a change of approach from some education officers to sessions.

'The resources bought for the sessions will prove useful in other public engagement sessions and several have already been re-used in family activities' *Chris Jarvis, OUMNH*

'We were able to purchase some puzzles and commission sturdy sets of foamboard tiles to support one of the focus objects. I will be able to incorporate activities from Curious Curators into other taught sessions.' *Clare Coleman, Ashmolean*

'Working on the Curious Curators project has led me to re-evaluate my assumptions as to what will and won't work in a museum focussed on the History of Science. From the feedback from schools, literacy is clearly a topic which can be taught through our collection, as much as science or history. I am now planning to launch a new Take One Object session next September, based on the Curious Curators project'. *Helen Pooley, MHS*

'The project made me more flexible. When the schools asked me to adapt the session to the class topic it felt like a lot of extra work. However, it was relatively easy...I want to explore how I can support classroom topics more rather than just having off the peg sessions', *Rebecca Mcvean, Pitt Rivers*



8. Summary of key findings from the project

- Teachers are interested in sessions which can help them meet the demands on the National Curriculum (this may need museum educators to work even more flexibly than we have done in the past and to consider how we market sessions to teachers)
- Schools from further afield may need additional financial support with transport costs to encourage them to come to our museums, particularly to take part in projects which may represent a departure from sessions they have done with us in the past.
- Cross-collaboration between the education officers from the different museums has tangible benefits in terms of sharing best practice, professional development, contacts with teachers and information about visit history.
- Special projects such as Curious Curators can be an important way for museums to develop relationships with schools



9. Links to social media/public engagement

Blog written by Becca Mcvean (Education Officer, Pitt Rivers)

<http://pittrivers-education.blogspot.co.uk/2017/03/city-primary-schools-get-to-be-curious.html>

Facebook (MHS) October 19th 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/MHSOxford/?fref=ts>

Twitter post by Rose Hill Primary School

<https://twitter.com/rosehillprimary>

Website post by West Oxford Community School

<http://westoxfordschool.co.uk/2484/curious-curators/>

Presentation delivered to UCL/Institute of Education Study Day at the Oxford University Museums, May 25th 2017 by Helen Pooley (Education Officer, MHS) and Clare Coleman (Education Officer, Ashmolean)



Curious Curators Presentation.pptx

