NATIONAL NETWORK
Museums Australia
Evaluation & Visitor Research

EVRNN BULLETIN

Spring 2014

Contents

EVRNN Committee

Newsletter contact: enquiries@reganforrest.com

MA Membership due soon? Renew online: museumsaustralia.org.au

President's Annual Report

As tabled at the EVRNN AGM, 21st October 2014

Thank you to EVRNN members for your continued support of the Network through your membership fees.

Our Committee
Thanks to the Committee members for volunteering their time throughout the year and sharing their energy, ideas and expertise. The committee consisted of:
Secretary: Regan Forrest
Financial Liaison: Gillian Ridsdale
Members: Jan Packer

Our Activities
During the year the committee held teleconferences, the main agenda items relating to decisions about Network activities.

EVNN Bulletin
The Bulletin was published each season and has this year been the main form of communication with members. Again, as in other years, many thanks to Regan Forrest for her perseverance in, and determination to keep this valuable platform happening and to do so in such an interesting and informative way. Contributions from members are always welcome and will continue to be actively sought.

Museums Australia Conference
The conference this year was in Launceston, Tasmania. Two of the EVRNN committee members and a number of other network members were there and participated in the conference program.

The EVRNN offered two bursaries selected on the following criteria: 1) to be an EVRNN member, 2) from a smaller institution, and 3) had not received a bursary previously. The recipients were Leith Robinson from Western Australia who provided reflections on her conference experience in the Winter Bulletin and Andrea Little from the Royal Australian Mint in Canberra.

As for other years, we conducted the Conference Evaluation the results of which were delivered to the organising committee.

An Initiative
An initiative arising from the MA 2014 Conference is that a number of networks and special interest groups might look to working more closely together so that instead of duplicating effort we might be able to share our efforts for the mutual benefit of members of all our networks. To this end, the idea of sharing our bulletin or extending invites to activities organised by specific networks to other networks has been broached.

One suggestion is that at the 2015 MA Conference that the Education and EVR networks and the digital technologies interest group might co-host the pre-conference day that has in the past been held by the Education Network. We would be looking to have our members certainly attend the day but also be part of the program. We will keep you posted about the outcomes of this discussion over the coming months.

Thanks again to all EVRNN members for your special interest and please be in contact if you would like to be involved in presenting papers at the conference and providing articles for the Bulletin or indeed even just to make contact with fellow EVRNN members.

Carolyn Meehan
EVRNN President

Contribute to the EVRNN Bulletin

Email Regan with your ideas for an article or regular spot

enquiries@reganforrest.com

Check out the EVRNN Blog

View recent posts and add your comments

http://evrsig.blogspot.com.au/

(taken from http://relatingresearchtopractice.org/)

Does authenticity of an object matter?

Objects define museums: The collection, maintenance, and display of objects are the central functions of museum practice. Objects are vital for attracting and holding visitors' attention. They illustrate diverse ideas, practices, and principles, and they can trigger meaning-making. Most museums favour the presentation of original objects, rather than replicas. Indeed, prior research suggests that visitors welcome the opportunity to look at renowned authentic objects (Kirchberg & Tröndle, 2012). But does authenticity confer an advantage in the communication of content? In this study, Hampp and Schwan sought to empirically test the effects of authenticity on the perceptions of visitors. Their definition of authenticity includes objects that evolved in the real world or were produced for real-world purposes. In particular, authenticity is attributed to objects that were once in touch with significant historical events and to specimens of which only one or a few examples exist. Objects that have been crafted specifically for the museum, such as models, replicas, and interactive simulations, do not count as authentic.

Research Design
The study was conducted in the Deutsches Museum, Munich, Germany. The experimental exhibition consisted of three showcases arranged in a row. In one showcase, the object presented was chosen because it illustrated the functional aspect of the story. In the second case, the object highlighted the sociocultural context. In the third, everyday products without historical meaning were presented. The objects were all authentic, but, for this study, their status was varied by simply changing the information in the accompanying object labels and listing them as either originals or replicas. As examples of the sorts of objects displayed, an exhibit on medical technology included a wooden leg (functional focus); a corset worn by Vivien Leigh for *Gone with the Wind* (sociocultural focus); and contemporary breast implants (everyday focus).

After viewing the display cases, 56 participants were asked to rank the objects they had liked the most and to justify this ranking. They were also asked whether the objects they had seen were originals or replicas.

Research Findings
From their analyses of the responses, Hampp and Schwan found that participants did not evaluate objects presented as originals more highly than objects presented as replicas. However, 35 participants said that they had not questioned the status of the objects; they had assumed that the objects were authentic, as is customary in museums.
In explaining their rankings, participants offered a range of criteria. Although they did not use the term authenticity explicitly, they did refer to aspects of the object's provenance. For example, participants appeared to value the opportunity to engage with history in examining a significant object from the past. Some described the objects as emanating an aura. The rareness of an object was often noted in reverent teams, as was the object's ability to function properly.

In their conclusion, Hampp and Schwan state that authenticity does not play a prominent role in shaping visitors' views of museum objects. But authenticity is still important: Visitors appeared to apply the notion of authenticity when describing the reasons for liking specific objects. Indeed, they distinguished four different dimensions of authenticity: history, charisma, rarity, and functionality.

However, in evaluating the objects, participants ranked objects that provided scientific insights more highly than others, even those that were more authentic. The authors therefore conclude that the degree to which an object in a science and technology museum conveys content is more important than its authenticity.

Implications for Practice
The findings presented here question the assumption held by many museum curators that an object has to be authentic in order to engage visitors. Although some visitors regard originals as imparting a compelling aura, it seems that specifically designed objects, such as models and interactive exhibits, can better communicate content. This advice may not be new to many exhibit designers and educators!

Perhaps a more wide-ranging recommendation from this study would be to complement the display of authentic objects with communicative models and replicas. In this way, the emotional draw of a rare and authentic object could be connected to an exhibit designed to support cognitive engagement, thus providing the visitor with both a memorable experience and an enriched understanding.

Source: http://relatingresearchtopractice.org/article/352

Relating culture to prior knowledge

This paper's findings illustrate the claim that young people's prior knowledge cannot be separated from the cultural context in which it is situated. The authors argue that, if we wish to increase engagement in science education, we must attend to youths' out-of-school experiences in their homes and communities. Such experiences shape the understandings and practices that young people use at any given moment.

Research Design
The data presented in this paper come from an ethnography of how 13 upper elementary and middle school students encountered science and technology in their everyday lives. For three years, the researchers conducted frequent interviews with these 13 participants and observed them in various settings. This paper aims to demonstrate that prior knowledge about health is multidimensional; it comes from personal, academic, family, and cultural contexts.

Findings
Two case studies are discussed in detail. The experiences of "Luke" illustrate the ways in which his beliefs about animal-based medicines that are traditional in his family and culture are intertwined with an environmental narrative learned at school. Interviews with "Biqila" similarly present a non-Western cultural understanding of health mixed with explanations from more Western interpretations of biology.

Theoretical Basis
The authors' conception of prior knowledge builds on Banks and colleagues' (2007) description of learning as:

- Lifelong. Learning takes place over time.
- Life-wide. Learning occurs across settings.
- Life deep. Learning is shaped by an individual's various religious, social, and moral values.

Bricker, Reeve, and Bell also build on the work of Chrisman and Kleinman (1983), who noted that a large proportion of health care takes outside the professional or organized sector of knowledge representing the Western medical tradition. A great deal of health care, even in modern Western societies, takes place at home and involves family remedies and folk traditions. By defining the boundaries of health education based solely on professional knowledge, educators risk ignoring the lifelong, life-wide, and life-deep nature of learning.

Implications for Practice
The case studies remind us of the need to understand a learner's prior knowledge — in all its cultural richness and diversity — when we seek to teach about scientific knowledge and practice. Teaching science lessons in isolation fails to acknowledge that learning is life-wide and life-deep and that learners' cultures will inevitably be part of their meaning-making processes. Furthermore, this research reminds us that purely cognitive conceptions of knowledge exclude social and cultural perceptions that also contribute to learning.
The authors argue that helping young people to see the benefits and constraints of scientific ways of knowing and to engage with science issues relevant to their own lives requires first understanding their existing notions. Schreiner and Sjøberg (2004) describe this stance as meeting young people "at their premises."

The implication here is clear: If we ignore young people's cultural learning outside of school, instructional efforts that regard prior knowledge as purely cognitive will not meet with much success in helping learners make sense of new content.

Source: http://relatingresearchtopractice.org/article/351

Museum educators learn by doing

In this paper, Allen and Crowley describe a five-month project in which university researchers and museum educators worked together to develop a new field trip program for middle school students.

The authors note that museum educators rarely experience ongoing training; they tend to rely on their past experiences of teaching and learning to guide their interactions with learners. As a result, the practice of museum educators is frequently organized around traditional transmission models of learning, in which educators provide and

learners absorb a given body of knowledge. More contemporary conceptualisations of education, by contrast, see experience and interaction as vital for learning.

Research Design
Eight educators from a large natural history museum in a midsized Rust Belt city took part in the project. They were developing new inquiry-based tours on climate science. During the tours, they modelled scientific observation at a single exhibit and then used driving questions to help students document their own observations and reflections. After each school trip, the educators engaged in reflective debriefing meetings in which they shared their experiences of structuring the visit and the pedagogical strategies they had employed. Researchers facilitated these meetings and also interviewed the museum educators to study how their practice was evolving.

Findings
As they implemented the new field trip structure, several educators found their beliefs challenged by the climate science content, the pedagogical approach, or both. Several educators tried to avoid the political context of climate science. Others remained uncomfortable with letting learners lead and continued to judge the success of their school trips by the volume of information they felt they had transmitted.

However, the actions and opinions of other educators changed during the project. "Steve" valued the opportunity to reflect on colleagues' experiences as well as his own. "Paul," a former middle school teacher, welcomed the learner-centred approach and yet admitted he was having difficulty implementing the new facilitation strategies. Although changes in their practice and approach varied, the educators' participation in the project and its regular reflective discussions resulted, Allen and Crowley argue, in an emergent community of practice . This paper therefore demonstrates how a community of practice can be developed through shared reflection and communication.

Theoretical Basis
The theoretical perspective underpinning both the design of the project and the ongoing professional development reported in this paper is that learning is an active, participatory process. The analysis of the educators' experiences is thus grounded in sociocultural learning theory. Communication and collaboration among the educators led them to develop new practices. The project itself promoted key guiding principles for inquiry-based learning: learner autonomy, conversation and reflection, and deep investigation of selected concepts rather than shallow exposure to many facts.

To support the on-going process of professional development (PD), Allen and Crowley acknowledge the importance of providing a safe environment in which ideas, successes, and failures may be shared. They also note that the process was designed in accord with Nunnery's (1998) study, which revealed that educators do not necessarily need to develop new approaches themselves, but they do need to witness the successful implementation of new approaches in context. Furthermore, the iterative process of sharing ideas and experiences allowed the educators to feel part of the process of developing the new tour while giving them room to reflect on how best to support learning on the museum floor. The authors thus describe this process as an emergent community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which the educators developed their own professional language and had space and time to engage in reflection.

Implications for Practice
By instigating an open, encouraging, and reflective process, the program reported in this paper changed the practice of educators, including some who struggled with the scientific content, a politicised topic, and a challenging new pedagogical approach. The iterative long-term nature of the project highlights the value of seeing professional development as a continuing process.

Allen and Crowley's study also highlights the value of professional communities of practice and notes their role in facilitating staff engagement with professional development initiatives. As informal institutions become an increasingly prominent in science education, effective support for learning communities of informal educators is likely to become increasingly important.

Source: http://relatingresearchtopractice.org/article/355

Remember – back issues of the EVRNN Newsletter can be downloaded from https://sites.google.com/site/evrsig/evrsig-bulletins

The What, When and How of Participant Incentives

Regan Forrest and Jan Packer, University of Queensland

Introduction

We've all seen it; we've all done it: *Complete our survey and enter the draw to win! Agree to be interviewed and get a free pen!* Researchers call these "participant incentives", which generally speaking are defined as "benefit[s] offered to encourage a person to participate in a research program"[1]. Offering incentives is considered to be good practice in evaluation and visitor research. Visitors agree to give us time out of their visit for the benefit of our research, and it behoves us to value this time and use it ethically[2]. If we consider research as a social contract, incentives are a gesture of reciprocity, acknowledging the value of visitors' time.

But what kind of incentive is appropriate for a given piece of research? What's feasible? What's ethical? What might be some unintended consequences? This article will explore some of the issues surrounding participant incentives.

The Bigger Picture

To understand the role of participant incentives, we first need to consider why people respond to surveys in the first place. There seem to be three main kinds of reasons: altruistic (people who want to help or see it as their civic duty); egotistic (having specific stake in the results, or simply enjoying doing surveys) and study-specific (interest in the topic or organisation)[3]. Incentives increase the "egotistic" reason for completing a survey. But appealing to respondent's altruism can also increase response rates, as can the fact that many visitors hold museums in positions of high trust and regard.

Particularly for online surveys, incentives have been shown to increase the response rate, but this also depends on the length of the survey, who you're trying to target and whether they have a stake in the research outcome[4]. As a general rule of thumb, you should state up-front how long any survey is going to take, and offer an incentive that reflects the time commitment you are requesting. For online surveys, anything taking longer than 20 minutes to complete counts as a "long" survey that warrants an incentive. One of the most popular incentives is to give participants the opportunity to enter a prize draw of something of considerable value (e.g. gift certificates valued at least $100, a tablet computer or similar items).

However, a higher response rate isn't necessarily the ideal – irrespective of the response rate, your survey strategy should aim to minimise systematic differences between people who do respond and those who do not (nonresponse bias). This is distinct from overall response quality, which does not appear to be affected by incentives[5]. Nonetheless, if there is a particular target audience of interest (e.g. teachers, visitors who have participated in a particular programme, visitors from a particular cultural or ethnic group, etc.), you may need to consider ways to increase the response rate among those people in particular.

Compared to the use of incentives in telephone and online surveys, there is very little published research about the practicalities of conducting onsite visitor interviews in museums and similar sites. Rather, examples of practice are shared through informal networks (more on this later).

Ethical Guidelines

Neither the Australian Market & Social Research Society (AMSRS) *Code of Professional Conduct*[6] nor the Australasian Evaluation Society's *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Evaluations*[7] specifically mention participant incentives, however both outline important principles with which any choice of incentive should comply. In particular, the AMSRS code specifies that there must be a clear delineation between market research and "non-research activities" such as promotions or compilation of databases for marketing purposes. This may have implications for what you can use as incentives, as well as how you use any contact details you collect for the purposes of prize draws. Care should be taken to ensure that incentives cannot be interpreted as coercion, particularly if the incentive is large enough to cause certain participants (e.g. at-risk groups) to reluctantly participate in order to receive the incentive. In any case, it has been suggested that it may be better to increase intrinsic motivations rather than rely solely on monetary incentives[8].

Is it an Incentive, a Thank You, or Compensation?

The principle that monetary incentives should only be used as a last resort may appear at odds with the idea that visitors' time is valuable and should be acknowledged as such. However, it's largely to do with the way incentives are framed: an incentive can be considered an inducement to participate, but it can also be presented as a "thank you gift" that you give to visitors as a token of your appreciation. In this sense, the timing of the incentive may come into play. Giving an incentive in advance may increase participation and there is no evidence that it raises a sense of obligation among potential participants[9].

There is another type of payment that we should briefly mention here, and that is compensation. This is particularly relevant where participation incurs costs direct costs (e.g. travel to a focus group session). Any costs that participants so incur must always be compensated.

Some Examples

In September this year, there was a discussion on the Visitor Studies Association (VSA) listserv about the incentives that different institutions give away to visitors who participate in short (<5-10 minutes) onsite surveys. Among this community of practice, the respective merits and drawbacks of different approaches were discussed. We have summarised the key points in the table below:

Incentive	Features	Drawbacks / Considerations
Vouchers for in-visit added extras (e.g. simulator rides, temporary exhibitions, etc.)	Adds value to visitors' experience with little or no direct cost to Museum	May lead to unanticipated spikes in demand for additional experiences – e.g. can the simulator accommodate everyone who's given a voucher?
Small gifts (e.g. pens/pencils, stickers, temporary tattoos, bookmarks, postcards, key-rings)	Tangible and popular gifts, especially for children. If you're surveying adults in a family group, giving children a few items to choose from can keep them usefully occupied while the adults respond to the survey. Cheap if purchased in bulk.	Gift needs to match target audience of survey (e.g. temporary tattoos are great for kids, less so for adult responders) Children may end up using stickers to decorate your exhibits!
Food / coffee / ice cream vouchers	Generally popular and well-received.	Can create a rush in the café if you're doing large numbers of surveys. May be limited by the contract arrangements in place with caterers.
Prize draws	Popular with visitors and practical to implement with online surveys. Cost of a single big-ticket prize may work out cheaper than hundreds of small giveaways. Visitor contact details must be recorded for prize	Visitor contact details must be recorded for prize draw. These details must be able to be separated from the survey responses to maintain anonymity. Be aware that offering a free membership as a prize may reduce membership take-up during the survey period[10].
Gift certificates	Can be used for longer surveys or detailed interviews that involve a longer time commitment and therefore warrant a higher value incentive.	Gift certificates may be seen as equivalent to cash from a tax perspective.
Free return tickets	No direct costs. Tickets can be given away to friends and family if participants can't re-visit.	Not relevant to free-entry institutions. Could be perceived as marketing.
Discounted museum membership	Encourages a longer term relationship with the visitor.	Not an attractive incentive for tourists.

Conclusions

Incentives are established good practice in evaluation and visitor research, and are generally intended to represent a token of appreciation for visitors' time. Although incentives can increase response rates, this is not necessarily the principal reason why incentives are used. Like all aspects of visitor research, decisions regarding the size, nature and timing of giving visitor incentives must be clearly thought through from an operational, financial and ethical perspective at the outset of the research. Done well, incentives offer the dual benefits of increasing responses and creating a sense of good will among visitors.

1. Arts Victoria. (n.d.) *Visitor Research Made Easy*, p. 82 (sourced from: http://www.arts.vic.gov.au/Research_Resources/Resources/Visitor_Research_Made_Easy)
2. Bicknell, S., and Gammon, B. (1996). *Ethics and visitor studies – or not?* Retrieved from: http://informalscience.org/images/research/VSA-a0a4h9-a_5730.pdf
3. Singer, E., and Ye, C. (2013) The use and effects of incentives in surveys. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* Vol 645, 112-141
4. Parsons, C. (2007) Web-based surveys: Best practices based on the research literature. *Visitor Studies*, Vol 10(1), 13-33.
5. Singer & Ye (2013).
6. http://www.amsrs.com.au/professional-standards/amsrs-code-of-professional-behaviour
7. http://www.aes.asn.au/images/stories/files/membership/AES_Guidelines_web.pdf
8. Singer & Ye (2013).
9. Singer & Ye (2013).
10. *Visitor Research Made Easy*, p. 60.

Visitor Observation: Privacy Issues

Regan Forrest (originally posted at reganforrest.com)

During my PhD I spent some time tracking and timing visitors to learn more about visitor behaviour in the exhibitions I was studying (more on the history and applications of visitor tracking here). Recently, I was asked about the privacy implications of doing such research. What steps do we need to take to ensure we're a) staying on the right side of the law and b) respecting visitors' rights to informed consent and ability to opt out of participating in research?

On the first part (i.e. The Law), I'll tread carefully since I'm not a lawyer and it will vary in specifics from place to place anyway. However, in a general sense, museums will generally count as a "public place", and people can reasonably expect to be seen in public places. Therefore if you're just documenting visitors' readily observable public behaviour, and nothing about them that may allow them to be identified as individuals, you're probably in safe territory. However, it would be wise to check whether your museum is classed (in a legal sense) as a "public place" – for instance an entry charge may implicitly impose an expectation of some level of privacy on the part of paying guests.

> If you're tracking visitors across a whole site, sooner or later they're bound to notice you. Awkward. You'd be better off telling them first.

So how about different approaches to informed consent?

The first consideration is cuing – do you tell visitors they're going to be watched and/or listened to at the start of their visit? If so, then you are studying *cued* visitors – and gaining informed consent is relatively straightforward. When you approach potential participants, you explain the benefits and risks of participating, and they can decide whether they want to be part of it or not. The downside of cuing, of course, is that you're probably no longer going to be documenting natural visitor behaviour – people tend to do different things when they know they are being watched.

Depending on what you're studying, this may not be an issue – and, like contestants on Big Brother, visitors tend to forget they're being watched or listened to after a while, even if they're rigged up with audio recording equipment (Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004). Also, if you're going to be tracking the same group of visitors over the course of a whole visit, which could mean following them for 2-3 hours, then you really do need to cue them first – otherwise, frankly, it just ends up getting creepy and weird for all concerned.

If you're tracking visitors across a whole site, sooner or later they're bound to notice you. Awkward. You'd be better off telling them first.

In contrast, tracking and timing *uncued* visitors through a single exhibition gallery can be done discreetly without visitors becoming aware they are being tracked (assuming you are not trying to hear what they are saying as well, meaning you can observe from a reasonable distance). It still takes a bit of practice, and is easier in some exhibitions than others. Even so, if someone approaches you and asks what you're up to, the right thing to do is fess up, explain what you were doing, stop tracking that person and try again with a different visitor.

If you're taking this uncued approach to visitor observation, you're in a far greyer area with respect to informed consent. The usual approach is to post a sign at the entrance to the museum or the gallery informing visitors that observations are taking place, and giving them steps to take if they wish to opt out of being observed. In practice, this might be notices telling visitors which areas to avoid if they don't want to be watched, or having a mechanism for visitors to opt-out by wearing a lapel sticker or wrist band (although chances are this won't be necessary – it never came up in my research and my experience tallies with other researchers I've spoken to).

What about when you're recording?

Things can get a little more complicated when you go beyond simple observation and field notes to audio or video recording visitor behaviour. It's one thing to watch publicly observable behaviour, another to have that behaviour recorded, replayed, and deconstructed *ad infinitum*. This doesn't mean it's not done – audio recording at individual exhibits dates back to at least the 1980s and Paulette McManus's landmark study of visitors evidently reading labels more than it might first appear (McManus, 1989). In that study, specific exhibits were hooked up to a radio microphone linked to a tape (tape!) recorder, and an observer unobtrusively watched the exhibit from a safe distance, making field notes to aid subsequent interpretation (Leinhardt and Knutson also emphasise how important observational data is to back up audio recordings, where there are frequently snippets that make little sense if you don't have additional details about what was happening at the time). As far as I can tell, visitors were uncued in this study.

Audio recording of uncued visitors poses fewer difficulties than video recording, as people can't (easily) be identified based on voice recordings alone. Things get tricker when you get to video, of course. My first exposure to video-based visitor research was seeing Christian Heath speak about his and Dirk vom Lehn's work in V&A's British Galleries in the early 00s (Heath and vom Lehn, 2004). In this case, although they specify that visitors explicitly consented to being part of the research, it's not obvious whether this was done in advance, or after the fact by approaching visitors once they'd left the exhibit of interest (and then discarding the data of those who have refused to participate prior to analysis). This *ex post facto* approach is a way you can ensure both uncued visitor behaviour and informed consent, but as I have no direct experience of this, I don't know how high the refusal rate is and how complicated it is to ensure data is discarded appropriately as required.

Irrespective of the type of informed consent, there is the issue of data storage. Gone are the days of tapes that could be kept under lock and key. You'll need to have a data retention policy in place to ensure that anything that could potentially identify participants is kept secure, safe from those who have no need to access it . . . and from accidental syncing to your public Facebook feed.

Disclaimer: This is just general advice based on my own experience and what I can glean from some of the literature. Different parts of the world and different ethics committees may have different views, and the specifics of any given piece of research may make a difference as well.

References

1. Heath, C., & vom Lehn, D. (2004). Configuring Reception: (Dis-) Regarding the "Spectator" in *Museums and Galleries. Theory, Culture & Society*, 21(6), 43–65.
2. Leinhardt, G., & Knutson, K. (2004). *Listening in on museum conversations*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
3. McManus, P. (1989). Oh, yes they do: How museum visitors read labels and interact with exhibit texts. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 32(3), 174–189.