

Empowering Young Visitors

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The project described here was designed to investigate the applicability of a School-Museum Learning Framework piloted in an earlier study. The Framework had its theoretical base in research into school visits to museums, family group behaviors in museums, and social constructivist approaches to teaching and learning.

The Framework rests on three Guiding Principles:

- Integration of school and museum learning
- Facilitation of natural learning behaviors appropriate to the setting
- Provision of a learner-centred climate

Implementation of the Framework involves students bringing their own chosen questions or 'areas of inquiry' to the museum and students having considerable control over their learning within parameters provided by the teacher.

Seven grade 5 or 6 teachers from four wide-ranging Sydney schools agreed to trial the Framework, with minimal assistance from the researcher. The excursions took place at the Australian Museum in Sydney during 1995. The project began with a one day Professional Development seminar for the teachers including introduction to the teaching/learning approach, experience with a sample mini-unit in the Museum, and ideas on development of their own learning units. The teachers organised their own visits to the Museum at varying stages in their 5-6 week units.

The applicability of the Framework was evaluated through interpretive analysis of observations, interviews with students and teachers, videotape and audiotape recorded during the visit, and students' written work.

The results of the project indicated that the School-Museum Learning Framework can, with adaptations to suit each situation, provide a successful model for learning-oriented school-museum experiences. The overwhelming response from teachers and students was strong support for the Framework's guiding principles. Significantly, the teachers' showed willingness and confidence to select and emphasise different elements of the Learning Framework to suit their class and context.

While these trials showed that the guiding principles are robust under a wide variety of circumstances, they also revealed the need for a framework for school-museum learning to be flexible and broad-based. They showed that provi-

sion of a learning climate including a clear shared understanding of the purpose can be provided through:

- integration of school and museum learning;
- use of a learner-centred approach allowing students choice over their specific learning,
- movement and pacing which reflects 'natural' learning behaviours of family groups; and
- both cognitive preparation as well as familiarisation with the setting and how best to learn from it.

The teacher trials also revealed the impact of prior experiences of students and teachers with the learning approach, and with the museum; the need to monitor the number and nature of the students' questions or "areas of inquiry"; and the value of working in small, independent groups.

This project indicated that with minimal professional development, teachers can adopt the School-Museum Learning Framework to suit their own class situations. By supporting and assisting teachers to facilitate provision of the four main components - purpose, choice, sharing and control - museum professionals could ensure that young visitors will be empowered learners who will leave their museum visits feeling positive about themselves, their learning, and the museum.

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In Search of Resolution: The Australian War Memorial, "The Enemy", and Front-End Evaluation

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The Australian War Memorial has many audiences: Australians who fought or lost loved ones in war, people who have grown up in a multicultural society, and inbound tourists from countries that Australia once opposed. They all visit for different reasons and with different needs and expectations.

How can the Memorial represent "the enemy" in its galleries in a way that will meet their different needs?

This was one of the issues being tackled in some recent front-end evaluations undertaken at the Memorial. The evaluation projects were for two new galleries being developed as part of a major overhaul of the Memorial. The two galleries have a strong focus on the Pacific region during World War II, when Australia was primarily fighting against a Japanese enemy.