Evaluating Young Peoples' projects in Museums Common findings
Kate Pontin

■ The Aims of this Poster

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The primary aim of this poster is to summarise findings from evaluation reports on museum projects with young people.
Many of the evaluations referred to here were undertaken by myself over the last 7 years and these have been pulled together to show common findings. Case studies are provided to illustrate the diversity of work undertaken and the key findings from the evaluations.

I also want to consider how to produce effective evaluations of such projects and how these may be best written up. What do we mean by good practice? Only effective evaluation will provide valid findings that can be used to inform future museum practice.

The aims of project evaluations commonly focus on the outcomes for participants, which more recently have been based on Generic Learning Outcomes. Finding ways of reporting such rich data can be difficult if it is to be representative and inspiring. There is often also a need to consider the actual project management too and how it might be improved. Building relationships with both those running and those participating in projects is important as much evidence qualitative.

Hallmarks of quality Qualitative research are:
- A clear research question/aim
- Effective use of theory and prior research
- Specification of the relationship between the researcher and the researched
- High ethical standards
- Documentation of methods including
  - Sampling
  - Tools
  - Analysis method
- Ensuring validity, reliability and trustworthiness methods include showing partners and participants the findings and comparing with other similar projects
- Effective communication of findings

■ Background
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A number of projects with young people have been undertaken in museums since Museum Fever in the late nineties.
Many projects have worked with young people who have been in danger of, or have been excluded, in one way or another.
The foyer movement has been a key partner in many of these projects and was developed to provide secure accommodation for young people where they are expected to work to individual action plans which include education, training and social goals. Others have worked with youth groups, referral centres and scout groups.

These projects have intended to help 'turn young people on to learning' and to inspire them about museums. However many also hoped to build self-esteem, confidence and motivation. Museums have endeavoured to provide positive learning focusing on self-awareness, tolerance and consideration, confidence, teamwork, problems solving, communication, decision-making and leadership.

Realising Potential, a report from the Campaign for Learning and the Foyer Federation summarises the following key findings from its research.
It suggests that projects need to offer
- Sufficient time
- Involvement of learners in the planning
- A requirement to overcome previous negative experience
- Fun
- Motivational activity
- Appropriate staff
- Sustainability
- Flexibility
- Clear objectives
- Have strong leadership
- Good partnerships
- Celebrate success
- Keep the young people as a priority
- Patient, respectful and supportive staff

So what do other evaluations suggest?

■ Young people

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Adolescence arrives at about 2-14 years old, and is due to biological or hormonal changes which influence the cognitive scope, self-perceptions, views of the social environment and personal values.
It is a period of identity forming, of emotions, and peer pressure. It can also be a period of risk taking, which is a particular trait of those who reach adolescence early (Irwin and Millstein, p8).

The motivations of young people, according to Morris Hargreaves and McIntyre in "Start with the Child" include wanting:
- Less support from parents
- Increased responsibilities
- Their own space
- Money/consumerist opportunities

They also value friendships and often align themselves to a group. In contrast they are institutional antagonistic!
All these aspects influence how one works with young people and also approaches used in evaluation.

Evaluation with Young People
It is important that when evaluating projects with young people that time is taken to develop relationships with them. This includes a sense of respect and trust on both sides. Without this it is difficult to get honest feedback from them. Remember to:
- Visit young people early in the project and make regular visits through out attending different types of session
- Explain that you need their input and use informal discussion with the offer of food/ etc to encourage participation
- Collect their advice about making the museum friendlier for young people
- Be flexible in the face of obstacles but otherwise stay focussed. Thank them for their help. Let them know it is not about testing them but about improving the museum/activity for others in the future
- Above all enjoy being with them and listen to them

■ Evaluation of Young Peoples Projects
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General Guidelines
- Set clear aims that can be assessed or measured
- Choose tools according to your aims: see below for an example from What Eye See Too

Aims of the project included:	Tool chosen for data collection
A responsibility for the exhibition development	Observation
Opportunities to access displays, collections etc of partner museums	Observation, Evidence of activity programme
Self-esteem as members of their community	Discussion with young people and with youth workers
Skills in photography and exhibit development	Discussion with young people and photographer/project worker. Observation
An ability to work together	Observation Discussion with youth workers and photographer/project manager
Aims for the partners involved were to:	
Develop partnerships between museums and youth workers	Discussion with museum and youth staff
Raise profile of museums and youth work	Discussion with youth workers

- Use a range of tools, including information gathered from the participants themselves
- Involve the young people in the evaluation and where possible get them to organise it
- Use an external person to run the evaluation if possible, or at least use one nominated member of staff who has the **time** to do it
- Collect all the data and keep it together!
- When analysing the data, check the aims again. Read and if necessary re-read it.
- Look for examples that support success and "*collect*" or group them together. Remember to look for examples that raise issues
- When you write up your report remember whom you are writing it for and discuss the evidence for and against for each aim.
- Your reports may include both the participant benefit (using GLOs) and also on how effectively the project was run

> **What Eye See Too**
> An independent evaluator used a range of tools including observation, informal interviews with both staff involved and participants as well as brief questionnaires about the project. We also found that an evaluation meeting at the end helped all those running the project reflect on successes and failures.
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> It was also useful to look at the results of the young people's photography sessions. In helping them put up the exhibition the evaluator had time to see them work but also chat to them about the project. She kept notes in a dated memo book

Young people at Littlehampton Museum (What Eye See Too)

Young people at Amberley Working Museum in Sussex (What Eye See Too)

■ Case Study:
What Eye See Too.
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What Eye See Too was a follow on project that aimed to help young people be inspired by museums through the process of making an exhibition of their own photography. These photos were linked into their local heritage and museum collections. Youth Groups in Woking, Camberley, Arundel and Littlehampton worked with a project leader who is an experience photographer. The young people were from a variety of backgrounds. Each project usually meant meeting once a week over 6-8 weeks.

Key findings in the unpublished report highlighted:
- The museums and their staff involved gained new skills for working with young people
- The museums and youth groups developed new and key partnerships
- The project was able to run in a variety of different ways depending on the capacity of the museum in terms of staff, resources and the like
- The young people developed photographic skills in particular but also a stronger understanding of their own area and its past.
- Participants also developed an increased sense of self-worth and were proud of their photographs and displays. This helped develop a greater confidence.

Issues raised in the evaluation included:
- Maintaining motivation of the young people many of whom had low self-esteem was sometimes difficult. Changing activity and finding interesting ways of doing things was very important. They often needed one-to-one support and thus higher staff to participant ratios, which could be a problem when staff had a number of priority commitments!
- The length of the project is key allowing for relationships to develop and learning to occur but not becoming too long so that the young people loose interest
- The difficulty in letting the young people run the project when it was so short and had a predetermined goal
- Prioritising project work with other activity in the youth clubs and museums also meant that help was not always available when it was most needed.
- Making sure all the young people are publicly credited for their work is really important, as this was very much a confirmation of their success.
- Short-term funding and no longer term commitment to continue developmental programmes for the young people means that it will rely on the enthusiasm of individual partnerships and this is unfortunate for the museums and the young people.

■ Case Study: Represent

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Represent was undertaken in 2000 and was funded by DCMS.

Partners: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (including
             Soho House and Aston Hall), West Midlands
             Regional Museums Council (as it was then). There
             was no youth group partner as the project co-
             ordinator wanted to gather young people who were
             interested in joining rather than being told to as part
             of a group activity. He spent many hours going
             round relevant centres talking to young people.

Participants Involved young people from inner-city areas in
             Birmingham such as Handsworth, Aston and
             Newtown

Aims   To attract young people to the museums, improve
             their skills, build confidence, and to employ a young
             person to run the project on the New Deal Scheme.
             It also planned to change the ethos of the Museum
             Service

Outcomes   included the group growing from 4 to 40! They
             visited museums, developed communications skills,
             learnt about photography, DJ workshops and graffiti
             art. The contributed to an exhibition and museum
             policy.

**Key Findings   A good project co-ordinator experienced in
             working with young people was key
                    It was also important to**

- Go out to the young people to explain the project to
  them rather than expect them to come to you!
- Make it fun and social
- Provide a range of stimulating activities and
  opportunities
- Use experts to facilitate when necessary
- Be flexible
- Develop good communication with the partners
  and young people
- Be clear and agree the aims
- Provide enough funding to allow risk-taking

■ **Case Study**
Re:Evolution

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The Project
Foyers in Swindon, Yeovil, Bath and Bridgewater joined in a project working with local museums. Each Foyer linked with a local museum to develop a display or other interpretation tool for the museum. For example the Bath group has made a video for use in training museum front of house staff.
The young people visited a number of museum and heritage sites including museums (the Tower of London, the Science Museum, The British Museum), art galleries, a Falconry Centre, castles, battlefields and RNAS Yeovilton. They had opportunities to handle objects, try on costumes, search art collections for a display and develop personal learning skills on the way.

What did people feel they got out of the project?
I have never laughed so much – if all history could be taught like this it would be fantastic.

I like going to museums. Not something my parents would go to. I get bored easily but I like solving problems.

I learned how to be more confident
around new people and feel more
comfortable being myself.
I am now better at – not feeling as judged in museums for being myself, not what they expect us to be.

How do the young people feel about museums now?
I would never have thought of coming to a museum before.

I did not like them at first and I love them now.

It depends on the museum's attitude to young people…

How can museums become more accessible to young people?
- Consult with young people and listen to them.
- Respect their opinions and contributions.
- Recognise how much rapid change there often is in their lives and find ways to work with or respond to that.
- Give them ways to achieve things for themselves, which will also help you.
- Draw safe boundaries for them, and within these offer as much freedom as possible.

To achieve this it is important that museums:
- Work with partners with experience of young people and their needs
- Consult with young people about their opinions, needs and interests
- Maintain a commitment in time and funds to continue this work and to develop staff skills and knowledge in this area
- Agree aims, share planning and ownership
- Employ a co-ordinator - essential for those who have not worked in this area before

■ Conclusions

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So what do all these reports conclude?
There are an amazing number of similarities despite the diversity of the projects.

They generally agree the following key aspects:
- A project co-ordinator who is experienced in working with young people. This is critical.
- Develop appropriate partnerships and shared aims
- Good communication and flexibility
- Prioritise the project and provide adequate funding
- Consult with the young people
- Respect young people and praise results
- Provide fun and interesting activities
- Appropriate time for relationships and confidence to develop
- Consider sustainability

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For further information on Kate Pontin and her research please see www.katepontin.co.uk . This poster will be on her website shortly.