

## Some Models for Gallery Education in the UK

---

JANICE MCLAREN

Gallery Education can be described as a professional field of practice that exists to engage people in thinking about or using visual media – primarily, though not exclusively, exhibitions – as a resource for learning.

This paper offers an overview of some of the models that exist for Gallery Education in the United Kingdom at the early part of the 21st century. It's important to note that these models are not exclusive but are instead a subjective account from a primarily London perspective. This said, gallery education within public galleries in the UK might be divided into four broad areas:

- Interpretation
- In-gallery Interactive
- Artist-in-Residence
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) work

In addition to this, an emerging series of new or experimental types of programmes fall under an umbrella category of 'other'. It must be stressed within this paper that, with respect to gallery education as it relates to art or exhibitions, it can be argued that the primary educational resource or material is the work or exhibit itself.

Finally, many public galleries in the UK accept a responsibility for creating the conditions in which different programmes might be both intellectually, physically or otherwise accessed, particularly for individuals who have had little or negative experience of art, exhibitions or visiting a gallery.

## Interpretation

The first ‘category’ might be considered the most basic area of provision that a gallery or museum would present to its audiences – interpretation. An interpretative format is a one-way dialogue and, in this way, offers audiences a more passive engagement with the gallery programmes. Indeed the most active work on the part of the audience or participants would be to physically move in front of, or around, a building or exhibit. However they may be engaged or ‘active’ on intellectual or other levels in many ways.

Along with the prior information, knowledge and experiences an audience or participants will themselves bring to an exhibition, interpretive materials might include:

- labels which offer basic information, e.g. artist name, work title, date work was produced and materials, as well as the date a work was acquired or the name of the work’s owner;
- ‘extended labels’, text or information panels offering contextual information on the artist or the work;
- take away material such as leaflets, information sheets, guides or catalogues;
- audio guides;
- a reading or resource room, where further information can be offered in print, web or moving image/sound formats;
- ‘informal’ in-gallery talks and tours for both individuals and groups;
- ‘formal’ talks by artists and other specialists;
- supplementary or contextual events such as film screenings and performances.

The above list is not exhaustive but offers the primary ways that galleries can and do offer additional ‘ways in’ to looking at and thinking about art, galleries and exhibitions.

## In-gallery Interactive

People will often, when visiting galleries, have conversations with companions, gallery staff or other visitors about work on exhibit. These conversations may even result in a deep, critical discussion. This might be considered a form of ‘interactive learning’, though clearly not something planned or organised by gallery staff.

Galleries offer a myriad of opportunities for other forms of interactive engagement with work, or ideas within the work, on show. One of the most

common ways galleries in the UK offer an interactive experience with the ideas and potential meanings within exhibitions is through workshops which often involve a mixture of looking, discussion and practical art-making. Workshops are predominantly aimed at young people, but some are offered to adult groups who have had little or no prior opportunities to become involved in gallery programmes.

‘Live guides’ are another type of interactive opportunity for people to engage in a dialogue about art or exhibitions. Artists – or other people who might have an affinity with or who have gained a knowledge of the work on show – are positioned within the gallery spaces with a brief to encourage visitors to ask questions, make comments or to have a conversation about an exhibition. This type of programming began in the early 1990s and continues into the 21st century, often with young people or non-art experts taking on the role of ‘host’.

## Artist-in-Residence

A great number of galleries in the UK offer ‘outreach’ programmes for individuals and groups who find physical access to the gallery difficult, or who are interested in a more sustained programme with an artist or other specialist.

An artist-in-residence scheme might evolve and be structured in numerous ways. An artist might be commissioned to make work within a school or community context. More often than not the artist is briefed to support a group of people to realise their own or a collaborative work. An emphasis might be placed on the process of art making as much as on the outcome – with a variety of skills and experiences amassed. At times, though rarely, no evident outcome is produced. In nearly all cases, the artist is there as a resource or specialist – complementing skills, knowledge and experience that already exists with the individuals involved. Ideas and a structure for this type of programme may be generated through joint brainstorming or may be prescribed, based on prior planning.

Artist-in-residence schemes organised or supported by galleries often include a visit to a gallery exhibition as inspiration, reward or research. The Whitechapel Art Gallery in London has committed significant resources to a programme called *Creative Connections* which places professional artists in schools on year-long residences and uses the Whitechapel’s exhibitions as a inspiration for new creative work with students and teachers.

Some galleries have facilities for presenting work produced during a residency – either on a long or shorter-term basis. The Chinese Arts Centre in Manchester has a live-in artist residency space where artists of Chinese de-

scent are invited to make work and open their studio space to discuss and show work-in-progress to visitors at specific times during their stay.

## CPD work

Events and activities related to Continuing Professional Development (CPD), particularly for primary and secondary teachers, are a growing trend in galleries. Many public galleries offer teachers' previews of temporary exhibitions. These events often promote the exhibitions as resources for learning with pupils.

In-Service Educational Training (InSET) sessions are also offered to teachers, regularly in the form of a workshop with in-depth discussions and/or practical activities relating to gallery exhibitions and the interests and needs of their pupils. These sessions are frequently facilitated by artists, gallery staff or other practising teachers. More formal, longer-term courses have also begun to be developed for teachers – including degree-based courses, in affiliation with universities and colleges.

Teachers have also been seconded to galleries, for further insight into what galleries might be able to offer their schools and to provide galleries with feedback and advice on their programmes. Similarly, gallery educators have been seconded into working in schools to further develop gallery educators' own knowledge of the potential needs and experiences of teachers and pupils. Engage (National Association of Gallery Education) has developed its government-funded *Watch this Space* programme enabling gallery and teaching staff to do just this.

Professional development programmes for artists have also been developed – from how to market their work to 'portfolio' review or sharing sessions.

## Other

Some recent areas of work included under the umbrella of gallery education are:

- artist commissions, where artists are invited to work with a group of individuals who may have nothing in common with each other but their involvement with that artist (this type of commission often overlaps with the work of exhibition curators and has developed out of work undertaken by artists in the UK since the 1960s). The Photographers' Gallery supported artist Anna Best to develop a project called *Occasional Sights* from 2001-

2003. This project included the publication of a book entitled: *Occasional Sights – a London guidebook of missed opportunities and things that aren't always there* and featured photographs and other contributions from over sixty people of their 'occasional sights' in London.

- mentoring (one-to-one work), where gallery staff provide adult individuals with support related to professional development or young people with work experience: *Creative Partnerships*, a national programme to support creativity in schools, commissioned *Arts Inform* to devise and run a mentoring programme for teachers in London schools in 2003. This highly successful programme ran for two years and paired teachers with professionals from arts organisations. Teachers were offered support on issues such as project planning, fundraising and evaluation based on the skills and experience of arts professionals.
- self-run spaces or programmes, where galleries provide a space or facilities for a group of individuals to generate their own activities related to particular exhibitions or to art in general. In 1994, the Tate Gallery Liverpool began the *Young Tate* program, targeted at young people between the ages of 14 and 25, in a long-term effort to make the Gallery's programming more relevant to the needs and interests of young people. Young people were invited to take the lead in aspects of the Gallery's work. Other programmes have begun to emerge more recently, including the *Tate Modern's Raw Canvas* programme.

The above five categories offer a basic overview of some types of gallery education that exists in the UK. There are as many programmes, however, as there are galleries and gallery educators. The ground is constantly shifting, as the perceptions of art and audiences continue to change the ways galleries work.

## Web links

[www.whitechapel.org](http://www.whitechapel.org) (Whitechapel Art Gallery, London)

[www.chinese-arts-centre.org](http://www.chinese-arts-centre.org) (Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester)

[www.engage.org.uk](http://www.engage.org.uk) (National Association of Gallery Education)

[www.photonet.org.uk](http://www.photonet.org.uk) (The Photographers' Gallery, London)

[www.artsinform.com](http://www.artsinform.com) (Arts Inform)

[www.tate.org.uk/learning/youngtate](http://www.tate.org.uk/learning/youngtate) (Young Tate, Tate Liverpool)

[www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/rawcanvas](http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/rawcanvas) (Raw Canvas, Tate Modern)

