

Literacy development across partner venues (Bury)

Institutions: Fusilier Museum, Bury (FM) / Bury Art Gallery Museum and Archives (BAGMA)

Renaissance North West lead: Literacy Network co-ordinator (Neil Dymond-Green)

Summary:

The Renaissance NW Literacy Network Co-ordinator assisted the Fusilier Museum and Bury Art Gallery Museum and Archives in developing new literacy-based sessions. These story-making sessions ran across the two sites and were linked with year 3 and 4 elements of the Primary Literacy framework taught in schools. The project also involved training to develop the skills of their staff and volunteers who deliver sessions.

Background:

The Fusilier Museum moved to its new site directly opposite BAGMA during 2009. The museum was keen to develop links with its new neighbour and find ways of collaborating with each other and local schools. A small amount of Renaissance money helped fund a new literacy-based joint workshop and training for their staff and volunteers.

Challenges

- Introducing staff and volunteers to the idea of using the collections in a non-factual way (especially at the FM)
- Developing workshops which would dovetail across the two venues and which would relate to schools' literacy work
- Introducing local schools to the idea that museums and galleries can support literacy work

Approach

After initial meetings with the staff responsible for education work in the two venues, a multi-pronged approach was decided upon:

- Initial training on the basics of the literacy framework with the two staff and initial generation of ideas
- Developing ideas around the Year 3 unit: *Adventure and Mystery stories* and the Year 4 unit: *Stories set in imaginary worlds* which could use the collections in new ways in the workshops
- Supporting the two staff to approach schools to take part in the workshops – empowering them to use 'teacher language' in terms of the literacy benefits of the workshops
- Asking the classes taking part to produce a piece of story writing before and after the project – teachers to select work from two average, two below average and two above average children to level against National Curriculum standards and give copies to the organisations (for evidence of impact)
- Asking the teachers to keep note of any positive or negative comments from the children (for evidence of changes in attitude)

- Training with volunteers from FM and visitor assistants (VAs) from BAGMA to give them an extended range of questioning, speaking, listening, group and basic drama skills
- Introducing the volunteers and VAs to the content of the session
- Producing support materials to help the teachers involved plan the work into classroom work and to suggest ideas they might use when they revisit the FM and BAGMA later to continue developing the work started in the led sessions

Intended outcomes

- A collaborative story-making project between the two venues and the schools.

Intended outputs

- Workshops which could be used again in the future and/or adapted
- Evidence of impact of the project on children's attainment and attitude

Evaluation

Responses from teachers:

- 75% of the teachers were pleasantly surprised at the amount of literacy-related activities which could be derived from the two venues' collections
- 75% of the teachers were also not expecting there to be so many practical and engaging activities within the workshops
- All the teachers were enthusiastic about the opportunities available by using cultural venues for creative learning
- All the teachers expressed confidence in their ability to lead more creative session in BMAG and the FM, but also asked that facilitated sessions be continued
- All the teachers had enthused to colleagues about the possibilities of working with museums with a creative, literacy-focused approach
- All the teachers noted high levels of enthusiasm, engagement and motivation from the pupils
- A need was identified for further development of workshop leaders to ensure they were fully able to continue to engage pupils and to be able to adapt pace and activities to the needs of particular groups
- A need was also identified for support needed for teaching assistants and parent helpers to know in advance how some of the activities worked where they had group responsibility (e.g. facilitating thought tracking)
- All the teachers expressed gratitude for the support given by FM/BAGMA staff when planning their return self-guided visit and would like to continue to develop this relationship
- Due to timing constraints, the workshops did not always sit well with particular literacy units taught in schools at that point in time. Most of the teachers said they would happily repeat the experience at a time which fitted more closely with these units.
- Unfortunately, due to staff changes and other pressures, it has not been possible to collect examples of the children's writing, so evidence of impact is hard to assess

Obstacles and issues

There were surprisingly few obstacles or issues. A small number of people involved were initially unconvinced by the approaches taken, as they initially believed that people only visit museums for factual/historical reasons. As the project advanced, there seemed to be more willingness to adopt new approaches and, at least, 'give them a go'.

Actual outcomes

Schools, staff and volunteers are onboard and trained. One VA from BAGMA has begun to visit other museums and galleries to gather more ideas about how to create new sessions relating to the new creative curriculum.

Actual outputs

- Successful workshops run and desire to continue to run them
- A bank of suggestions created which support the teachers involved in embedding this work within their literacy planning.
- Intention from both venues to adopt some of the approaches and strategies used into other currently available sessions and to consider developing other literacy-related sessions

Lessons learned

- Be careful about processes to engage hearts and minds – while many are ready to adopt new approaches, sometimes it may be less easy for others to take this step
- Schools won't automatically think of museums and galleries in terms of literacy teaching, thus emphasising the importance of being able to speak their language in terms of curriculum and support them in seeing how it might be embedded within medium and longer-term plans.

Next steps

- There is a good case to be made for more training for those delivering sessions, the people involved clearly engaged with the strategies introduced and would like more input so as to have an enhanced range of skills to offer. It's important to remember that although VAs and volunteers can be seen as confident, capable and enthusiastic (and indeed are), it should not be assumed that they therefore don't need support and development.