

**Programme Area: Literacy Network Co-ordinator**

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**June 2009 – March 2011**

**Museums involved:**

Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester Museum, MOSI, People's History Museum, Bolton Museum, Tullie House, Cumbria networks, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Museum of Lancashire, Queens Lancashire Regiment Museum, National Football Museum, Bury Art Gallery and Museum, Fusilier Museum (Bury), ERA group (educators in 16 museums in Cheshire including: Grosvenor Museum, Chester Cathedral, Weaver Hall Museum (formerly Salt Museum), Cheshire Military Museum), Lytham Hall

**External Partnerships:**

Bolton Find Your Talent, MLA Renaissance North East, MLA Strategic Commissioning, Mid-Pennine Arts, National Literacy Trust, three primary schools (two in Bolton, one in Manchester), Campaign! Make an Impact

**Overview:**

This was a new role created in the 2009/10 financial year to have a regional overview of literacy in museums and develop and spread good practice. The role could not have worked without the superb groundwork of Sue Good and Julie Howse, who oversaw MAGPIE in Manchester museums and galleries, or Lesley Parkinson who co-ordinated the Preston Museums and Schools in Partnership programme. The work also dovetailed very well with the ground-breaking Find Your Talent UCORLA programme (Using Cultural Organisations to Raise Levels of Achievement) in Bolton, co-ordinated by Joanna Steele.

The role began with discussions with Hub and other key museums about their schools programme and where they perceived literacy sitting within this. There was also initial discussion about a physical or virtual network to share experiences etc, but neither option proved viable and sustainable.

It quickly became clear that a more comprehensive audit of provision, related to the National Literacy Framework taught in primary schools, would support the co-ordinator and partner museums in understanding the aspects of literacy (particularly speaking, listening, group discussion and drama) in workshops and provide a starting point for developing museums and galleries' offers. The full audit is available and its recommendations included:

- Providing educators with an understanding of the literacy framework and straightforward practical activities which could support literacy (and general good practice) within workshops

- Creating a tool to support educators in diagnosing and developing the literacy strands within their workshops

It should be noted that these literacy strands often sat within already-established workshops teaching elements of history, art etc through the museums and galleries' collections. Developing these strands could enhance the learning experience without detracting from the unique experience of engaging with objects or art.

This audit led to the provision of a succession of training events around the region, led by the co-ordinator (and, initially, Joanna Steele) to give this background to the framework and practical activities which could develop and support these literacy skills, including developing a more open questioning style. Two of these events were run in partnership: one with Mid-Pennine Arts, the other with the British Library's 'Campaign! Make an Impact' programme. Approx 130 museum and gallery educators took part in these training events, giving both very positive feedback and later contacting the co-ordinator to inform him of how they had incorporated activities and ideas within workshops or to request additional support which was always offered in person or by phone.

#### **Key activities:**

- Undertaking the literacy audit – assessing the workshops at ten regional museums and galleries (Hub and non-Hub)
- Training events across the region to develop educators' understanding of literacy teaching in schools and to introduce them to a range of easily-useable practical activities to develop literacy skills within the context of working with objects or artworks.
- *MAGPIE planning group (Manchester)* was supported with training and development time to explore and develop literacy-related practice.
- *Bury Museum and Art Gallery / Fusilier Museum (Bury)*: A small-scale project helped the two venues to forge links, provided training for visitor assistants and volunteers and created a story-making day starting with creating heroes in the Fusilier Museum and then putting them into a setting of one of the landscapes in the art gallery.  
A case study is available.
- *ERA (a group of educators from 16 different Cheshire Museums)*: The co-ordinator had (before undertaking this role) worked with most of the group on activities bringing artworks to life through drama. In consultation with the group, a three-stage process was set-up.
  1. All the educators took part in the framework / activities training mentioned above.
  2. Those educators who were more confident and experienced at working in this way were aided through training and one-to-one support to develop and pilot a new workshop with a fiction (story-making) focus
  3. A small group of the most confident and experienced undertook a similar process to develop and pilot a new workshop with a non-fiction writing focus

This structure was seen as a sustainable method for the group to support each other and move colleagues on through the process as they later became ready. A case study is available.

- *National Literacy Trust*: Building on the work that Preston Museums and Schools in Partnership had developed with the NLT, the co-ordinator worked in association with Judy Clark, the NLT's 'Talk for Writing' consultant to develop the use of the TfW approaches in museums and galleries. Talk for Writing is a set of approaches used in many primary schools to enable meaningful speaking and listening which leads to effective and improved writing skills.

This particular project involved developing the use of Talk for Writing in a non-fiction situation (most TfW is done with story creation). A very successful pilot was run in partnership between the co-ordinator, Manchester Art Gallery and two classes from St Chrysostom's Primary School in Manchester. A case study is available.

*Campaign! Make An Impact*: A training day was held in association with Alison Bodley, CMAI's programme manager, to demonstrate the links between the CMAI programme and literacy skills.

### **Lessons learnt**

The key lesson learnt is that museum and gallery educators need to beware making assumptions about the school system and need to make an effort to not only understand the basics of the school curriculum but attempt to 'talk the same language' as teachers. Many North West educators have moved from knowing that there are literacy elements to their sessions to being able to articulate to teachers what they are and how they enhance their sessions.

The other key lesson is that there are a range of very simple activities one or some of which can be easily incorporated into workshops to enhance the responses and learning of pupils and to include as many individuals as possible in learning.

An additional lesson is that the imagination and resourcefulness of museum and gallery educators is almost unlimited and they will generally leap upon ideas which enhance their delivery!

Going forward from the current phase of Renaissance, there will be continue to be a need for educators to have training and updates on the school curriculum and how literacy/English is taught, given the changes that will happen during the years 2012-2014. It will be especially essential to prove the value of literacy elements to workshops and literacy-focused workshops in a world where schools have less money.

In addition, there was limited scope within the timeframe of this work to look at how literacy-related activities can impact on the quality of outreach workshops, which may well grow as schools struggle to find money for transport to museums and galleries.

### **Impact**

Forty museums and galleries across the North West benefited from this work, with 127 education officers, creative practitioners or volunteers taking part in the training programme.

Of these, 26 participants (mainly education officers) received additional support in their venue to assess how they provided literacy opportunities within their current workshops and/or with creating new workshops with a literacy focus or speaking and listening elements.

An additional two education officers (Manchester Art Gallery and Bolton Museum) and four teachers received training in association with the National Literacy Trust to understand the basics of 'Talk for Writing' and to develop ideas for how to incorporate this into non-fiction based workshops.

The tool for assessing and developing speaking, listening, questioning, group work and drama within sessions has been trialled by three different venues, with very positive feedback and is ready to be rolled out to other museums and galleries. **(Developing speaking and listening skills: A tool for museums, galleries and archives)**

### **Outcomes (from work plan)**

The decision was taken to combine the idea of a diagnostic support tool and a bank of resources into one easy-to-access document. **(Developing speaking and listening skills: A tool for museums, galleries and archives).**

The MAGPIE group was supported to a place where they had received an enhanced level of training and support around literacy issues, along with chance to reflect on and compare practice within the group. The group's membership changed considerably over this period, so support was extended beyond the originally-planned timeframe.

Manchester Art Gallery was given additional support to develop a workshop based closely on relating artworks to the text of a book (fiction). The workshop was based on Ted Hughes' The Iron Man and has now become a part of their core programme.

<http://www.manchestergalleries.org/education/primary-ks2/workshops/iron-man/>

Due to various constraints on Tullie House, the co-ordinator was only able to offer training to staff and practitioners and not support further development with workshops.

After the success of the initial project, staff changes at Bury Art Gallery and other pressures on the Fusilier Museum meant that additional support there was not taken up.

Bolton Museum has also had its share of issues, including staff changes and financial pressures, so the input there was limited to the training/development element of the 'Talk for Writing' non-fiction package. They anticipate following through on this into workshops during 2011.

Manchester Art Gallery's 'Talk for Writing' non-fiction project happened successfully and not only enhanced their current 'Victorians' workshop, but also offered possibilities for the period when a key piece of artwork will not be available for use.

The Cumbria networks received training input and many of the museums have reported already incorporating some of them into their workshops.

ERA have been a major success story of this work as all sixteen venues involved in the network have made progress in developing speaking and listening elements and/or literacy-related workshops. Due to the nature of the group and the structure of the training and support, the co-ordinator is confident that they have a level of understanding and skill to support and develop each other further.

There was a successful training event in association with Mid-Pennine Arts, which included teachers as well as museum educators and forged great links as well as providing both sides with a better insight into the possibilities to develop literacy in galleries and museums.

The support given to Lytham Hall enabled them to move forward with an HLF bid which had a strong educational element, including literacy links.

### Legacy

- A cohort of well-trained museum and gallery educators across the North West who not only recognise the advantages of incorporating literacy elements into workshops, but have developed their practice and their ability to explain this literacy-related approach to teachers
- An audit of provision as it stood in early 2010, which acts as a benchmark to show progress, but also contains valid and useful information for those seeking to develop their practice.
- A diagnostic and development tool (**Developing speaking and listening skills: A tool for museums, galleries and archives**) which gives educators background information on literacy in the curriculum, a simple-to-use reflection tool and a bank of easy-to-use activities for developing literacy in workshops and for meeting the needs of more able and older pupils at Key Stage 2
- Case studies demonstrating:
  - How partnerships between museums and galleries can enhance a literacy offer (Bury Museum and Art Gallery / Fusilier Museum)
  - How even very small understaffed museums and galleries can create literacy workshops and projects with lasting impact (ERA)
  - How elements of 'Talk for Writing' can be incorporated into a museum or gallery workshop at little or no cost