



The impact of the North West Museums Hub's primary consultant (Museums and Galleries) with MEP: summary of final report

September 2006

This report reviews a partnership between the North West Museums Hub and Manchester Education Partnership (MEP). It examines the progress and educational outcomes arising from the partnership from January 2005 to July 2006.

The partnership led to the appointment of a primary consultant. She was employed by the MEP but funded by the Hub. Her main role has been to develop and operate a programme of collaborative projects between five Hub and First Partner museums and over 40 schools. This programme is known as the Manchester Museums and Galleries Pilot (Magpie). The primary consultant has also performed the broader role of consultant, communicator, advocate and mediator between the education and museum sectors.

The partnership occurred when the objectives of the museum and education sectors came together. In 2003, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published its mission for primary schools in 'Excellence and Enjoyment'. Magpie fitted with this and with the objectives of the North West Hub Education programme delivery plan.

Phase one of Magpie ran from January 2005 through to December 2005. It involved teachers and pupils from 12 schools. Phase two ran from September 2005 to July 2006. This consisted of a further 29 schools. In both phases, teachers were asked to plan and deliver extended schemes of work. These should last half a term or longer and:

- incorporate one or more museum-based education sessions
- incorporate teaching and learning activities that relate to museum education practice

The particular curriculum focus was writing, though teachers also included other curriculum objectives. Teachers were supported by:

- experienced teachers known as lead practitioners
- museum educators
- professional development supplied by St Martin's College
- one another through network meetings

Impact

Teachers

The evaluation documents a considerable impact on teacher practice, confidence and satisfaction in teaching writing. Planning documents, interviews, feedback and discussions reveal teachers developed a more cross-curricular approach to teaching writing. They used museum sessions and innovations to deliver sequences of learning activities where writing had a purpose, context and was alternated with other learning experiences. These included a greater use of visual images, speaking and listening, performance, and kinaesthetic activities.

Teachers were generally positive about how they had developed their own practice and the benefits of these innovations for pupils. Significantly, some teachers regarded these changes as a transformation. For others Magpie confirmed their existing approach.

Pupils

Teachers reported improvements in many aspects of pupils' writing. The impact on grammar and punctuation appears to have been less marked. In addition, pupils wrote at greater length and with greater enjoyment. Progress in writing was measured by longitudinal teacher assessment for 201 pupils at baseline, mid- and end-point. For 176 pupils progress was measured through voluntary standard assessment tests (SATs). This showed a mean progress of:

- 1.73 points – about a National Curriculum sub-level and a half – over the first term
- 1.04 points over the second term
- 2.72 points over two terms
- 3.4 points over two terms if measured using the SATs

Mean progress of 3.4 points over two terms is significantly beyond local and national targets. It is equivalent to one point per term, that is six points or three sub-levels over two years. This progress provides clear evidence that Magpie adds value.

The analysis also suggests that in general, boys and younger pupils benefited from the scheme slightly more than others.

Schools

There is considerable evidence that Magpie had some impact on other teachers in participating schools. This was largely through the work of Magpie teachers disseminating their experience. In a minority of Magpie schools, there are definite plans to involve other classes in Magpie-type teaching and learning next year.

In a number of schools there is evidence that good practice has already been transferred. Teachers have adopted Magpie planning or teaching approaches, or booked in for particular museum education sessions.

Dissemination in schools was usually stronger where:

- more than one teacher participated in Magpie
- teachers participated in Magpie for longer

- head teachers viewed Magpie as a pilot for curriculum change
- participating teachers had a wide cross-school role

Museums

Magpie helped to popularise particular sessions and increased the volume of visits. There were 579 additional sessions involving 16,933 pupils, of which 13,440 were new to the host museum. A total of 41 schools were involved.

Of the 124 school visits, 73 were from schools that had not used the museum in the previous two years. Museum educators benefited from attending network sessions, particularly from training sessions run by St Martin's College. Interaction with teachers and the network helped museum educators understand how sessions might form part of an extended scheme of work and so meet the curriculum needs of schools.

Close work with teachers – but particularly with the primary consultant – provided feedback to museums about the quality and use of their sessions. This has impacted on development.

The primary consultant

Building on her leadership of Magpie, the primary consultant has fulfilled a wider role – mediating, brokering and communicating between the museum and the education sectors. She has documented this activity, which consists of:

- conversations
- meetings
- presentations
- contributions to specific projects
- exchanges of advice and guidance
- making connections
- raising awareness
- spreading good experiences

The impact of this activity is likely to be dispersed and is medium to long-term. This makes it very difficult to evaluate. Evidence shows the primary consultant contributed to the development and improvement of museum-based sessions. It also indicates she contributed to the development and delivery of related projects, such as My Manchester and the Peterloo Project.

Beyond this, the primary consultant has built links with a range of related agencies and networks in Manchester. Through these, she has spread awareness of what the museum offers in general and of particular opportunities connected to Magpie or other museum activities.

Partnership

At a structural level, the partnership has developed a steering group and a management post. These were recently extended for two years. On the ground, it has developed:

- a network of experienced and expert teacher practitioners
- museum/gallery educators
- additional curriculum and planning resources

- raised understanding of, and expectations from, partnership work

These achievements highlight the potential benefits of partnership. This is all the more true when there is a commitment to long-term co-working rather than a project-by-project approach. Furthermore, the partnership has progressed from working together towards separate objectives, to setting shared objectives jointly. This has started to happen because aims and funding from the museum sector overlap with the educational sector outcomes: professional development, attainment and curriculum resources.

The MEP values the primary consultant's ability to recruit schools and museums to the project, the effects of the professional development, and the way in which the project has been integrated into the planning and priorities of the authority. Trust and confidence in the primary consultant's role have developed over time. This shows that Local Education Authority (LEA) officers fully identify with the objectives of the project.

As personnel change and institutions reorganise or evolve, the partnership will have to adapt. In the case of this initiative, MEP restructuring and capacity issues in some of the Hub museums provide relevant challenges.

Conclusion

In terms of museum education, Magpie's achievement is already great. A museum education session might be a few hours learning activities, a number of potential learning outcomes and suggestions for follow-up work. The addition of Magpie planning and support transforms it into, perhaps, a half term of teaching and learning. This results in measurable progress in attainment, denominated in high-status National Curriculum learning outcomes.

The Magpie approach hugely increases the impact that museums and galleries can aspire to. This is provided that museums and galleries are ready to accept the curriculum objectives as their own. The situation will improve if these objectives are understood and shared with museum educators and – through them – other teachers. Otherwise, it is possible that some museum educators will see these outcomes as remote or irrelevant to their institutional priorities.

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