

## MAKING MUSEUMS OUR EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS

**Elena Sayanova**

*Vocational High School for Tourism and Catering – Razlog (Bulgaria)*

**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the idea of taking action to put learning at the heart of museums and museums at the heart of learning as it is a space where youngsters can learn and gain different experience with input from experts, using visual and object-based approaches, and where they can find new forms of creativity, self-expression and confidence. This means giving space for young people to be producers of knowledge as well as consumers and to learn about the connections and interactions between different knowledge systems.

Both cognitive and affective learning can occur as a result of student visits to out-of-school settings, and is influenced by numerous factors, such as the structure of the trip, setting novelty, social context of the visit as well as teacher actions on trip and quality of preparation and follow-up experiences.

The article also offers some teaching approaches to involving museums into the educational process.

**Keywords:** learning; museums; youngsters; visual and object-based approach; knowledge systems

Our point of view is that museums offer an enormous educational resource which can support inspiration and provide a learning space for everyone. To implement this, there must be concerted action to put learning at the heart of museums and museums at the heart of learning. It is a space where youngsters can learn and gain different experience with input from experts, using visual and object-based approaches, and where they can find new forms of creativity, self-expression and confidence. This means giving space for young people to be producers of knowledge as well as consumers and to learn about the connections and interactions between different knowledge systems.

First-hand studying of various artifacts, works of arts and documents is in compliance with modern task-based and problem-solving approaches: teaching that actively engages our students' minds. A museum is an important resource for teachers to draw upon as it 'keeps' collective memory and cultural identity of a society through its association with objects from the past and present. Teaching methods traditionally concentrate on book and word-based exercises; they do not often involve students into active learning from things, which can motivate

children to develop the need to know, generate students' interest, curiosity and thus stimulate their resourcefulness and creativity.

Museums are fascinating places for visitors as they tell stories about the objects they hold and the research they undertake in a variety of ways.

Dr Lynda Kelly in her report '*Student Learning in Museums: what do we know ?*', made for The Sovereign Hill Museums Association, emphasizes that learning, as the process of applying prior knowledge and experience to new experiences, always involves some element of emotion and feeling. She concludes that designing engaging physical, online and mobile museum experiences for young people need to include the following elements:

- **experiences** that encourage discovery, interaction, cater for the unexpected, provide many pathways to explore, give a taste for what happens behind the scenes and are fun;

- **content** that is challenging, real, authoritative, meaningful; it encourages questions and is well-organised and easy to navigate;

- **staff** that can relate to young people, are respectful of their ideas and views, are knowledgeable in their field and are easy to talk to;

- opportunities to **socialise**, be with their friends and learn together.

According to DeWitt and Storksdieck, learning on a field trip is a valuable addition to classroom instruction and a way to prepare students for future learning. Students are more likely to remember social and personally relevant aspects of field trips, yet also dislike and keep less favorable memories of these trips that seem overly structured and leave little room for their personal visit agenda (DeWitt and Storksdieck, 2008).

Students felt that in order to be substantively engaged in cognitive learning they needed to know how things worked; be able to think through ideas; have opportunities to ask questions; be able to handle, manipulate and closely examine artefacts and exhibits; be able to seek out information from several sources in language that is appropriate to their age and stage of development; and be stimulated through all their senses (Kelly & Groundwater-Smith, 2009).

What is more, students are more likely to remember social aspects of their visit. The social interaction occurring on a field trip is an important part of the experience and supporting students' in sharing their experiences enhances learning (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008; Kelly & Groundwater-Smith, 2009).

Students like learning with their friends. While they recognised that a visit to the Museum was primarily designed by their teachers to assist in their learning, they also wanted it to be a satisfying social occasion when they could learn with and from their peers (Kelly & Groundwater-Smith, 2009). Visits are highly social experiences for students. A study of sixth graders stated that they had more control over their own learning when interacting with their peers rather than adults who tended towards control (Birney, 1988).

The degree of structure of a field trip is the subject of discussion. DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) identified several issues around structured visits:

- field trips need to provide moderate amount of structure while still allowing for free exploration in order to maximise cognitive and affective outcomes;
- well-designed worksheets can be effective in promoting discovery-based enquiry if exposing students to a wide range of relevant information;
- well-designed worksheets may tap into already available interpretive material thus extending the richness of information;
- the use of pre and post visit activities can enhance the cognitive and affective learning outcomes;
- in a museum setting structure experiences, such as guided tours, specific detailed tasks can increase cognitive learning but may dampen enthusiasm;
- structure, including worksheets, may limit the ability for students to explore and engage with the unique aspects of the museum setting.

Teacher motivations for school trips include connecting with classroom curricular, providing a general learning experience, enhancing student motivation, exposure to new experiences, change in setting or routine and student enjoyment (Kisiel, 2005).

DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) also report that field trips are enhanced when the teacher becomes familiar with the setting before the trip; orients students to the setting and agenda and clarify learning goals; plans pre-visit activities aligned with curriculum goals; allows students time to discover and explore during visit; plans activities that support both the curriculum and account for the uniqueness of the setting.

In addition, learning in the digital age is based on sharing of knowledge and information. Anne Balsamo (2011) describes this emergent cultural formation as a ‘distributed learning network’ that includes various types of institutions such as formal educational efforts of universities, schools, after-school programmes, as well as ‘mixed reality sites’ such as museums, libraries and community organizations. These new spaces of learning have been described as interest-driven (Ito et al., 2008), affinity spaces (Gee, 2004), and voluntary associations (Jenkins et al., 2007).

The infrastructure of education is no longer the single school system, but rather a distributed, mixed-node, learning environment. While museums have long served as informal spaces for learning (from social norms to national history), the modern museum has explicitly embraced its pedagogical intentions by establishing educational programmes with clear connections to formal school systems. These programmes not only bring students to visit the museum during the day with their teachers, but also provide for teacher training at the museum and through their websites with lesson plans that explicitly reference formal curricular topics and learning objectives. The aim for these museum programmes is to support school-based educational efforts by providing an alternative space for learning that is less

structured and hierarchical than formal school-based programmes. (Boddington, Boys & Speight, 2013).

No doubt, there are numerous approaches to involving museums as educational partners. One of them is an integrated program consisting of the activities based on three assumptions: Contemplating (enjoy), Interpreting (reflect) and Trying (create). It can be applied to any cultural space with different expressive modalities –within the architectural or historic heritage, in nature, urban art, etc. Students can analyze the works of art through the comparative method, identifying similarities and differences in a thematic field, doing some relevant experiments, and so forth.

Educators from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock recommend to consider some important things when analyzing a work of art and focus on *Art Elements*, such as Line (straight, curved, angular, flowing, horizontal, vertical, diagonal, contour, thick, thin, etc.); Shape (what shapes are created and how); Light and Value (source, flat, strong, contrasting, even, emphasis, shadows); Color (primary, secondary, mixed, complimentary, warm, cool, decorative, values); Space (depth, overlapping, kinds of perspective); Time and Motion. They also recommend that students take into consideration so-called *Principles of Design* – Unity and Variety; Balance (symmetry, asymmetry); Scale and Proportion (weight, how objects or figures relate to each other and the setting); Mass/Volume (three-dimensional art); Function/Setting/ Interior/Exterior Relationship (architecture). Students also have to go beyond description and offer a conclusion and their own informed opinion about the work of art.<sup>1)</sup>

We developed two detailed schemes for students so as to facilitate completing such tasks.

#### MODEL 1 (for less advanced students)

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Now I'd like to attract your attention to this |   | landscape<br>canvas<br>painting<br>water colour<br>portrait<br>drawing |
| 2. It was painted (drawn) by                      | famous<br>  well-known<br>  world-known | painter/ artist/...  |
| 3. He belongs to the                              | realistic<br>  classic<br>  modern      | school of<br>  trend in<br>  painting<br>  art                         |

4. As you can see it's | an oil painting/a pen-drawing/an engrave/...

5. We can see	a woman/a group	in the foreground
	a group of people	in the middle ground
	a horseman	in the background
	green hills	in the distance
		to the right of the picture

6. The picture is executed mostly in	bright	colours tones
	light	
	dark	
	warm	
	cold	

7. Numerous shades of	blue	prevail in it
	brown	
	red	

8. The artist depicts	a busy street
	a girl milking a cow
	a forest in autumn
	the rough sea

9. The artist employs the	usual	composition
	strange	
	trivial	

10. This is one of the	early	works of this painter
	best	
	latest	

MODEL 2 (for more advanced students)

### **Critical Response**

#### Paragraph One

Description: Write a description of the painting. Write it as if you are writing to a friend or you are describing it over the phone.

#### Paragraph Two

Analysis: Look at the composition of the painting and explain how the elements of art and the principals of design are organized. Found on a separate sheet of paper are a word list with brief definitions to be used for

this paragraph. You are expected to use at least two elements art and two principles of design.

#### Paragraph Three

Interpretation: How does this painting make you feel? What is your initial reaction when you looked at this painting? Are you impressed with the skill of the artist or the idea. How much are you inspired?

#### Paragraph Four

Evaluation: Is this a good painting? What are its strengths or weaknesses? What would you do to make it better?

Teachers are recommended to create a museum session plan, depending on the time available.

The plan should include the theme, the objectives, some materials needed as well as the activities to carry out with educators playing a role of mediators and facilitators.

The session (either in a museum or in the classroom) can begin with students observing the works of arts, after which we can start a dialogue in various ways with the activities that facilitate the verbalization of ideas and opinions. It also might include different games:

- *Bag Game* – every student can be given such a bag. Let them feel the object with the bag closed and try to guess what's inside. The object can only be felt by hand, it cannot be seen. Or there can be one bag so that students will explore the invisible object and then voice their opinion, which can be compared and discussed.

- *Pieces of a Puzzle* (each student provides a piece and says something about the work).

- *Words Game* – each student can write three words related to the work of art. Then they have to comment on their associations- There may be a card with a question and have to find the answer in one, or more, of the works.

- *Analogies Game* – finding common elements between different works of art. diagram (on paper, with arches or spherical shapes, or colored ropes)

- *Secret Painting Game* - one of the students chooses a painting or exhibit in the museum but does not tell the others which it is. The other students take turns asking Yes or No questions to get clues about what it is.

- *Feeling Game* – ask each student to pick one work of arts that makes them feel a certain way: happy, sad, etc. Discuss why. Later, ask them to create their own abstract art.

- *Story Time Game* – ask each student to invent a story to go with a painting they choose.

- *Memory Game* – have students take turns looking at a painting and trying to memorize as much as possible about it. Then have them turn their backs to it and see how many questions about it they can answer.

Selecting a theme is of great importance due to some reasons:

- It focuses your preparation by helping you make choices about content and structure.
- It helps students consider how works of art are related.
- It helps students connect new experiences to their own lives.
- It focuses the tour experience and keeps you and your students on task.

### Examples of themes

*Stories in Art* – Ancient Stories (Trojan War, The Odyssey, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), Love Stories (Venus and Adonis, Telemachus and Eucharis), Stories from Mythology (Leda and the Swan, Medusa), Stories from the Bible (Noah's Ark, Joseph and Potiphar's Wife);

*People* - Portraits, daily life, children, families, mythological gods and heroes (Hercules, Achilles), people from history (Mary Seacole, Louis XIV);


*Creatures* – Insects, pets, dragons, griffins, sirens;

*Nature* – Landscape, weather, plants, habitats;

*History & Culture* – The Italian Renaissance, 17th-century Holland, the French Revolution;

*Art Making* – Sculpture, vase painting, drawing, mosaics, photography, manuscripts, glass.

### Museum Lesson Plan

Photos/ Reproductions		
	Art work identification	
Title and date	Still-life, 1943	The Bread, 1951
Artist	Giorgio Morandi (1890 – 1964)	Jean Hélion (1904 – 1987)
Technique	Oil on canvas (30 x 45 cm)	Oil on canvas (72 x 91 cm)
Subject/Theme	Objects/Still-life	Description/Reproducing the atmosphere
	Art work description	
	Undefined space	Interior space
	Objects resembling various geometric shapes, with predominantly straight lines.	A kitchen...
	Light comes from the left. There is also highlighted spot in the background	The light comes from above

	Still life	
	Objects and elements of everyday life (figurative objects)	
	Reduced color palette; dominated shades of brown , gray, white	
	Texture	
	Ligth and shadow	
	Perspective	
	Depth – Three-dimensionality	
	Contours marked from the very object color	
	Background and figure	
	Shape (geometric shapes)	
	Technique – oil on canvas	
	Painting	
	Context	
	Italy	France
	Biography	
	<p>Giorgio Morandi is an Italian painter, born in Bologna. During 1930-56 he taught printmaking and drawing at the Academy of Arts. His first still-life and landscapes were inspired by the works of Renoir, Monet et Cézanne. He focused increasingly on subtle gradations of hue, tone, and objects arranged in a unifying atmospheric haze, establishing the direction his art was to take for the rest of his life. Morandi showed in the Novecento Italiano exhibitions of 1926 and 1929. From 1928 Morandi participated in some of the Venice Biennale exhibitions, in the Quadriennale in Rome and also exhibited in different Italian and foreign cities. 2)</p>	<p>Jean Hélion French painter and writer, born in Couterne. Hélion moved to the United States in July 1936, staying in New York and later Virginia. While he continued painting abstractly, he increasingly felt that his work was tending toward representation, and he began drawing from life. His reading of Baudelaire directed him toward a concept of modernity in which the most ephemeral aspects of contemporary life are reconciled with the timeless and the geometric. He believed that Seurat , who he called “the last great master, and Leger, the greatest after him. Hélion’s work underwent a radical change—one that would confound his admirers—when he abandoned abstraction decisively in 1939. His first large-scale figurative canvas, With Cyclist (Au cycliste), revealed a simplified and streamlined treatment of form that is related to Léger’s style of the 1930s. Jean Hélion died in Paris on October 27, 1987.3)</p>



Museum Educational Game ‘Treasure Hunt for Food on Canvas’.

This activity was implemented in the Museum “Square 500”, Bulgaria’s new national gallery, located near “St. Alexander Nevsky” Cathedral. It has a collection of over 42,000 art works from the National Art Gallery and the National Gallery for Foreign Art. The exhibition presents about 2,000 art works, half of which are by Bulgarian artists and the other come from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America.

Task 1:

Make pictures of three paintings of food. (In case it is allowed) – Hall 1

Task 2:

Find the painting “All Souls’ Day”. Who is its author and what is his nationality?  
– Hall 4

Task 3:

On the painting “Still-life with Fish” by Abraham van Beyern, apart from fish, there is some other food painted. What is it? – Hall 6

Task 4:

Which painting by Palma Vecchio have you found in the hall? – Hall 7

Task 5:

Who is the artist created the paintings “Grape Picker” and “Bacchanalia Woman”? – Hall 15

Task 6:

What kind of food did Bernard Buffet depict in his “Still-life”? – Hall 18

Task 7:

What kind of food can be seen in the painting by Tzenko Boyadzhiev “Relaxation Time”? – Hall 21

Task 8:

During which centuries did the Pahari painting school develop, which representative of which is the Kashmir style? – Hall 23

Task 9:

Finish the title of the painting by Andre Lanskoj “Still-life with ...”? – Hall 8

Task 10:

In which painting by Vera Nedkova there is some fruit? – Hall 12

Task 11:

What kind of food did Zlatiu Boyadzhiev paint in his work of art “Dinner Time”? – Hall 7

Task 12:

Which paintings depicting food by Bencho Obreshkov have you found in the gallery?

Task 13:

Who is the artist and what is the title of the painting?

Task 14:

In Hall 26 there are paintings of food, created by two Bulgarian painters? Who are they?

Task 15:

Apart from being daily basic food, bread in the Bulgarian customs plays a significant role in numerous rituals, both pagan and Christian. In which painting by Aneta Dragushanu can we see bread? – Hall 15

Task 16:

The famous Bulgarian painter Nenko Dimitrov-Balkanski was born in the town of Kazanluk on 20th of September 1907. He graduated from the National Academy of Art in Sofia in 1930, studied in Paris and Munich and specialized in Italy from 1939 to 1941. Some of his paintings are exhibited in the National Art Gallery and in the Art Gallery of Kazanluk. Which of his paintings, related to the family have you found here? – Hall 10

Task 17:

Which paintings of food, painted by Vasil Barakov have you found in the gallery?

Task 18:

What is the name of the Japanese artist (1823–1880), whose paintings of food can be found in the gallery? – Hall 23

Task 19:

For nearly 27 years Vladimir Dimitrov-Maystora (the Master) worked in the village of Shishkovtzi, the region of Kustendil. He portrayed the local people, the rural life, the customs and traditions, focusing on the typical characteristics of the Bulgarian national type and the relations between the people and the nature. What are those typical features? – Hall 25

Task 20:

How many halls does the National Gallery “Square 500” have?

*Treasure Hunt* is one of the most popular educational games for young people visiting the museum, which are used to secure the children’s active interest, make learning fun, and enhance the museum experience (Avouris & Yiannoutsou, 2012). Some museums provide paper-based treasure hunt applications, as can be seen on the Van Gogh museum website<sup>4)</sup> or on the American Museum of Natural History site<sup>5)</sup>. Some museums make these game applications available on their website, as for example The Metropolitan Museum of Art<sup>6)</sup>. Some museums offer the game as a guided activity, such as the Melbourne Chinese museum<sup>7)</sup>, whereas other museums provide downloadable treasure hunt apps. In fact, some museum sites provide instructions to enable children to create their own treasure hunt games, as on the British Museum website, for example<sup>8)</sup>.

Treasure hunt game creation also became a business for individuals/groups/companies, as can be seen on Watson Adventures<sup>9)</sup> and on Huntzz<sup>10)</sup>, which enable users to play and create games using a mobile device<sup>11)</sup>.

Overall, both cognitive and affective learning can occur as a result of class visits to out-of-school settings, and is influenced by numerous factors, such as the

structure of the trip, setting novelty, social context of the visit as well as teacher actions on trip and quality of preparation and follow-up experiences (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008). In relation to the physical site, Groundwater-Smith and Kelly emphasized that the following design principles will attract and engage young people: establishing coherent goals and aims; providing conditions that give the learner an opportunity to explain, inquire, interpret, apply and connect at a variety of levels and in enjoyable ways; looking for ways of attracting and holding interest; engaging young people in deep knowledge and understanding that requires of them higher order thinking; supporting varying levels of interaction with exhibits, including hands-on experiences; providing conditions for learner discovery; being alert to feedback and enabling young people to make an ongoing contribution.

## NOTES

1. <http://ualr.edu/art/art-history-resources/papers-and-projects/guidelines-for-analysis-of-art/>
2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giorgio\\_Morandi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giorgio_Morandi)
3. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean\\_H%C3%A9lion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_H%C3%A9lion)
4. <http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/vgm/index.jsp?page=265&lang=en>
5. <http://www.amnh.org/explore/kids-guide-to-the-museum>
6. <http://www.metmuseum.org/visit/itineraries/family-greece>
7. <http://www.chinesemuseum.com.au/whats-on/public-programs/treasure-hunt/>
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16. Background to the work of Groundwater-Smith and Kelly (2003-2011) can be found here: <http://web1.australianmuseum.net.au/blogpost/Teacher-Talk/The-Coalition-of-Knowledge-Building-Schools>

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✉ **Dr. Elena Sayanova**

Vocational High School of Tourism and Catering  
1, Kalinovo St.

2760 Razlog, Bulgaria

E-mail: esayanova@yahoo.com