Applying research to practice: visitors talk about museums

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What do people think the role of museums[1] should be? How do people want to engage with museums? What roles do learning, education and entertainment play in a museum visit? If museums are sites of communication what could that look like? What are the ways that museums could accommodate this?

This paper will attempt to answer these questions through discussing four research projects[2] that have looked at these issues across a range of audience groups:

- *Exhibitions as contested sites: the role of museums in contemporary society* is a three-year Australian and international research project funded by the Australian Research Council with partners the University of Sydney History Department, the Australian Museum, Sydney and the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. This project is investigating the role of museums with an emphasis on how institutions can deal effectively with the challenge of mounting exhibitions on controversial issues and sensitive topics (Cameron, 2003). The research component includes quantitative surveys with the general public and museum visitors; qualitative focus groups with museum visitors and staff, both in Australia and internationally; and a review of the role of the media, including depth interviews with journalists and museum publicists.

- *Public Spaces, Learning Places: visitors talk about learning and museums* (Kelly, in preparation) is my doctoral research about how museum visitors define learning, education and entertainment and the role of museums in lifelong learning using surveys and depth interviews.

- *Indigenous Youth and Museums* (Kelly, Bartlett, & Gordon, 2002) a project jointly funded with the Australia Council focussing on how young Aboriginal people wanted to engage with museums. Interviews and focus groups were held with young Indigenous people, as well as people working in museums and of peak

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[1] I am using the ICOM definition of a "museum" which includes art museums, as well as other institutions that hold collections and present exhibitions/public programs.
[2] More information about these projects can be found at the AMARC website http://www.amonline.net.au/amarc/

body representatives from organisations such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Department of Education, Science and Training.

- *Older Australians and Museums* (Kelly, Savage, Landman, & Tonkin, 2002) is a research project targeting Australians aged 65 years and over, including those who currently visited and engaged with museums and those who didn't. There were three phases to the project: an extensive literature review; a quantitative study via a telephone survey of Sydney and Canberra adults; and several qualitative projects consisting of depth interviews and discussion groups.

1. What do people think the role of a museum is or should be?

In the many years since I have been conducting audience research I have seen a gradual change in the perception of museums amongst the broader community. Most people view museums as having an "educational" function as well as holding collections of artefacts, although there is less understanding about their role in researching these. For example, in a recent study of perceptions of Sydney adults of the Australian Museum, 73% thought that the Museum was "educational". In general people understood that the Museum had collections (49%) and produced exhibitions (32%). Thirty-two per cent of respondents could not say what the Museum did, and only 8% associated the Museum with scientific research. This is not surprising as other studies have also found low awareness of the scientific and research role of museums among the general public (Gyllenhaal, Perry, & Forland, 1996; Kelly, 1999). Of those who mentioned that the Museum held collections (n=396), interestingly they were able to name specific content areas including fossils, rocks and minerals (28%) and Aboriginal material (23%).

1.2 Museums as Contested Sites

In the *Contested Sites* project a range of statements were developed about the role of museums in presenting controversial topics, whether they should be involved in current debates and their role in leading or influencing public opinion. In the quantitative phase people were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with these statements using a five-point Likert-scale. So far, surveys have been

conducted with four different samples through telephone and face-to-face surveys[3] in Sydney and Canberra.

Results from the quantitative studies so far are showing that people strongly support the role of museums in providing information about important and controversial issues as long as they provide mechanisms for visitors to make comment about them. For example, 90% of the Sydney telephone survey respondents and 97% of the Australian Museum *Body Art* visitors agreed or strongly agreed that museums should be *Places that should provide information resources about important topics*. In addition to this 87% of the Sydney sample and 91% of the Museum sample agreed or strongly agreed that museums should be *Places that should allow their visitors to make comment about the topics being presented*. There was moderate support for museums changing views and as places to examine critical topics. The role of museums in influencing or changing public opinion was given less support: 40% of the Sydney sample and 29% of the Museum sample disagreed or strongly disagreed that museums should be *Places that should lead public opinion about controversial topics by pushing a particular view* (46% and 43% respectively agreed/strongly agreed with this which was the lowest score of all statements). However, this did vary between samples, with surveys conducted with Australian Museum and Australian War Memorial visitors showing greater support for museums in challenging people's views about important topics. These results are being further examined and analysed for statistically significant differences between groups. In addition, another survey is being conducted at the Australian Museum to compare these results, given that the respondents in the first survey were visitors to the *Body Art* exhibition who were younger than general visitors to the Australian Museum.

These statements were further discussed and unpacked in the qualitative phase – a pilot study using five focus groups of adults, three in Sydney and two in Canberra, conducted by the research team during November 2002. Findings so far show that focus group participants exhibited strongly held views that museums should not lead public debate, but should act as an objective source of information, especially in this current political climate. People recognised that as there were so many different

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3 The ways that statements were phrased altered slightly in each survey as feedback was received. Detailed results have not been included in this paper as they are still being analysed. It is also planned

information sources available, working out which are reliable is a major challenge. Although museums were generally seen as a trustworthy source of information, there were some concerns about the ability of museums to present objective views about a topic; the ways that they could make their own position explicit; how they could present many voices and divergent/contradictory facts and points of view; and how to assist visitors to make up their own minds. Although participants in these groups were clear about the general educational role of museums, particularly in children's learning, the *Contested Sites* project is showing that when presented with difficult and controversial issues the ways they see museums dealing with these needs serious reflection on our part about the capability and authority we have to do this. Questions and issues raised included:

- How much can museums present the "facts" given the often contradictory interpretations of history?

- How will museums make choices about what to include and what to leave out?

- Who's views are given prominence? Who's view is "right"?

- How will stories be supported by objects relevant to the museum's collections and content areas?

- Why go to a museum to see topics that you can already get information about on the Internet?

- People were cynical about museums doing something just to be controversial. They generally thought that an issue needs to be relevant to what the institution is about. Topics such as environmental sustainability, population, reconciliation and social justice were cited as ones that were appropriate for museums.

- Educational or entertaining: just as there's a time and place for being serious and challenging, there is also an important component of fun and relaxation in a museum visit.

- Parents wanted support through easy to obtain and well-packaged information; lists of discussion questions/issues; fact sheets and links to further resources.

- Participants wanted museums to provide opportunities for visitors to have a say through feedback forms, suggestion boxes, lectures and discussion groups, with the option to opt out if you wanted to.

to include these questions in a national telephone survey in late 2003.

Respondents also felt that in presenting hot and controversial topics there was always a risk of offending someone. From my interpretation of the discussions it seems that solutions lie in making the role of the museum explicit through explaining where the museum stands on an issue, then providing the information and tools for visitors to make up their own minds. Museums must recognise and reconcile themselves to the fact that visitors come with a wide range of views and agendas. Some people will be seeking confirmation of their views, others are more willing to see other points of view and change their minds or question themselves. How topics are presented will greatly influence whether audiences become engaged with an issue or whether they will just walk past.

1.2   Museums as sources for information and learning

Through the many studies conducted at the Australian Museum and those in the literature, the main reason people say they visit a museum is to learn. They talk about experiencing something new; doing something worthwhile in their leisure; being with others; being challenged; active participation; increase their knowledge about the world in general; personal satisfaction and esteem; and education/learning (Kelly, in preparation). Interestingly, people also believe that being entertained is very important. For example, in a survey of 413 Australian Museum visitors, 77% said they visited museums in general to experience something new; 71% for entertainment; and 71% for learning (Kelly, 2001). A study of visitor agendas and museum learning found that people who visit museums value learning, seek it in many ways and are usually better educated: 'The primary reason most people attend museums, whether by themselves or with their children, is in order to learn. … [therefore, they are] likely to see museums as places that provide opportunities for them to expand their own and their children's learning horizons' (Falk, Moussouri, & Coulson, 1998, p.40).

People use museums as one of a wide range of information resources. An ethnographic study of family museum visiting found that a variety of diverse places for learning were accessed, including museums, airports, office lobbies and university lounges, and that families weren't bounded by the borders established by these institutions (Ellenbogen, 2002). The quantitative study for my doctoral research asked about sources used when learning something new. People were asked to rate nine

different resources that people use when learning that had emerged from my pilot studies, as shown on Table 1.

Table 1. Resources Used in Learning

| | %age rating important/very important | |
	SYDNEY PULSE (n=300)	VISITOR SURVEY (n=100)
Books/libraries	**85**	**89**
Other people – family/friends	**87**	56
Museums, galleries, other cultural institutions	**76**	**75**
Universities, formal education courses	59	**73**
Work colleagues/peers	61	67
Internet/websites	61	54
Television programs	57	41
Adult education courses	53	47
Computers/CDROMS	39	35

As this shows so far, lots of incredibly interesting results have come through. In the phone survey of 300 Sydney adults, *museums, galleries and other cultural institutions* were seen as very important as resources for learning by 76% of the population, third only to *other people* (87% of the population) and *books/libraries* (85% of the population). It is worth noting that this question was asked without indicating that a museum or gallery was sponsoring the research (Market Attitude Research Services, 2003). As could be expected, 75% of the Museum visitors rated *museums, galleries and other cultural institutions* as important, this was the second highest following *books/libraries* (89%). It is also not surprising that 73% of Museum visitors rated *universities, formal education courses* as important, compared to 59% of Sydney adults, since most visitors to museums are more likely to have tertiary qualifications (Falk, 1998; Kelly, 2001). These results are being further examined in terms of demographic patterns, including visitation, and are being repeated in other research projects and contexts.

Further to this there is a view that museums need to move from being suppliers of information to providing useable knowledge and the tools for visitors to explore their own ideas and reach their own conclusions. This is because increasing access to technologies, such as the Internet, '… have put the power of communication, information gathering, and analysis in the hands of the individuals of the world' (Freedman, 2000, p.299). In this sense, the museum needs to become a mediator of information and knowledge for a range of users to access on their own terms, through

their own choice and within their own place and time: 'The role of museums in the future … lies in legitimising information and information processes and in being an advocate for knowledge as the province of the people, not the sole property of the great institutions' (Freedman, 2000, p.303). These echo the sentiments of participants in the *Contested Sites* focus groups.

1.3   If museums are places for learning what does this mean?

In my pilot qualitative work for my doctoral research I found that people talked about learning in terms of place (where learning happened); people (who learning happened with); tools for learning (how we learn); motivations for learning; and outcomes of learning, which moved from information, knowledge and skills to new insights, changed attitudes and self-perception. So far, people describe learning through discussing their own personal *way* of learning and how this impacts on them as an individual (Kelly, 2002). These ideas are being further developed and tested through a quantitative study. A set of eleven statements about ways of learning and outcomes of learning were developed. Each statement has been rated on the importance to the individual by two samples of people so far: 300 Sydney adults via a random telephone poll[4] (Market Attitude Research Services, 2003) and 100 adult visitors to the Australian Museum through an onsite survey. The statements being tested are shown on Table 2 with results for high ratings only (that is, a score of important or very important).

Table 2. Learning Statements

	%age rating important/very important	
	SYDNEY PULSE (n=300)	VISITOR SURVEY (n=100)
Learning in a physical, 'hands-on' way	**92**	**81**
Learning when the information provided is of immediate interest to me	**91**	**83**
Constructing meaning based on my own experiences	**90**	**82**
Learning that builds on what I already know	**88**	**84**
Learning new facts	**87**	**81**
Seeing something in a different way	**86**	**82**
Learning with and through others	85	80
Learning that specifically fits with how I like to learn	81	64
Changing how I see myself	64	50
Teacher-led learning at school/other formal place	63	44
Being told what to learn	21	10

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[4] Known as the "Sydney Pulse"

A preliminary analysis of these results shows that while the top statements are the same, the order of importance differed between samples. For Museum visitors, *Learning that builds on what I already know* was most important (84%), followed by *Learning when the information provided is of immediate interest to me* (83%), with *Seeing something in a different way* and *Constructing meaning based on my own experiences* rated third-highest (82%). With the Sydney adults sample, *Learning in a physical/'hands-on' way* was most important (92%) followed by the same as the Museum visitors. *Learning new facts* was also among the top statements for Sydney adults (87%). Analysing these on demographic factors as well as statistical testing on differences between samples will unpack these results further. It is interesting to note that for both samples the statement *Being told what to learn* was rated lowest which confirms some of the initial findings from the *Contested Sites* study.

Visitors to the Australian Museum were also asked to describe in their own words what they thought learning, education and entertainment meant. Although not yet fully analysed, when asked what learning is, they said things like:

- *Passing on information or knowledge from one generation to the next.*
- *Opening the mind to new experience.*
- *Expanding your knowledge about an area by a variety of means.*
- *Process of applying information and skills.*
- *Engaging with the world in a way to discover more about it and make sense of things. Finding your place in the world.*

While education was also seen in similar ways to learning in terms of acquiring information, knowledge and skills, education was also associated with being told what to do by others. Entertainment was seen in a totally different way as a relaxing, fun, pleasurable escape from the everyday, undertaken in your leisure time and is primarily a sensory experience that could, but doesn't necessarily, include learning.

2.   How do people want to engage with museums?

The *Indigenous Youth and Museums* research (Kelly, Bartlett et al., 2002) found a lack of understanding by young Indigenous people about what museums did beyond presenting exhibitions, and little awareness of the extent of Aboriginal collections held by museums. When shown collection items, these young people enjoyed looking

at objects from "country" [5], seeing familiar people and names and making personal connections with these. They expressed curiosity and a desire to know more through referencing the past as it impacted on contemporary issues and the future. They were interested in accessing a range of cultural institutions as information centres for researching family histories using the resources of museums, libraries, archives, and other agencies with relevant information. They were also highly interested in employment opportunities at museums. The Industry consultations in this study found that targeted programs where museums worked together and focussed on the interests of Indigenous young people by offering information and resources about their rich and significant cultural heritage, as well as providing practical skills through training and mentoring programs, resulted in positive responses and engagement. In this study we found similarities with other research that we have undertaken with general audiences – young Aboriginal people want the same types of experiences from museums:

- Respect for them as individuals
- A welcoming atmosphere
- Seeing themselves reflected in content, programs and staffing
- Active learning experiences that catered for their individual and collective interests and learning styles in a comfortable and supportive atmosphere
- Involvement in program development and delivery
- Contemporary modes of information exchange using interactive, digital technologies including the Internet, film, radio, CD-ROM/DVD
- Examination of contemporary youth issues such as music, sport, technology, fashion, art, performance and, for Indigenous youth, a particular emphasis on cultural practices and family history.

The *Older Australians* study (Kelly, Savage et al., 2002) found that these people were an energetic, active and busy group of people. They are living, and have lived, through great change, adapting to new situations, and with rich life experiences upon which to draw. Older people have more free time than younger people, with most ever more determined to maintaining energetic, independent and intellectually hungry lives. This includes travelling domestically and internationally; socialising; gardening;

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[5] 'Country means the place where a person comes from, and includes family origins, physical location, cultural links and spiritual connections' (Kelly, Bartlett et al., 2002, p.41).

visiting museums and galleries; and attending theatre, concerts and cinema. Participation in family activities was very important for most of the people in this study. This group are also active users of museums: 93% of those surveyed could name at least one museum, and 82% of people aged over 65 years visit museums. Overall, around a third of the older population (35%) had a general interest in museums, with 47% keeping an eye out for special activities that they provide. Regular visitors had a good knowledge of large Australian museums and also knew a lot of smaller and specialist ones, as well as many having visited overseas organisations. While most regular museum visitors described a lifelong attraction to museums, a few people had become interested only after retiring, relating this to a new appreciation and passion for history. Respecting their rich life experiences in the content presented and recognising the contribution that they are still able to make was considered critical for meaningful engagement with museums, especially from the older Australians who were working or volunteering in museums. Although regular museum visitors were very enthusiastic overall about the services provided in Australia, there were a range of issues that older audiences wanted addressed which mostly related to their physical experiences, including visitor comfort, and meeting social needs[6].

3.   What might this engagement look like?

These studies are finding that people want to engage with museums at deeper levels beyond visiting physical exhibitions, being included through consultation and involvement, and showing respect. Coupled with this is the desire to see themselves reflected in both the products and services provided by museums. Responding meaningfully to these poses several challenges to current museological practices. The requirement for museums to think more broadly about their roles, services and impact and how this can be demonstrated will need to be addressed. Providing enjoyable, exciting and educational experiences that match both how people like to learn and current learning theory will also become a priority.

3.1   Towards a theory of museum learning

Our views of learning should be strongly focussing on learners and the personal meanings they make based on their prior experience, knowledge and interests, in a

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6 An overview of this study is being published in the June edition of *Visitor Studies Today!* (Kelly, in press) and an online summary can be found at the Environmetrics website

constructivist model of learning. Jeffrey-Clay (1997) pointed out that 'Constructivist theory holds that prior knowledge is of primary importance. Rather than learners being empty vessels into which information can be poured, they come … with a wealth of knowledge already organised. It is upon this knowledge structure that learners hang new information, creating new links to their pre-existing knowledge. To learn meaningfully, a person must integrate new knowledge into his or her conceptual structure.' (p.3). People themselves recognise that their learning needs to build on existing knowledge. My quantitative study showed that 88% of Sydney adults and 84% of Museum visitors rated *Learning that builds on what I already know* as important/very important. As this was the number one response for Museum visitors effective programs must account for the fact that people come with their own views of the world through which they interpret and respond. It is through this that people will start *Seeing something in a different way*, which is critical given firstly, that 86% of Sydney adults and 82% of Museum visitors rated this as important/very important, and secondly, that museums claim this as an significant outcome for them.

How effective and rigorous are we in meeting these requirements? The challenge for museums in providing constructivist learning was articulated by Lois Silverman (1995) who posed this question for museums: '… the more personal and subjective ways in which visitors make meaning (such as through life experiences, opinions, imagination, memories, and fantasies) are at best ignored and more often invalidated in museums, where they tend to be regarded [by staff] as naïve and inappropriate' (p.165). Is this still the case today? This is a critical issue in understanding what learning experiences museums are constructing, given that my quantitative study found that 90% of Sydney adults and 82% of Museum visitors thought that *Constructing meaning based on my own experiences* was important or very important in their learning.

Sociocultural theory is also worth exploring, being very relevant to museums as it constructs learning as a socially-mediated process where learners are jointly responsible for their learning (Daniels, 1996; Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hansman, 2001; Matusov & Rogoff, 1995; Schaffer, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978), accounting for and making explicit the '… unplanned intersection of people, culture, tools and context'

(Hansman, 2001, p.44). In a sociocultural model '… learning is not something that happens, or is just inside the head, but instead is shaped by the context, culture, and tools in the learning situation' (Hansman, 2001, p.45). It has been argued that a sociocultural approach is an appropriate theoretical framework in developing museum learning experiences and also in researching these as it accounts for meanings made within a social context, rather than facts learned, focussing on the interplay between '… individuals acting in social contexts and the mediators – including tools, talk, activity structures, signs and symbol systems – that are employed in those contexts' (Schauble, Leinhardt, & Martin, 1997, p.4). In a similar vein, Matsutov & Rogoff (1995) stated that: 'Museums, as educational institutions, provide opportunities for people to bridge different sociocultural practices and, through this process, to bridge different institutions and communities' (p.101). Sociocultural theory accounts for the information sources people use and the learning they engage in outside museums, as already mentioned as important by visitors in these studies.

Paris (1997a; 1997b) outlined the way that sociocultural views of learning could be integrated into a theory of museum learning. He argued that in order to facilitate meaningful learning, museums need to create environments that encourage exploration and enable meaning to be constructed through choice, challenge, control and collaboration. This leads to self-discovery, pride in achievements and, ultimately, learning, where visitors '… may "learn" more about themselves and their experiences through reflection' (1997a, p.23). This has been described as the culmination of a deep learning experience or "changing as a person" through developing insights and understanding, applying this in new ways and seeing the world and yourself differently (Kelly & Gordon, 2002; Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993).

3.2   What might this engagement look like?
From a synthesis of the literature and studies conducted to date it is suggested that the ways museums could meet visitor needs, enhance learning and promote engagement fall under a number of areas. These views have been further developed since my presentation at the Australian Museum/University of Technology, Sydney *Why*

Learning? Seminar in 2002[7] and are offered for further debate and discussion as a work-in-progress.

### A.	*Audience-focussed programming*

- Meeting physical needs:
    - attention to basic visitor comfort
    - plenty of seats, text that is legible, well-lit exhibits
- Sociocultural experiences:
    - exhibits designed to encourage conversation and promote group interaction
    - objects and real material to actively use and manipulate
    - mediation through knowledgeable others, who facilitate discussion and sharing of opinions and understandings
- Emotional and spiritual:
    - sensory and sensual
    - engaging, stimulating the senses
    - many layers of information
- Personal:
    - a good understanding of learners' prior knowledge, experiences and interests through a rigorous program of front-end evaluation
    - topics that people are interested in
    - dealing significant, complex issues that people think are important
    - real-life experiences explained through narratives and stories

### B.	*Experiences that are entertaining and enjoyable*

- Relaxing and welcoming
- A place you want to go to in your free time
- Active experiences:
    - physically and intellectually challenging
    - offer an escape from the everyday

### C.	*"Deep" learning[8] experiences:*

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[7] For further information and papers from this seminar see
http://www.amonline.net.au/amarc/conferences/index.htm

- Opportunities to satisfy intrinsic motivation through immersion and flow[9]

- Opportunities to engage in critical thinking and questioning

- Exhibitions that raise questions, not give answers

- Being presented with many sides to a story/issue which allows you to make up your own mind

- Multiple layers of content

- Self-direction and choice in interpretive styles and levels of information provided

- Ability to apply information to variety of other contexts and life experiences

- Intellectually challenging, but not authoritative

D. *Inclusive Programming*

- Finding yourself reflected in staff, programs, content

- Consulting audiences/stakeholders/communities before, during and after development

- Relevance through making explicit why it is important to know something

- Being clear and honest about the position of the museum on a certain topic through providing multiple voices and points of view

- Giving opportunities for visitors to have their say and make comment about what's being presented to them

- Employing a range of people from different backgrounds and communities, or using them in developing and designing exhibitions and programs

E. *Moving beyond the physical boundaries of the museum*

- Outreach via Internet and travelling programs

- Collaborative, not competitive
    - working together across the sector

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[8] A deep approach to learning is concerned with integrating new material with personal experiences, understandings and interests, relating previous knowledge to new knowledge. In this sense it is a more reflective, holistic and positive experience, with the underlying intention to understand tasks and make new meanings. It is contrasted to a "surface" approach to learning characterised primarily as an external process of remembering and regurgitating facts and descriptions, with little meaning to the individual, made up of disconnected parts that focussed on the materials or task (Kelly, in preparation; Ramsden, 1992).

[9] Flow is defined as '… a state of mind that is spontaneous, almost automatic, like the flow of a strong current' (Csikszentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995, p.70) where the individual becomes absorbed in what they are doing through an immersion experience that is intrinsically rewarding (Kelly, in preparation).

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- o complementing each others' strengths
- Using the media as an active partner (Ellison, 2003)
- Programs that are based in the community
  - o museums go to them, they don't have to come to us

4.   Conclusion: museums as sites *for* communication

These ideas are offered as a way to think about the experiences we are providing for our visitors and how we can maximise their learning and do need further debate and testing. Central to this are a range of questions about our underlying epistemological beliefs that go to the very essence of what we think the role of a museum is. In her work in art museums Knutson (2002) stated that '… a closer examination of the curatorial framework – the intentions, strategies, and beliefs that inform the development of exhibitions – may provide valuable insight into our understanding of how art museums construct learning experiences' (p.5). How are these beliefs manifested through our activities? Our historical and contemporary practices need to be looked at, questioned and continually evaluated. How will museums change to be truly visitor-centred and inclusive? How will they structure visitor experiences to provide meaningful learning that fits with how visitors say they like to learn?

This leads me to speculate whether our organisations are sites *of* communication, which, to me, suggests a passive engagement with our audiences. Are we, or should we be, sites *for* communication, promoting partnerships between the museum and our audiences, inviting them to a conversation, allowing them to explore and be entertained on their own terms, rather than being told what to think? Do our institutions currently have a '… multifaceted, outward looking role as hosts who invite visitors inside to wonder, encounter and learn' (Schauble et al., 1997, p.3)?

These issues were evident in the *Indigenous Youth and Museums* study. Our research found that youth and, specifically, Indigenous youth, expressed a desire for inclusion and involvement to both stimulate their learning and test their skills in a peer and adult arena. We felt that meeting these kinds of needs required a major shift in attitude across museums: for true engagement museums will need to provide broad access to resources and collections, while taking a mentoring role and allowing Indigenous youth to control their own experiences through curating exhibitions and program

management, as well as reflecting contemporary issues in their collection policies and acquisition programs. We suggested that coordination and mentoring of this kind may not come naturally to professionals used to different ways of dealing with diverse audiences. Do museums have the will and the leadership in place to actually do this? Will they change practices embedded in tradition? Are they willing to put resources in terms of money and people toward programs for these audiences and, as such, meet the needs of many different audience groups? It was recognised that strategic decisions about audience focus are often made at a managerial level and are usually resource-dependant. In this study we recommended ways to do this which I have adapted to encompass a broader range of audiences. Solutions lie in:

- Having accessible information available online about audiences[10] – how they learn, what their needs are, what interests them in museums

- Working together across industry and with new partners from broader areas such as the welfare and TAFE sectors, universities and private industry

- Seeking diverse forms of funding in collaboration, not competition[11]

- Evaluating outcomes – both the short-term and long-term impact of programs

- Networking/sharing these outcomes and information via conferences, workshops and the Internet.

It has long been recognised that there is the need for a change in the mindset of museums from being places *of education* to places *for learning* (Falk & Dierking, 2000, 1995) responding to the needs and interests of learners who visit and use their services, transforming museums from '… being *about* something to being *for* somebody' (Weil, 1999, p.229, original emphasis). From being information providers to information facilitators, recognising that museums are one of a range of sources that people use. Through becoming sites for communication in the ways proposed in this paper, museums will be able to meet the physical, intellectual and spiritual needs and demands of their varied audiences while remaining a trusted source of information and public learning.

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[10] For comprehensive information about audiences see the AMARC website
http://www.amonline.net.au/amarc
[11] A review of *Previous Possessions, New Obligations*, Museums Australia Inc policy for Indigenous issues in museums across Australia, found that competing for scarce resources was one blockage in implementing effective outreach programs for Indigenous communities (Kelly, Gordon, & Sullivan, 2000).

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