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EdCom Newsletter: August 2015

Chair's Corner

Our field has co-opted the term “inclusive practice” in a way that seems a bit Sisyphean. Generally understood to encompass not just people with disabilities and diverse learning styles, the phrase has become a catchall to include all cultural and linguistic backgrounds and psychographics. Translation: everyone. It’s not that becoming more inclusive is futile like rolling a boulder up a hill; it’s just that it’s a never-ending pursuit, an ongoing “practice” more than a culmination. Throughout our careers we will always find untapped audiences to cultivate and new tools to employ in the effort.

As such, EdCom reasoned it would hardly be overkill to dedicate a full year to exploring inclusive practice via professional development. We kick off our series on September 24, with a virtual chat presented in partnership with the Museum Education Roundtable that examines distance learning as a means for achieving greater inclusivity. And in October we’re offering a series of webinars on topics informed by the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Learn more below and join us!



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What Are You Reading?

Each month we ask luminaries in the field what’s on their nightstand. This newsletter features Melanie Adams, Ph.D., Managing Director of Community Education and Events at the [Missouri History Museum](#) in St. Louis, and President of the Association of Midwest Museums.

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Calendar

August 31, 2015:
[2016 Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo](#)
Session Proposals Due

September 17-21, 2015:
[Museum Education and Accessibility: Bridging the Gaps ICOM-CECA Conference](#)
Washington, DC

September 24, 2015:
[Distance Learning in Museums](#)
Virtual Book Club
Google Hangout

October 2, 2015:
[John Cotton Dana Award for Leadership](#)
Nominations Open

October 7, 14, & 28, 2015:



Stories of Inclusion:
Inclusive Practices at Cultural
Institutions
Webinar Suite

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Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis
by Robert Putnam

With the images of inequality racing through our newsfeeds and televisions each night, it is hard to image a book about inequality that brings something new to the conversation. In *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, author Robert Putnam encourages young people and their parents to share their stories of success, sacrifice, and struggle as they reach for a better future.

As a museum educator, the concept that stuck with me was how young people gained “soft skills” or had access to “social capital.” While many museums may have a robust program that brings in students from underserved neighborhoods, one trip to a museum does not always provide the access that allows students and their families to use museum resources to improve their lives in a meaningful way. Museums can help young people acquire these soft skills in a few ways.

First, create an environment that welcomes young people as they are. Second, develop programs that create relationships with teens to help surround them with caring adults. These programs should include opportunities for paid employment to help students gain valuable work experience.

Finally, museums should find ways to connect the teens to content in a way that is both meaningful and relevant to their lives. If museums can find a way to do these things, we can help all kids achieve their American dream.

Awards of Excellence

EdCom has recognized outstanding contributions to museum education since 1983. Over the next four newsletters we will highlight the accomplishments of this year's award winners. If you know a person, program, or resource worthy of recognition, keep them in mind for our next call for nominations this winter.

2015 Excellence in Programming

Peabody Essex Museum, Native American Fellowship Program

This paid summer fellowship program for Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native backgrounds provides participants with a comprehensive perspective on the theory and practice of museum leadership in the

context of a meaningful, in-depth project in a museum department. The program also includes weekly workshops, field trips, and topical presentations. Judges were struck by the track record of the program (6 years and counting), its organization and content, and the museum's strong commitment to encourage inclusive practice in the museum field.

Mark Your Calendar

EdCom has a number of upcoming events.

Virtual Book Club: Distance Learning in Museums

Thursday, September 24, 2:00 pm (EDT)

Google Hangout

On Thursday, September 24th, at 2:00 pm EDT/11:00 am PDT, EdCom will host its fourth Virtual Book Club chat. This chat will focus on the summer edition of the *Journal of Museum Education* (JME), in partnership with the Museum Education Roundtable, on distance learning in museums. The discussion will be moderated by Susan Spero, Professor of Museum Studies at the John F. Kennedy University. Panelists will be Naomi Coquillon, Manager, Youth and Teacher Programs at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History and Anne Kraybill, Director of Education and Research in Learning at Crystal Bridges Museum. The discussion will center around these questions and others:

1. Why is distance learning important for museum education, and how can we make the case for it in our museums?
2. What is being done with distance learning in museums as seen through case studies in the JME issue and beyond?
3. What are some strategies for getting started with a distance learning project, including lessons to be learned from instructional design?

[More details and the link to register can be found on AAM's website.](#)

Stories of Inclusion Webinar Suite

October 7: ADA@25 and Universal Design at Cultural Institutions

October 14: Responding to Visitors who are Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, Blind or with Low Vision

October 28: Responding to Visitors with Cognitive, Developmental and Emotional Disabilities

We are replacing our previously mentioned "Stories of Inclusion" webinar with a set of three webinars in October. This set of programs will support of our year-long programming initiative to investigate inclusive practice. Mark your calendars for the "Stories of Inclusion" webinars scheduled for October 7th, 14th, and 28th. Attend one or all three.

If you are able to host a viewing event of the webinar at your institution, please contact [Tony Pennay](#).

Calling You

Session Proposals Now Open

Session proposals for the 2016 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo are open now through August 31. Start the [submission process](#) today and take part in the iterative process. EdCom volunteers will be active in the forum and providing feedback on education-related proposals. Last year the most successful sessions were submitted before the final two weeks.

Make Us Laugh

In the hectic, fast-paced, screaming and shrieking world that is museum education, we all need a good belly laugh once in a while, right? And that is why we are asking for your best and funniest museum educator stories. Had an encounter with a visitor that still makes you fall off your chair laughing? Worked on some program that went in an unexpected and funny direction? Tell us about it at edcom@aam-us.org.

Call for Photos

The EdCom Communications team is hard at work revising your EdCom website and are looking for your pictures to share with the field. If you have any photos of museum education in action or would like to take any, please share them at edcom@aam-us.org. Please include a [photo release form](#) for any faces.

One Good Thing

Visual Thinking Strategies at Summer Fun Camp for Students on the Autism Spectrum or with ADD/ADHD

Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art

For the second year, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art educators are facilitating Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) at the Summer Fun Camp for students diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum or with ADD/ADHD. VTS discussions have a proven ability to help viewers develop observation, critical thinking, and communication skills. Last year the educators also noted an improvement in social and attending skills. For the 2015 session, formal observations are being conducted and case studies of individual campers being prepared with additional input from camp staff and parents. Campers with paraprofessional assistants were provided with a personal printed copy of the same art image being projected for the group. Paras encouraged non-verbal or very quiet campers to point to items of interest on the print and to raise their hands to contribute to the discussion. In some cases the para raised his/her own hand, sharing whatever the quiet camper noticed. Campers will finish with a field trip to the Beach Museum of Art. The program is a part of a larger initiative to integrate VTS into learning in the USD 383 school district.

The Flint Hills Summer Fun Camp utilizes community resources in the arts to help children through the summer, including drama, music, art and magic (Hocus Focus by Keven Spenser). The Beach Museum of Art is interested in how looking at visual art, in particular VTS and other methods which focus on attending and communication, can help special needs students. We feel that we are rising to the call of Lois Silverman's "The Social Work of Museums." For more information about this program, visit the [Flint Hills Summer Fun Camp website](#).

Did you know that in February 2014 AAM approved a [Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement](#)? Programs such as the Flint Hills Summer Camp are helping meet AAM's strategic priorities and EdCom's theme for this year of inclusive practice.

Leadership Lowdown

Each newsletter we'll introduce one of our committee chairs. If you're interested in helping with one of EdCom's

committees, see our [volunteer site](#). This month we meet Claudia Ocello, Chair Elect of Leadership Development and Awards.

Why are you involved in EdCom?

The Museum Education field has given me so much, I really wanted to give back.

What's your day job?

I'm President & CEO of Museum Partners Consulting, LLC, we work with museums on projects related to Education, Evaluation, Exhibition Development, and Accessibility.

What is the future of museum education in 10 words (or fewer)?

Proactively meeting and/or anticipating needs of changing audiences.

Recalling your expectations on your first day as a museum education professional, what is one thing that has surprised you about working in museum education?

I think museum educators are the most open professionals in the museum field. I never feel competition, and love that museum educators share resources, ideas, data, and methods with everyone in the museum world.

When you need inspiration as an educator, who or what do you turn to?

While there are many colleagues, blogs, people I follow on Twitter ([@Museumptrns](#)) who are filled with good ideas, I think it's crucial to look beyond the museum world and get inspiration from the field of education in general and more often, outside the education sector altogether. I try to think "How could I use that in my own practice or with one of my projects?"



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