



A Culturally and Socially Responsive Museum is a Museum for All

My role as a museum educator involves developing and delivering innovative and interactive education programs for students of all ages and backgrounds. I focus on using the museum's exhibits and collections to create learning situations that broaden perspectives and knowledge of specific subjects, and instill an aesthetic and emotional experience.

My current focus is on the Basil Sellers Art Prize 2012 (BSAP) exhibition, for which a range of English, Art, ESL, Sport, Literacy and Humanities programs have been developed that cater to primary, secondary, tertiary and adult students and teachers across a range of disciplines. The programs were largely appealing to school teachers who were given classes suited to their curriculum and student needs, leading to visits by more than 900 students from different parts of Victoria.

Within my gallery pedagogical activities, I adopt questioning strategies that are encouraged by many museum educators internationally. These include Artful Thinking Routines and Visual Thinking Strategies developed by Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, which are designed to improve literacy, communication, creative and divergent thinking skills.

By embracing social equity in education and access, I support young people to recognise their role in society at large and participate as members. Undeniably, this requires acceptance of diverse audiences on part of the institution and museum educator, which in turn fosters community, culture and diversity, best reflecting our globalised society.

A unique initiative at the Potter is the development of English as Second Language (ESL) programs for ESL Australian, international and adult students who have recently arrived in Australia or are refugees. For many of these students, visiting an art museum in Australia is a first-time experience. ESL students have been marginalised in many museums' programming. At the Potter, they learn of the sociocultural behaviour expected in museums and the purpose of museums in society, and gain insight into Australian culture and the language required to discuss art and engage with artwork meanings.

Many ESL students expressed changes in their perception toward the museum after participating in the programs - from being an institution that appeared 'irrelevant' to their lives, to a site that is welcoming, life changing, participatory, rewarding, and that could facilitate English language learning. This reinforces the need for museum educators to constantly pursue new connections, new languages, new techniques and new perspectives to broaden the relevance of the museum to broader audiences.

My approach to the BSAP education program is based on the premise of the art museum as a true centre for learning. Museum programming must reach out to all young people and education groups, including the 'hard to reach' and underrepresented. The programs are influenced by my research in museum education and the arts and by my transdisciplinary education background in Visual Culture, Visual Art, Education and Museum studies.

For more information of the Basil Sellers Art Prize education program at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, visit the website: <http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/education/basil-sellers-art-prize/>. (<http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/education/basil-sellers-art-prize/>.)

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