

Canadian Art Gallery Educators Symposium 2009

Tools for Change: Meeting Future Challenges

Case Study: Developing Gallery Outreach Policy: A Collaborative Process (April-August 2007)

Project Leader:

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Summary of Study:

Over the past three decades there have been exciting changes in the museum world. In many cases primary funding is now received from government institutions rather than private donors. This has led the majority of Canadian museums and galleries to place greater importance on their roles as public institutions. Museums and galleries are being called to transition into institutions that are welcoming, relevant, educational and stimulating to diverse publics—especially those that do not fit in the typical profile of a museum visitor. This project examined the role that collaboration can play in creating such experiences for uninitiated publics. The project developed a framework for collaborative art education between art galleries and community groups in order to inform art gallery and museum outreach educational programming policy development. The objective of this process was to discover a means to effectively foster the development of a collaborative vision for socially inclusive programming between a gallery and a community group. The proposed framework was implemented through a collaboration between *La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse* (La Centrale) and the *Immigrant Workers Centre of Montreal* (IWC). The framework is strongly grounded upon dialogical and negotiation methods often employed in business management contexts. Qualitative methods used in this research included a focus group meeting, an interview and a written reflection from the collaborating members—the gallery programmer, the gallery educator and the community group facilitator. The data from these methods served as the basis for the discussion and analysis of the framework’s efficacy through examining the fulfillment of the goals, effectiveness of the dialoguing processes and the inclusive nature of the project. This process resulted in recommendations for collaborative art gallery educational processes through the refinement of the proposed framework.

Profile of Gallery

La Centrale is a non-profit gallery and artist-run centre in Montreal. La Centrale was founded in 1973 by a group of women artists, with the intention of enabling contemporary art created by women to be more accessible to the public (La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse [LCGP], 2004, para. 3). The gallery grew out of the feminist art movement and its current mandate illustrates its goal to engage a “broader spectrum of underrepresented artists and their initiatives within established art institutions” (LCGP, 2008). La Centrale aims to provide a platform for discourses surrounding “contemporary art informed by feminist and gender theory, as well as intercultural and transdisciplinary practices” (LCGP, 2007a). In order to achieve these aims, La Centrale “attempts to represent the interests of its constantly

changing community” and to “establish a dialogue with various cultures and art communities” (Regroupement des Centres d’Artistes Autogérés du Québec [RCAAQ], 2002, p. 82). According to the RCAAQ (2002), La Centrale has achieved this through encouraging collaborations between artists and communities, professional exchanges and partnerships with organizations.

Audience Targets

The target audience for this project was a community group consisting of participants who had never visited a museum or gallery. The gallery chose the *Skills for Change* community group, which is affiliated with the Immigrant Workers Centre of Montreal. The Immigrant Workers Centre of Montreal was founded in 2000 by a group of Filipino-Canadian “union and former union organizers and their activist and academic allies” (Immigrant Workers Centre [IWC], 2006b, para. 1). The centre was created to offer a safe environment outside of the workplace where workers could discuss their personal situations (IWC, 2006b, para. 3). The IWC provides counseling on rights, popular education and political campaigns. This organization asserts that “labour education is a priority, targeting organizations in the community and increasing workers’ skills and analyses” (IWC, 2007, para. 1).

The Skills for Change program at the IWC teaches individuals basic computer literacy, in order to assist them in learning more about labour rights, and to help them find work or succeed in their current jobs. The program “incorporates workplace analysis and information on rights” while teaching computer skills (IWC, 2006b, para. 3). The program also creates a connection between the struggles of immigrant workers and other social and economic struggles, with the intention of building alliances (IWC, 2006b, para. 3).

Project Rationale

In an effort to further this dialogue between the gallery and its community, La Centrale decided to implement a collaborative project that aimed to encourage community groups of new visitors to encounter contemporary artists, art, and galleries. The gallery aims to encourage a wide variety of as many new visitors as possible to participate in the gallery through projects such as the one explored in this case study. La Centrale strives to create positive encounters at the gallery that draw upon the past experiences of its participants and fulfill the needs of each community group in a welcoming environment. The gallery aims to stimulate interest in contemporary art, contemporary art spaces and the arts and cultural community for its new visitors in a non-elitist manner. In order to achieve this, La Centrale and the Immigrant Workers Centre collaborated to develop a vision for the project that incorporated the goals of each organization, was inclusive in nature and that centred around effective dialogical processes.

Learning Goals

The primary learning goals were to facilitate an experience for this particular uninitiated public that would:

- Introduce participants to contemporary art and a contemporary art space in a non-elitist, welcoming fashion.

- Offer new information related to computer literacy that would assist them in learning about labour rights and/or assist them in finding employment or success in their current positions
- Include their voices in the development and implementation of the experience.
- Draw upon the participants' past experiences.

This project was also implemented in order for La Centrale to embark upon a learning experience. La Centrale aimed to:

- Develop a framework for creating, implementing and evaluating collaborative community outreach projects in a contemporary art gallery.
- Determine the most effective means to establish a dialogue between community groups and the gallery.

Project Components

The project consisted of an initial meeting with the Skills for Change facilitator and La Centrale's programmer and outreach educator. During this meeting the goals of both organizations were expressed. Links in the goals were then determined and a workshop that encompassed these links was developed. This workshop incorporated the computer literacy skills and notions being covered at the time in the Skills for Change program and the ideas present in the *Orientité* exhibit at La Centrale in May of 2007. *Orientité* was a photography exhibit examining issues of displacement and identity surrounding adoption. Participants examined the artworks, were engaged in a dialogue focused on the links in their experiences and that of the artists as well as the medium being used. The participants were taught how to use a digital camera and were given the opportunity to explore this medium. Once photographs were taken, the participants were taught how to upload the images and how to attach and send files from their newly created email accounts. A final dialogue was shared over a potluck lunch at the gallery. In order to determine the success of the project, a final follow-up meeting was conducted between the gallery educator and the community group facilitator. The gallery educator also compiled a written reflection that examined the efficacy of the processes.

Outcomes/Evaluation

The project's success was determined by examining the final dialogue between the gallery educator and the community group facilitator along with the final written reflection conducted by the gallery educator. The dialogue and reflection were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the dialoguing processes, the fulfillment of the goals of each organization and the inclusive nature of the project. Each of the above mentioned areas were deemed successful in varying levels by both of the collaborating organizations. Therefore, the project can be referred to as successful in achieving its intended goal. However, there were a number of areas of improvement that were called for during the reflective processes: 1) An increased link between the workshop and the goals of the community group; 2) A heightened balance of power during the planning stages of the project; 3) An increase in the visitors' comfort levels; and 4) The inclusion of a mixed-method dialoguing approach in each dialogue.

Resources

This project was conducted on a volunteer basis, and did not have a financial budget. The facilitators of the project provided digital cameras and a computer.

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