

Denver Convening Report

Leading the Future of Museum Education



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 Bank Street
College of Education
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Leading the Future of Museum Education: Challenges and Opportunities

In late-May, 2015, over one hundred museum education directors and program managers, along with several higher education faculty and consultants, met at the History Colorado Center in Denver to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the profession. This report provides highlights from the talks and discussions that took place, some of the principle findings from written activities and evaluations, as well as insights from follow-up meetings that took place in December 2015 in New York and Denver and in May 2016 at the American Alliance of Museums Conference in Washington DC. Also included is a list of resources related to some of the ideas discussed.





Facilitator Kim Popetz leads a sorting activity during the first day of the convening.

WHY CONVENE? WHAT DID WE TALK ABOUT?

Brian Hogarth, Director

Leadership in Museum Education, Bank Street College, New York

The impetus for the convening

Why did we convene? The organizers had two main goals: to assess the current state of the field and to do that from a leadership perspective. We envisioned a gathering where attendees would share questions, ideas and concerns with peers. We did not expect to arrive at answers, but hoped to identify the main issues and refine questions that might point the way forward.

We decided to avoid the “panel of experts” type of program, spending most of our time in smaller breakout discussion groups, allowing the content to emerge organically from those sessions. There were half a dozen talks scattered throughout the convening, but these were short and designed primarily to provoke further ideas.

The event drew participants from across the country, ranging from Alaska to Arkansas, from Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. While the largest number came from art museums, science centers, history museums, zoos, and children’s museums were also represented. There were several museum studies faculty in attendance from Florida, Boston, San Francisco and Philadelphia.

We are very grateful to the museum education leaders from the Denver area that volunteered to host this convening, working with Bank Street’s Leadership in Museum Education program, as well as the Education Professional Network (EdCom) of the American Alliance of Museums, to coordinate the program.

The larger context of museum education work

There was a strong awareness at the convening that our work takes place in a larger context of considerable uncertainty and social upheaval. We see tremendous technological and scientific progress all around us. We are increasingly connected, but also distracted reviewing and processing a constant barrage of information. In the public arena, there is political divisiveness and institutional gridlock. Growing inequities are breeding discontent and anger. There is intolerance and violence erupting in response to conflict and the massive migration of people around the globe. At the same time, our very existence is under threat from environmental degradation. These formidable challenges formed a backdrop to our discussions.

As educators, we want our institutions to take a more active role of addressing these broader social issues. In the past, the job of museum education was to cultivate learning and appreciation by drawing people into the museum, generating interest and focusing attention on collections and exhibitions. Now, our work is more about connecting and facilitating experiences that visitors, in part, help to determine. Our work has become more collaborative and outward in orientation.

For some of our institutions, the picture looks good. Attendance and participation is soaring, buoyed by impressive new

facilities and visitor amenities. Educational programs have expanded across many platforms, interests and age groups. But there are serious questions about real progress. Are museums and their programs well-intentioned luxuries for a small but loyal segment of the community? How can museums do more to embrace an increasingly diverse public?

The state of our field

At the convening, we asked ourselves:

- What is the state of our profession?
- What is changing about museum education?
- How is education perceived in the organization and in our communities?
- Who is benefiting from our efforts?
- What sort of impact are we having?
- How can we become better leaders?

There were a number of comments raised about the status of education within the museum. Some felt that education's 'moment' had arrived and that they were genuinely playing a stronger leadership role in the museum. Others felt that education was slipping back in importance, or even being dismantled. Some felt that education was constrained from reaching its full potential. Despite mission statements touting the importance of education, many museums appear reluctant to have museum educators represented at the senior management level. Despite these uncertainties, everyone felt very committed and passionate about the on-going potential of museum educators to engage the public in meaningful experiences with art and culture, heritage, science and the natural world. We were sure that the public needed us, even if our place in the institutions was not always clear.

Many expressed concern over career prospects in the field of museum education. The work is very demanding. There is little time off, or support for training. Positions are often poorly compensated for, relative to the cost of living, particularly in the larger cities. Younger museum educators juggle many positions to survive in the new 'gig' economy. What can we do, as leaders, to improve the prospects for, those newcomers and those considering to enter the field of museum education? How can we mentor others while attending to the constant demands of fundraising, managing programs and evaluation? What skills do we need as leaders to fill more director-level positions? How can we be more strategic about advancing the field and extending our influence?

While admitting that there were many obstacles facing our profession, we were reminded that many of the issues raised by museum educators over the last couple of decades have actually come to pass or are in the process of unfolding. Educators have developed a body of professional literature, supported visitor research into planning and evaluation and played a stronger role in interpreting collections and exhibitions. Museum educators have steadily advocated for the needs of those who experience significant barriers to participation. Museum educators have played a leading role in the transformation of the museum experience from one that was primarily about the transmission of knowledge-based expertise to one that is centered on more active models of participation and engagement. Museums today look and act differently, largely on account of the work of educators. Our status as a profession has improved. Museums will need our expertise even more in the future if they are to remain relevant and engaging. Our collective challenge, therefore, is to build on what has been accomplished, articulate the benefits of our programs in the broader community, and continue to transform the organizations in which we work.

Changing what we call our work

New questions have arisen from the increased focus on the visitor experience. For example, how does a museum balance its traditional knowledge and authority with the desire to be more open, transparent and to encourage co-creation? Will visitors expect more participation, and less learning? If ‘experience’ and ‘engagement’ are increasingly shared across the organization, will that diminish the need for a separate department focused on visitors and learning? Will museum education be marginalized or isolated to only working with schools? Will it embrace life-long learning, recognizing that many people are living longer and needing to continuously update their skills and knowledge? Will museum educators adjust to changes in formal education, or will they lead the development of interest-based or online learning activities that take full advantage of out-of-classroom experiences? Will museum educators lead collaborations with organizations and professionals outside their traditional boundaries and disciplines?

Many in the profession are dropping the term ‘education’ altogether in favor of learning and/or engagement. Education, for some, too easily equates with old-fashioned, top-down, instructional models that do not work well in informal settings where meaning is more apt to be socially negotiated than ‘taught’. Museum education has traditionally thought of itself as that part of the museum that delivers the museum’s content to the public, instead of working with the public to create various pathways to discovery and learning. In the future, programs and exhibitions will be more dialogic in form, or follow “rhizomatic” models, where participants shape and construct multiple ways to learn in response to changing conditions. These developments may change the ways we organize and do our work. Whatever we do, it will be important to make sure that a more diverse public is brought into the conversation and participates fully in the making of new iterative, relational sorts of programs and exhibitions.

How the convening unfolded

At the Denver convening, we initially broached our subject very widely, to ‘get a read’ on the state of the profession and raise issues from many angles. We were trying to assess current realities and frame the discussion around both challenges and opportunities. At the very least, we hoped that the convening would help us to refine what we needed to be talking about in the future.

After initial opening welcomes, the event began with a silent writing activity, where participants were invited to move around the room writing comments and answers to a set of questions:

- What is the most promising development in the field?
- What is the most worrisome development in the field?
- What kind of language are you using to explain the value of museum education?
- How is the role of education changing at your institution?
- Is ‘education’ an outmoded term?
- Do education offerings across institutions feel redundant?
- How much should we be following the lead of the K-12 education sector?
- What challenges remain for museums as they adapt to a rapidly changing, digital world?
- How can we encourage greater diversity in our ranks?
- What is your most pressing leadership-related question?

Following the writing activity, there was a collective gathering of responses into various categories using post it notes on the wall. Various discussion groups then formed around these posted categories. Participants reported back about:

- making the case for education’s value both inside and outside the institution; advocating for impact
- developing our story about what makes us unique from, as well as related to formal education
- reorganizing space to reduce the silo effect; developing more shared spaces for interdisciplinary work
- embedding collaboration throughout the organization
- doing more co-creative work with curators
- having more direct contact with funders and board members
- tolerating failure, and modeling the creativity we teach
- thinking less about developing (temporary) programs and more about developing (long-term) audiences
- acknowledging feelings and emotions (when planning for visitors)
- recognizing that diversity can expand all our perspectives; being prepared to relinquish some control; talking less about diversity—and doing more!
- spending more time leading and less time managing
- evaluating on the basis of shared goals, not just departmental interests

“One group noted that the purpose of education is to provide opportunities for people to cultivate a sense of agency. They defined museum education as a field or space in which we “research, design, implement and create conditions and structures for: creative play, exploration, study, observation, thinking, contemplation, dialogue, ideas, exploration, experimentation, processes, dissemination, new capacities and experiences with and without words.”

The second day was mainly group activities designed to elicit thoughts about what could be done in the future, both now and in the future. Highlights of these discussions are included in the following section.

As part of the convening, participants met at the Clifford Still Museum, engaged in some ‘throw-down’ activities organized by Mike Murawski from the Portland Art Museum, and toured new educational facilities and exhibits at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. The convening ended with a reception at the Denver Art Museum. A pre-convening group also met to tour new galleries and spaces at the Denver Children’s Museum.

The provocateurs

The main speakers at the Denver convening were videotaped and their talks are being made available on YouTube (Search “Leading the Future of Museum Education”/Bank Street College). Following are some highlights.

Kaywin Feldman, who is the Duncan and Nivin MacMillan Director and President of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, spoke about the challenges of operating increasingly large and insufficiently nimble organizations (“we have become behemoths”) within a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) global world. She noted the changing role of museum staff, including curators, especially regarding the presentation of content, and of balancing the needs of existing visitors with opportunities for attracting new audiences, recognizing that “it’s not necessarily the same tactics to serve both.” She invited everyone to consider the transformative power of art and culture, how it can change lives and make people care more about humanity.



Marsha Semmel (top) and Kaywin Feldman (bottom) address the convening.

Marsha Semmel, museum consultant, currently Senior Advisor to the National Center for Science and Civic Engagement, formerly at the Institute of Library and Museum Services and the Noyce Leadership Institute, talked about “rethinking leadership development” in the context of today’s rapidly changing and uncertain learning environment. She discussed several current programs that posit an increasingly connected formal/informal learning ecosystem that includes museums. The challenges of keeping the learner “at the center” of this system—avoiding potential fragmentation and unequal access—require such approaches as “boundary spanning leadership,” “systems thinking” (the ability to see the big picture and the relationships between all the parts of the organization and its stakeholders), and a “collective impact” orientation, in which different entities align goals and metrics to address community issues that are too big for any single organization to address properly.

Mizuko Ito, a cultural anthropologist and MacArthur Foundation Chair in digital media and learning at the University of California, Irvine, spoke to the group via video conference call. She is part of a national organization called the Connected Learning Alliance, devoted to re-thinking education along more student-centered, interest-driven lines, in which students can take advantage of open source information and expertise that falls outside of textbooks and curriculum-based boundaries. She encouraged attendees to think about making connections beyond traditional teaching models and to cultivate relationships with teens (her area of research) and that even small interactions with them can have life-changing impacts.

Jane Sillis, director of engage.org spoke to the group about work her organization is doing in the UK to foster leadership training. Jane spoke at length about her “Extend” leadership training with an emphasis on mid-career training across all art forms in the cultural sector. The program has been through several iterations, and includes residencies, mentoring and action research projects. Students and employers recognized that the programs increased confidence, listening skills, self-awareness, developed specific leadership competencies and increased the ability to “work more strategically in

“It’s not about a single technology or technique, it’s about building a much broader network and ecosystem so that different programs, organizations, and online resources are interconnected. We need schools working with libraries and museums and having a strong student voice being part of the equation... So the work of educators has more to do with brokering connections across organizations.”

—Mizuko Ito

terms of networking.” Jane’s concerns, shared by her organization and various governmental partners, included the lack of diversity in museum staff, the importance of retaining talent (including pay and performance practices) and the difficulty of maintaining emphasis on education initiatives when organizations are under pressure.

Dan Spock, Director of the Minnesota History Museum, and Shari Werb, Director of Education at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History, conducted a review of the proceedings in the form of a conversation in which they asked each other questions. Their “q and a” conversation focused on how museums can best serve the public, attract new audiences and find ways to lead institutional change. Using their own experience, they shared ways they’ve supported experimental activities, developed meaningful and positive relationships (including hybrid positions) across institutional silos, and shift-

ed orientations towards inclusion and community engagement within and beyond the museum. Finally, they identified some ‘super powers’ museum educators needed to have: persistence, tolerance for ambiguity, questioning and listening, and ‘leaning into’ the unknown.

Consultant Laura Roberts provided some final comments. A transcript of her remarks follows this section.

Moving forward

While the Denver convening provided a useful gathering for the sharing of information, it exposed as many uncertainties as it did possibilities. We generated a great deal of written responses, group work and evaluations. These have been reviewed and are summarized in the following pages, along with findings from two follow-up meetings.

In late May, 2016, one year after the original convening, a session entitled “Power Shift: Advancing New Leadership Roles for Education” was held at the American Alliance of Museum’s national conference in Washington, D.C. The purpose of this session was to share initial findings from Denver with the broader professional community, and to invite further discussion on the following five sub-themes:

- Advancing Co-creation & shared authority (discussion led by Elizabeth Baird, North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, Raleigh)
- From educator to leader (George Buss, Minnestrista Cultural Center, Muncie IN)
- Managing change (Cindy Meyers Foley, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH)
- Advancing the museum’s public value through education (Barbara Henry, Barbara Henry & Associates, Berkeley, CA)
- Redefining education (what we call ourselves) (Brian Hogarth, Bank Street College, NY)

Our intention is to keep the momentum going, develop more concrete action plans and plan further convenings. The organizers welcome your continued input into this important aspect of our work.



"Curators are gatekeepers in a world in which all the fences have come down" @KaywinFeldman

CLOSING THOUGHTS FROM THE CONVENING

Closing thoughts on the future of leadership in museum education

Laura B. Roberts

May 29, 2015

My task today is to summarize the direction of our discussions and identify some common themes.

I want to start with the concept of adaptive leadership. Marsha Semmel cited Ron Heifetz's work, which I also commend to you. I have also found useful Jay Rounds' analysis in an essay on "best practices" in exhibition development in *Are We There Yet? Conversations about Best Practices in Science Exhibition Development* published by the Exploratorium. ("The Best of Practices, The Worst of Times."). Rounds points out that in times of change, doing the same thing better or more efficiently is exactly the wrong strategy. When the environment is changing, we need new ways of operating. Best practices are about becoming more efficient – or *exploitative* of our resources. In times of change, we need to become more *explorative* as we search for new ways of operating. The problem is that as organizations and as individuals, we lose our adaptive muscle; we allow it to atrophy when times are good. Times haven't been good since 2008, but I'm not sure we have yet developed our adaptive leadership skills.

I think we heard loud and clear from Kathryn Hill, Kaywin Feldman and Marsha that we need adaptive leadership. Do any of us NOT believe we are dealing with a VUCA reality – a time of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity? By the way, if you ask your board about this, they will probably agree that they are dealing with a VUCA reality in their own work, but may not realize that museums are operating in a similarly dynamic reality, assuming – incorrectly – that we are somehow insulated from reality in our rarified institutions.

Unfortunately, there is no well-established, single path to get us where we want to go. Our "best practices" from the past – even the not-so-distant past – won't be adequate.

And all of our speakers pointed to some troubling reasons why our institutions are not being terribly adaptive. I don't think anyone wants to be managing a "behemoth." As Kaywin said, "what does it mean to be a gatekeeper in a world without walls?" Marsha introduced us to John Seely Brown who teaches us that we need to stop protecting our assets – our stocks – of authoritative knowledge and instead nurture our flows – creating new knowledge.

Fortunately, I think many museum educators routinely use the sort of skills an adaptive leader needs. Moreover, if we are going to shift our museums from a focus on objects to a focus on visitors and community, it is clear we are positioned to lead the way ...

- We are trained to elicit observations and points of view and to bring people together in dialogue. We are good facilitators. We have those "soft skills" to be boundary spanner.

- Over the last two days, we have demonstrated that we are clever, creative and imaginative. We are good problem solvers. We are good listeners
- We have practiced the skills of collaboration and partnering. We are matchmakers and brokers
- We often serve as the integrators in the institution, bringing disparate staff together
- We are often “empowerers.” Many educators are refreshingly light on ego.

So I think we bring a lot to the table as our institutions and the leaders within them begin to change the way they approach problems. But I think we also acknowledged some shortcomings over these two days. These are the things I would put at the top of the reinvention to-do list.

We are no more adept at fostering diversity than the rest of our institutions and in fact, to the degree that our programs rely on volunteers who have the leisure and capacity to work without compensation, we are perpetuating a flawed system. And we have learned over time that an institution that is not inclusive will not be successful in attracting and keeping diverse audiences – a practice that not only clashes with our values but that does not make good business sense.

Kaywin said we were rule-followers. We need to become more skilled at breaking rules, experimenting and being willing to fail. We can’t be afraid to ask beautiful – and scary – questions.

We also need to get out of our education silos, whether they are geographic (in the basement) or psychological – self-imposed or imposed by others – and think institutionally. Marsha alluded to systems thinking, a skill we all need.

We heard repeatedly that we need to be better advocates for our values, our expertise, and our audiences, yesterday from Kathryn and today from Jane Sillis. To do that we need to talk about our work with rigor and confidence. As someone said yesterday, we need to “quote the literature until you are blue in the face.”

And closely related to that, we also heard that we need to get over our squeamishness or lack of skill or lack of commitment to articulating real goals. But we have to go a step further and be mindful of how we are doing on achieving those goals and be committed to institutional learning and improvement. Yes, it is hard, but the more we duck this question, the harder it is to be an effective advocate. Moreover, if we don’t do it, it will be done to us.

And speaking of squeamish, technology isn’t going away any time soon. Almost all of us have had a device at our elbows through these meetings, but how many of us are committed to harnessing the power of technology to expand access, improve engagement and try new approaches to our work? Mimi Ito said small actions can make a big difference for kids, linking their informal use of technology to educational success. If museums = education not museums = collections, that opens us up to use any and all platforms.

Today is a great start on our planning for the revolution. These discussions almost make me wish I were back on the front lines as a director of education. But I don’t have to be, because you are doing the excellent work our field needs!



Small group report-out session at the convening.

MINING THE DATA

Laureen Trainer,

Trainer Evaluation, Denver, CO

Following the convening, the facilitators found themselves armed with loads of informal statements, thoughts, discussions and loosely based themes. However, the information was spread out across large Post-It note sheets with writing prompts; populated across hundreds, if not thousands, of brightly colored sticky-notes; captured on video share-out reports; and hidden in plain sight amid the pages of a post-convening survey completed by the attendees. They knew great information data lay within, but were unsure how to begin accessing it. Working with a Denver-based evaluation consultant, Laureen Trainer of Trainer Evaluation, a way forward emerged.

The team decided to look at information from various parts of the two-day convening and information captured in different manners: Trainer Evaluation analyzed writing prompts from the first day of the convening, a verbal share-out session in the afternoon of the second day, and an open-ended response to one of the questions asked on the post-convening survey. The team believed these three data sets provided a comprehensive summary of the types of activities participants engaged in and also represented different types of responses: 1) informal, fragment-based thoughts and ideas; 2) a verbal summary share-out of a more comprehensive brainstorming session; and 3) the more formal responses to a survey.

Written Responses to Writing Prompt

As mentioned earlier, after initial opening welcomes, the event began with a silent writing activity, where participants were invited to move around the room writing comments and answers to a set of 10 questions. This represented the broad beginning of the convening and these questions sought to jump start reflection by assessing current realities while framing the discussion around both challenges and opportunities. The team choose to analyze 4 of the 10 questions:

- What is the most worrisome development in the field?
- How is the role of education changing at your institution?
- What challenges remain for museums as they adapt to a rapidly changing, digital world?
- What is your most pressing leadership-related question?

The handwritten comments from each sheet had been transcribed into a word document; each question had between 69 and 87 responses. Trainer Evaluation read through each of the responses several times to see if trends emerged that would help to explain the data. Once a coding scheme was formed, each response was coded.

So, what did the data show? Each question is explained in a bit more detail on pages 14-18, but briefly:

- The most worrisome developments in the field revolve around chasing funding, unequal power, demand for outcomes and museum school relationships.
- The changing role of education was so varied that to code each response would create a tangle of themes, instead

the filter of attitude about the role of education was applied to the data: 52% of educators feel positive about the changing role of education in their institution, 17% are have neutral attitudes, 17% of educators feel the role of education is changing in a negative direction and 14% have mixed reactions - there are some good changes and some bad changes in relation to the role of museum education.

- Overall, museum educators are somewhat skeptical about the role of technology in museums. For example, tensions around how to provide an “authentic” digital experience; which digital technology to pursue; how to balance “authentic objects” with digital, money and training to support technology-based work.
- By far the most pressing leadership questions is how to elevate the role of museum education and articulate impact.

Verbal Share-Out Data

One data set was a video recording of a brainstorming share-out on the second day of the conference. Working in small groups, museum educators were tackling, essentially - what’s next? Where do we go from here? How do we take the ideas from the past two days and make changes at an individual level, a departmental level and institutional level? Trainer Evaluation watched the video and captured those ideas that presented in an actionable manner. For each level of discussion (individual, department and institutional), Trainer Evaluation documented the idea put forth by the share-out and any next steps listed; the group came up with 2 actionable ideas and accompanying next steps for each level. The results are on the pages 19 and 20.

Survey Question: Any particular ideas about the future of education or leadership that caught your attention? Any you would hope to implement?

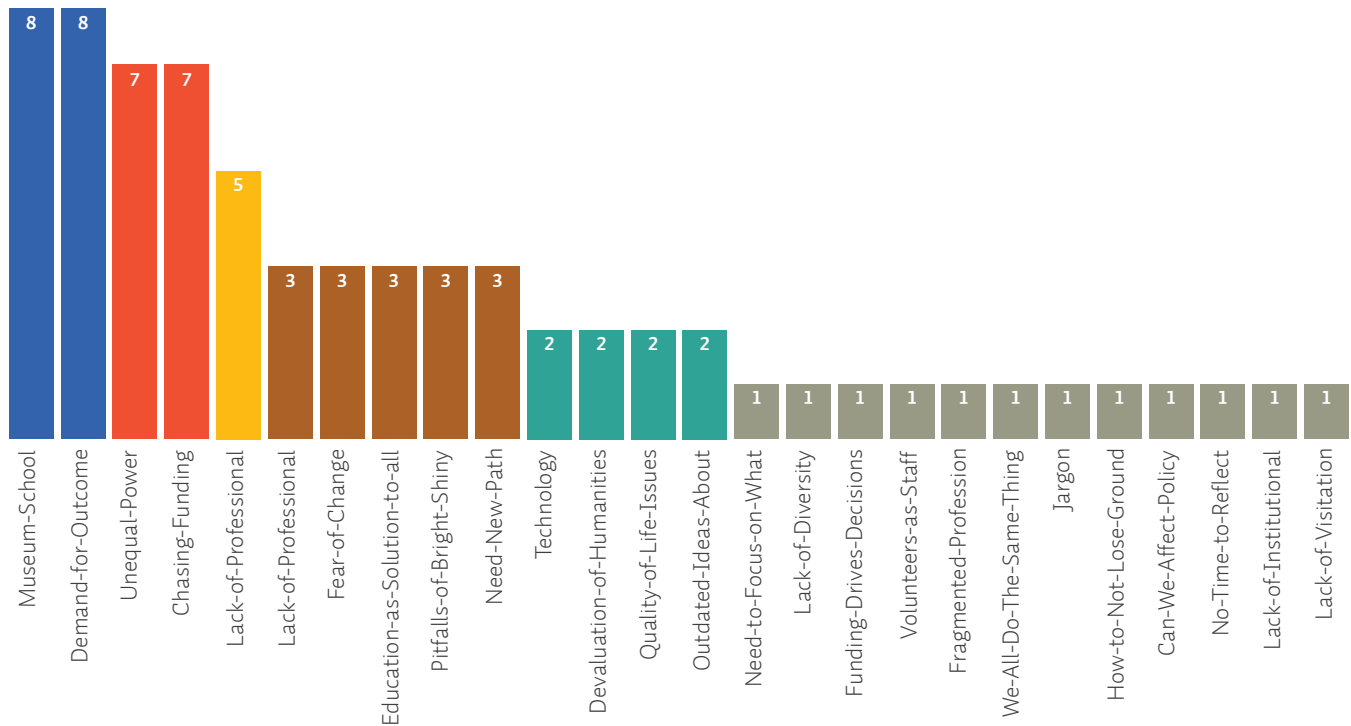
Several of the survey questions focused more on the logistics on the convening and ideas for the next time. The team thought that these questions - Any particular ideas about the future of education or leadership that caught your attention? Any you would hope to implement?- were ripe for analysis. Participants offered 26 ideas in 63 responses. Once coded, 7 of those ideas had between 3 and 8 “votes,” the others received 1 or 2 votes only.

When looking at the top 7 ideas, 50 people had noted them in their answer. They were:

1. Be the change you want to see
2. The need for reflection
3. The importance of incorporating theory into practice
4. The need to be leaders in their institutions
5. The need to diversify
6. The importance of collaborative approaches (more external)
7. The importance of building bridges and breaking silos (more internal)

‘Be the change’ appeared to be a powerful message for this group of museum educators, 30% of respondents noted this as a particular idea for the future of education or leadership that caught their attention. The themes and short descriptions can be found on page 21.

WHAT IS THE MOST WORRISOME DEVELOPMENT IN OUR FIELD?



Although funding did surface in a few other places, it was not a major focus until now. Chasing funding is on par with unequal power as the most worrisome development in the field.

The demand for outcomes is seen as a worry in the field. However, this is a dangerous “worry” as outcomes are what will help the field demonstrate impact and value. How can educators become empowered to embrace, use, and disseminate outcomes in a way that is productive, relevant and will move the field forward.

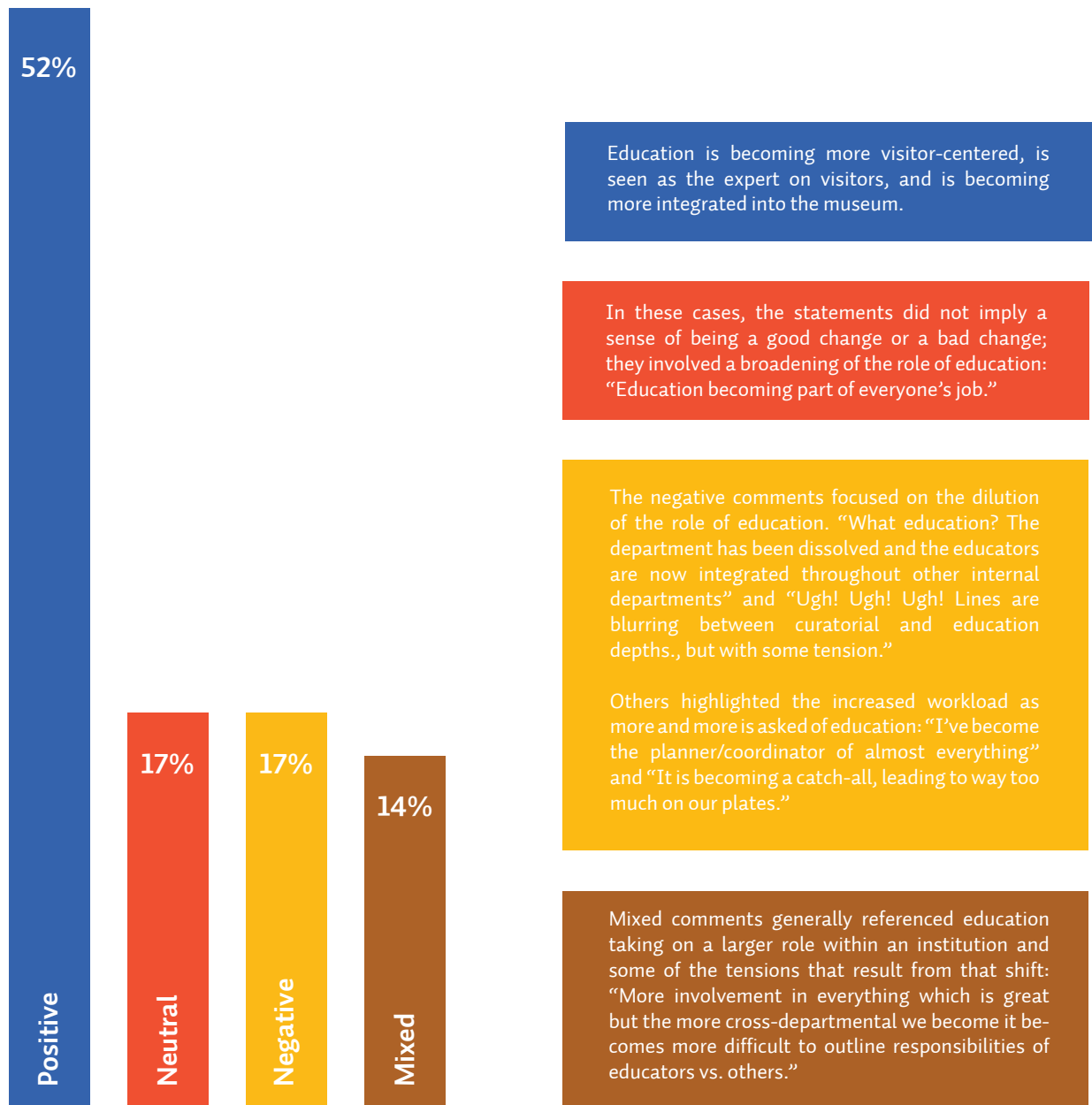
Lack of professional standing and lack professional development were seen in other areas of the convening and are linked to unequal power.

Fear of change and the pitfalls of chasing the next new thing are also concerns. Other institutions are looking for that new path, as they feel stagnated.

In some cases, education has become a diluted catch-all to solve all visitor/program/front line needs, in a sense devaluing the training and expertise of the field.

The Museum-School Relationship is worrisome to some, as education is sometimes seen as only “the school department” diminishing the expertise, training and value of the museum education.

HOW IS THE ROLE OF EDUCATION CHANGING AT YOUR INSTITUTION?



Half of the museum educators feel good about how the role of education is changing at their institution.

WHAT CHALLENGES REMAIN FOR MUSEUMS AS THEY ADAPT TO A RAPIDLY CHANGING DIGITAL WORLD?

CHALLENGE	# of responses
Authentic Digital Experience with Objects	18
Which Digital to Pursue	14
Tension Between Authentic Objects & Digital	11
Money	11
Training	9

A combination of related challenges: What digital technology do we pursue? How do we pay for it? And how do we keep up with the technology and training?

1st concern is practical and combines three key logistical factors: 1) How do you choose the right digital platform in a world of ever changing technology, 2) How do you pay for every changing technology and maintain the platforms you have, and 3) How do you train your staff and IT people to optimize the technology for the visitors and the experience?

- **“Staying relevant in a rapidly evolving digital world. One of the biggest challenges is filtering through what is out there, so that we are choosing digital platforms for their content not just for the sake of integrating technology.”**
- **“Need more training for current educators to learn how to write digital content and be able to speak “tech” terms.”**
- **Museums are expected to have the most modern exciting digital tech-how to develop sustainable, digital interacting on a small budget that don't go out of ? too quickly.”**

How do you balance technology with the real object and “authentic” museum experience? Does digital technology degrade visitors’ relationships with the objects?

The 2nd challenge concerns a deeper conversation about the “place” of digital in museums - how do you balance digital in a way that provides an “authentic” experience of interacting with real objects?

There is a range of feeling and attitudes within this category; from those who seem to have a bit of distrust that digital can enhance the “real experience”:

- **The value of the authentic “in-person” experience. Nothing compares to the real experience of a work of art conveying this to our visitorship is essential;**
- **Digital interactions should not substitute/supplement real experience (looking at art!).**

To those who are trying to find a role for digital that provides a seamless and enhanced experience:

- **Balancing real-time looking at authentic objects and the potential of digital technology of social media to share that experience more broadly.**

To those who believe that digital has a role in museum:

- **Digital experiences are an extension of the museum experience—for some audiences interacting digitally is a natural and authentic/meaningful way to experience our institutions.**

Does digital threaten museums?

The 3rd concern is more of a general sense that the digital realm might supplant the physical world of the museum. In this view, it seems people see digital as an either-or; you either have the museum and objects or you have a digital experience only.

- **From board member—if it’s all online— why does the museum still need to be open?**
- **What are museum programs providing that audiences can’t get online?**
- **Proving the worth of the physical experience of museums**
- **How to keep bricks and mortar relevant**

Collective impact - "Progress moves at the speed of trust." Think about the boundaries you connect with. Explore them as frontiers to frame and change what we are doing.

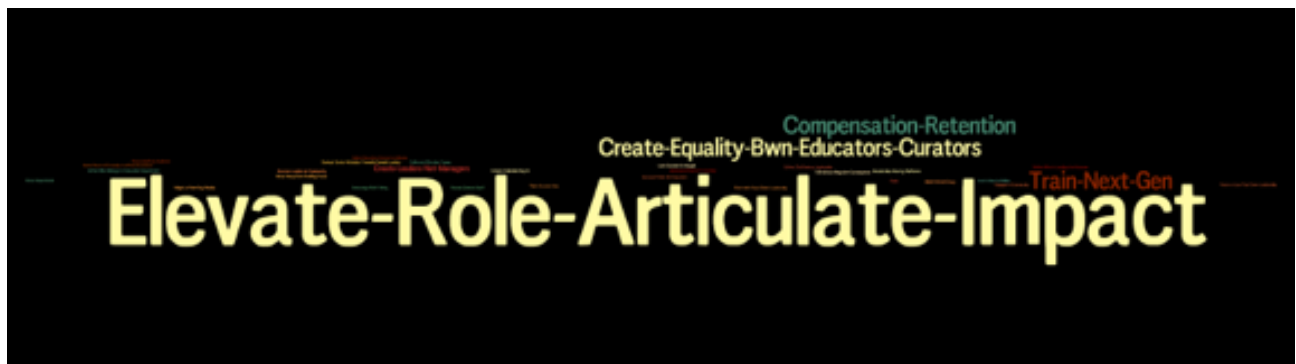
@SemmelMarsha



WHAT IS YOUR MOST PRESSING LEADERSHIP-RELATED QUESTION?

PRESSING LEADERSHIP CONCERN	# of responses
Elevate Role & Articulate-Impact	23
Compensation & Retention	6
Create Equality Between Educators Curators	6
Train the Next Generation	6

It appears that the question of how to elevate the role of individual educators to leadership and articulate the value and impact museum education as a field remains unresolved.



Seen visually, the main concern is more pronounced. The other three concerns that are still visible tie into the larger question of how to elevate the role of the educator, especially in relation to the curator. The concepts of fair compensation and how to retain good employees are also a part of the discussion around elevating the role of the educators and articulating value.

Within the question of how to train the next generation of museum educators might lay a seed of the answer - how do we equip the next generation with the leadership skills they need to work productively with curators for leadership roles? And how do we equip the next generation with the data and research they need to concretely demonstrate the impact and importance of education?

Why is this question still the leading concern? How does the field move forward from this sense of being “left out”? What concrete steps can be taken individually, within institutions, within the field, and within training programs?

IDEAS FROM THE NEXT STEPS ACTIVITY

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Idea was: get outside of your own discipline – seek a friend outside of the department, job shadow someone, take your COO/CFO/CEO out to lunch

NEXT STEP – Reach out to participants; who has done this? What have they learned? Have they been inspired, dejected? Do they have a new understanding of the role of education within the institution? Do they have a new understanding of how other departments view museum education? How have they used these insights in their work on their dealings with teams and people? Have people share their experiences.

Idea was: rework the job description – we can't keep posting what we always have in the places we always have or nothing will change within the field

NEXT STEP – Create a webinar or conference for museum educators and their HR staff to learn how to rethink their expectations, their language, and their “requirements.” Learn how to recruit and how to empower all staff to recruit. Think about what the results of this will look like in practice – what structures/expectations/norms need to be shifted within the institution? Within in the field?

DEPARTMENT LEVEL

Idea was: know why we are there and why we do what we do

NEXT STEP – Have everyone create elevator speeches for different stakeholders. What would you tell your CEO about why education is important to the museum and what you do? A trustee? A collections manager? A janitor? A parent? Create a space where people can share their “speeches” so that a collective knowledge and vocabulary builds around and within the field of museum education.

Idea was: education=museum

NEXT STEP – Take a look at professional training programs? What aspects of leadership are embedded in programs? What else needs to be there? How can we prepare the next generation of museum educators to be museum leaders – what business and political acumen do they need? Do they need content expertise, similar to curators? What would that look like?

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Idea was: provide permission to make the change

NEXT STEPS – Reach out to participants and ask them to reflect on this. As leaders in the field (everyone had a managerial role and many participants were at the executive level), are they willing to give their staff permission to take risks? Make change? Who has examples of a success story? Who has examples of where the change did not work? What did they learn from that? Are they afraid to continue to make change after “being bitten” once? What do they need as leaders to help them empower their staff?

Idea was: look beyond museums for models and trends – adapt and apply

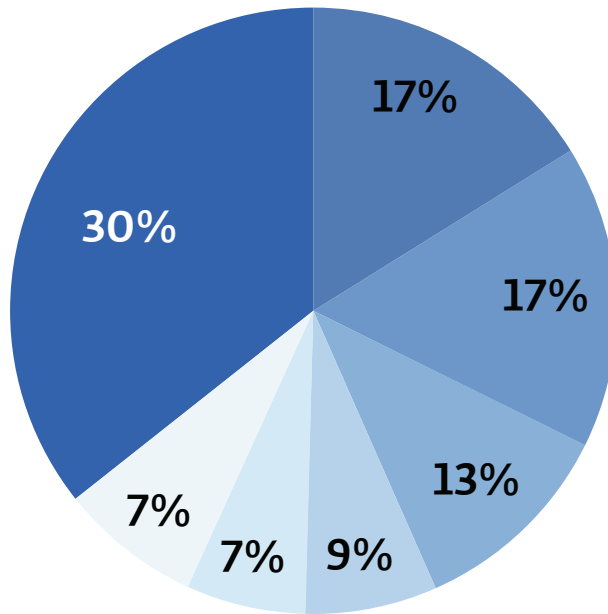
NEXT STEP – Can Bank Street (or some other institution or person) develop a repository of models and trends; something along the lines of *Dispatches from the Future of Museums* (sent out as an e-blast to subscribers and archived as a blog), where interesting thoughts, ideas, stories, reports are gathered (which is more than any museum educator has time to gather) and disseminated to the field in a manner that is an archive and searchable.



Next steps activity on the second day of the convening.

SURVEY QUESTION:

ANY PARTICULAR IDEAS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION OR LEADERSHIP THAT CAUGHT YOUR ATTENTION? ANY YOU WOULD HOPE TO IMPLEMENT?



Be the Change
Educators were inspired to start acting on issues in their field. They reflected on the ways they have sought change in the past few months.

Need to Reflect
Educators absorbed a lot of information during the conference and wanted time to reflect.
Potential follow-up questions: What have they come back to in the ensuing months? What conversations have they started? Stopped?

Incorporate Theory
Museum educators seemed struck by the concepts of adaptive leadership and collective impact that they heard about during the conference. They recognized the need to incorporate theory into their thought processes, discussions, daily work and future planning.

Museum Leaders
Moving towards becoming museum leaders, not just leaders in the education field.

Act to Diversify
“Diversifying the audience, social inclusion, building cultural competencies of staff.”

Bridging Silos and Breaking Barriers

Collaborative Approaches



Convening participants gather at the Clyfford Still Museum in Denver for an after-hours “throw down”.

NEXT STEPS—RE-CONVENINGS IN DENVER AND NEW YORK

Kim Popetz

Independent Consultant, Boulder, CO

The final activity of the Denver Convening in May 2015 produced a wide variety of suggestions for moving forward. In an attempt to hone in on the most constructive means of proceeding, as well as taking measure of how participants felt about what was accomplished during that time and how it might impact future work, two meetings, in New York and Denver, took place in December 2015. The meetings were planned regionally such that the New York meeting drew participants largely from the immediate metropolitan area but also individuals from Massachusetts, North Carolina and Ohio. Likewise, the Denver meeting hosted mainly those from the greater Denver area with professionals joining from Chicago, Indiana and St. Louis. In all, 11 museum professionals were present at each meeting. In each location, at least one person was added who did not attend the first Denver meeting, to add additional perspectives.

The general schedule for both meetings was the same but the participants brought their own interests and concerns to bear, creating two different trains of thought. The Denver meeting spent a fair amount of time analyzing the ideas brought forth at the May Convening, while the New York gathering focused on the future. Despite these differences there was a great deal of overlap in subject matter.

Diversity was a topic among both groups, with the New York group noting the importance in continuing to address issues such as diversity, accessibility and inclusion moving forward. Those in Denver noted that, from an audience perspective, people of color were not historically welcome into museums and still don't think of them as welcoming places. While pondering which portion of the public museums serve, the New York group posed this question: Are museums picking up those left behind by the divide between those with access to quality education and those without?

Low pay was a major topic for those in the east who noted that the museum field is losing professionals to higher paying jobs elsewhere. The group highlighted the need for a living wage while the Denver group noted that high turnover due to low pay hurt not only the bottom line but the ability to find qualified professionals.

The need for **professional development** was cited by all participants with the Denver meeting attendees expressing frustration with budgets cuts hitting professional development first and the New York group wishing for professional development outside of higher education. The groups raised two important questions: Is there a good model for creating a museum education mentoring program to cultivate the aspirations of young people just entering the field? Is it possible to create more training programs that will give museum educators the business skills needed to rise into leadership positions?

The need for **strong leadership** came up in many ways as the discussion moved forward. People noted that strong leadership was needed to orchestrate the vision statement and mission for each institution and to ensure that museum educators have the power to say no to funding, to projects, to apparent opportunities that may dilute mission and programming. Many wondered, how can educators tap into their own capacity for leadership within their organizations? Certain ideas

were offered as touchstones on this issue. Those in New York discussed a need for visionary thinking, political savvy and practicality while the Denver group saw a need for education departments to define their value, purpose and relevance in order to move forward.

Both groups pondered: What is preventing educators from being more **strategic** in advancing the field? Some feel the exhaustion from a constant push to innovate. Others feel the tug of the continual churn of daily programs taking them from the institutional work needed for long-term transformation. One noted the struggle to devise programming that reflects the shift to an audience-centered museum while not shutting out the public who is most comfortable with a collections-centered model. Finding, or creating, equilibrium in the museum education world came up repeatedly in multiple guises as the groups searched for a vision around which to rally so that the field can move forward.

Looking back at the first Denver meeting, one challenge was how to balance time spent addressing individual organizational issues versus the meta-issues such as diversity. What should be done to follow up and achieve greater focus? Many concrete suggestions were put forth about how to share data gathered at all the meetings and explore options that will produce concrete results. Both groups sought to take advantage of the interconnectedness that can be obtained on-line by creating an archive and blog. The archive would include the notes, transcripts of speakers, silent question activity, evaluation, and analyses from all three meetings. It would also include a tools section and a blog for thought-provoking articles and allow space for discussion. New York participants suggested committing ourselves to a future publication as a means for spurring people on whereas the Denver group felt a traditional paper or publication might be too static for the dynamic discussion needed to provoke real change.

Both groups viewed the blog as a space that could reach those at either smaller institutions or without the funding to attend future gatherings. A corollary suggestion was to create manuals for participants to take home from the next convening. The manuals would be designed specifically to guide those who want to lead discussions or activities with local or regional groups. Participants also suggested that professional development tools should be designed for teaching adaptive leadership, budgeting, fundraising, and other skills needed for educators to become leaders in the museum world.

Some very specific ideas were proposed regarding a future convening. The Denver group suggested, “creat[ing] a two day catalyst, that is highly actionable, for thinking and doing. It will build critical thinking and leadership skills for visitor impact and relevance.” They further suggested that a day of TedX style talks should be paired with a second day of discussions within affinity groups. Both groups put forward the idea that participants invite a colleague from their institution, but not their department, to attend with them. This thought was born from earlier discussions regarding the disconnect that can develop among the various departments in a single institution, particularly between curators and educators.

If a single theme runs through all of the above suggestions, it is that whatever comes from these discussions must be **actionable**. Participants at the meetings professed a desire to see something concrete come about through their work together. Several fretted aloud that this would turn into yet another series of meetings with no tangible results. The feeling that underscored those statements highlights the urgency of seizing this moment.

Selected tweets* from Denver by George Buss @ThatFedoraGuy #leadmuseum

🐦 Go on a big relationship-building mission with your content holders (curators, scientists, historians, artists, etc)

🐦 How much time do you spend inspiration shopping? You probably could do more.

🐦 If the future is a dialogical museum, we need to build skills of collaboration, creativity, communication & critical thinking. Developing skills of listening, coaching, reflection, and mentoring can be beneficial to museum

🐦 Time to stop whining and complaining, museum educators - Learn to say no. Advocate for yourself. Articulate your value. Move towards your anxieties, drink someone else's kool-aid.

🐦 Is education's role "building community" or fostering a culture within the organization for the institution to engage the community?

🐦 Museums think about schools more than schools think of museums. Is this a model of a bad code-dependent relationship? Different models?

🐦 Contextualize the interests of your museums in terms of a larger social problem. Think about your audiences as "communities of affinity."

🐦 If exhibits are the main public offering by museums, how can educators get more involved in their creation?

🐦 Develop a meaningful shared purpose, not learning for the sake of learning, but learning as a side effect.

*tweets lightly edited for comprehension

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Diversity is difference. Inclusion is a choice to embrace that.
Surround yourself w/ difference & let it change you. **@danspock**



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Marsha Semmel, Consultant, Arlington, VA
Greg Stevens, American Alliance of Museums, DC
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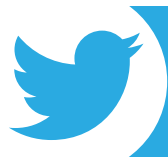
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If you are interested in learning more about the convening, related programs, participants or future convenings, please contact *Brian Hogarth* at bhogarth@bankstreet.edu.



Stop thinking like educators and start thinking like leaders - **Laura Roberts**

