From a Project Culture to Long-Term Partnerships

Connecting Art and Vocational Education (CAVE)

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ABSTRACT

In this practice-based article, we address issues on user participation, museum learning and cross-institutional partnerships. We present a three year-project by which our aim is to reach out to new users – teachers and students – who are otherwise unlikely to participate in art and culture in a museum by developing methods for working across institutions and cultural barriers. We present three examples of working with vocational institutions and discuss two central questions: 1) How can we develop dialogue-based partnerships with educational institutions, such as vocational colleges, meet their specific needs and combine our resources and competences? 2) How can we develop a stronger user orientation in dialogue-based learning sessions and communication in the museum? Based on theories on dialogic learning and partnerships, respectively, we argue that a workshop model, that we have been working on and developed further in a dialogue with institutions and institutions, can be a tool for creating a meaningful learning environment for new users and young students. The article ends with a range of (self)critical reflections.

Key words
participation | museum learning | cross-institutional partnerships | facilitating participatory art | cultural projects
SAMMENFATNING


Nøgleord

deltagelse | museumslæring | tværinstitutionelle partnerskaber | facilitering af deltagelsesorienterede kunst- og kulturprojekter

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In this practice-based article, we present and discuss our ongoing process of developing new methods for working across institutions and cultural barriers. The institutions involved over a three-year period are Brandts – Museum of Art & Visual Culture in Odense and a number of educational institutions on Funen, only recently introduced to the museum context. Although we are still at an early stage of our project, our experiences and observations have raised questions that call for a critical reflection and for locating the project within the discourse of cultural transformation, participation and social integration. A central question is how to integrate the participatory agenda in our practice and manage the transformation of the museum to meet new users and new needs, and to find methods for sustainable partnerships.

In the article, we record three workshops in the museum with a cross-institutional dialogue. These records are not classic research case studies; rather, they record what we find useful for our own reflections and discussions among colleagues. The purpose is to qualify the knowledge we have gained as a museum to be shared with the partners involved in future discussions and cooperation. An external evaluation will take place in the third year of the project. Meanwhile, this paper aims to clarify challenges and questions we need to look deeper into:

– How can we develop dialogue-based partnerships with educational institutions, such as vocational colleges, meet their specific needs and combine our resources and competences?
How can we develop a stronger user orientation in dialogue-based learning sessions and communication in the museum and scaffold meaning making experiences for new users?

Reaching out and engaging with new visitors is part of the changing role of the museum and the museum as platform for social learning, inclusion and democracy simultaneously forms part of the political agenda as described in the Ministry of Culture’s report in 2008. As also expressed in the Danish Museum Act, “museums’ social role is to be strengthened, and the museums are to contribute to society’s development and the general education through experiences, inspiration, learning, critical reflection and active citizenship” (Jensen et al. 2015:4).

However, as the National User Survey in 2014 showed,1 museum users do not reflect the national demography in terms of social and educational backgrounds and cultural diversity. One traditional means for reaching out to new users has been through learning programmes and school visits, which reflect the curricula of primary and secondary schools. This has also been the case with our three-hour workshops at Brandts. However, since 2010, we have experienced a growing demand from schools and institutions offering vocational education for young and adult students, which has forced us to rethink our approach to communication, content, activities and pedagogy.

Inspired by Reach Out projects in the UK and Denmark, we began developing long-term partnerships with 10 institutions in 2014, with four partnerships expected to be sustainable after three years. The aim of this is to ensure that participating in our learning programmes becomes a part of the annual programme for these educational institutions.2 Through dialogue with teachers, we are developing content and activities that meet students’ needs, not only to fulfil the curriculum, but also to provide a meaningful and memorable experience for students as well as teachers, and to provide “a safe space for unsafe ideas”.3 To support this, a platform has been established where adult learning, motivation, cultural references, and the scaffolding of creative learning pro-

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1. National user surveys regarding museums have been conducted in Denmark since 2009. Annual reports are published.

2. The Vocational Colleges have skilled students within their specific fields. The age range is from 17 to 50 years of age, while a major part of the education on offer is apprenticeships. These students are focused on training for their future professions, such as bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing, painting and decorating. The Health Care Assistant School teaches a wide age range of students (from 18 to 50 years of age). Currently, classes are divided into different age groups. One of the challenges with these schools involves the difficulty in linking the immediate curriculum with art. In the Production Schools, the age gap is between 16 and 19 years of age. The challenges in the planning processes include their continuous acceptance of students, which means that teachers never know for how long a period of time they will have a certain number of students. The practical skills of these students can appear to be rather poor, while some students experience low self-esteem and feel insecure in a museum environment. Vocational Schools have a number of vulnerable students, some of whom show talent in particular fields without having had the opportunity to develop general skills.
cesses are discussed. Museum educators and the project coordinator maintain discussions with teachers and their management and since all educational institutions are dynamic as to ongoing changes in tasks and curriculum these questions are central and form constant challenges for all. Students from the institutions involved are a heterogeneous group and the institutions vary in many aspects as well – from curriculum and organization to students’ background, age and motivation.

**USER ORIENTATION AND LEARNING AT BRANDTS**

With the construction and opening of the new Brandts – Museum of Art & Visual Culture in May 2013, the museum gained an opportunity to embrace art history and contemporary art along with everyday and popular culture. This is reflected in the museum’s programme with exhibitions entitled *Tattoo, The Sea, Danish Fashion Now* and *Selfie*. As an institution, Brandts stands on traditions from former institutions with projects and learning programmes, that exhibit a high level of user participation, but also presents challenges in terms of priorities within the organization, as described by Simon (2010). With the museum’s new profile, exhibitions can, to a higher extent, serve as a social learning space for users’ production of knowledge and by embracing visual culture we can establish a more user-orientated perspective within exhibitions.

All age groups have free access on Thursdays from 5–9 pm, and we try to create an informal atmosphere with activities that raise curiosity and support the social experience. This has been crucial in our strategy for attracting and engaging young visitors and meeting their various needs.

With Brandts’ new profile, representation within exhibition narratives has been opened up to a wider range of users. According to Hall (1997:8) an exhibition can be described as a “system or practice of representation and therefore works like a language”. When scaffolding learning processes in the museum context, we aim to define our role and, as Hein (2005) points out, focus on the visitor, not the content of the museum. To work from a visitor-oriented perspective means knowing more about the visitors, their interests, needs and expectations (Falk 2009). In the actual project, we seek information about the students by visiting their institutions and through a dialogue with the teachers.

In the project to be addressed here, our target group comprises young and adult users who are unlikely to visit the museum on their own, with peers or family members. They fit into the “recalcitrant” category, which is a term used by

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3. This expression was used by Elaine Heumann Gurian, Australia, already in 1996. Gurian believes that museums are civil institutions capable of addressing issues of social justice, they can play a unique role in their communities and are able, if they so wish, to represent and advocate on behalf of minorities and indigenous groups.


5. This includes Mediemuseet, which was part of Brandts until 2012.
Kobbernagel et al. in a survey published in 2015. The report stresses that schools and educational institutions play an important role in terms of motivating unwilling visitors to become museum users. As museum educators, we are aware that a visit planned by a teacher by no means ensures success. In her research on museums as social learning spaces, Lynn Dierking recommends: that museums “rely less on school administrators and teachers to design school visits”, that we talk to users directly (the students) and “create meaningful before, during and after visit experiences so that the museum visit is valued by the students because it serves a purposeful function, and not just a day away from school” (Dirking 2013:206). Dierking mentions that some museums in the US even require a commitment from teachers that the museum visit will be used in meaningful ways.

LEARNING PROCESSES AND WORKSHOPS AT BRANDTS

As pointed out in comments to the Danish Museum Act, the museums are to contribute to the general education meaning that all citizens should be able to benefit from a museum visit. However, for this to happen, we need to recognize that visitors and students in general have different backgrounds. The learning and production of meaning in the museum is based on the interaction between the museum and visitor. As expressed by Georg Hein:

Constructivism represents the view that learning is an active process in which we as learners make meaning – construct concepts of the phenomena we encounter. In order to convert sensory input (what we see, hear, feel and so on) into meaning, we rely on our previous experiences and on our previous meaning making. Thus, everything that we bring with us to any new situation – our culture, language, family background, companions on the visit – influences how we interpret our experience. (Hein 2005:359)

The idea that meaning is not something given by the museum to the visitor forms the basis for the workshops. Dialogue plays a vital role as “production of meaning takes place though a dialogical interaction and cooperation between people situated in a specific context” (Dysthe 2013:45, translated by authors); in this case, a learning setting in an art museum. Dysthe’s notion of dialogue is based on the Russian philosopher and literary critic Bakhtin’s thesis, in which one of the core values is polyphony. The art museum has a strong potential for polyphony and organizing learning sessions, in which students’ expressions contribute to the sharing of different ways of understanding the world and ourselves. In the dialogue, we facilitate, about art and visual culture, we are not seeking authoritative answers; rather, we seek to learn to see things from different perspectives and explain our points of view.

Teaching at Brandts is primarily organized as three-hour workshops, which are planned and conducted by the two educators at the museum. The workshops are based on current exhibitions at the museum. Most of the exhibitions are
temporary and, as such, the workshops are constantly adjusted and changed. In addition to these time-limited workshops, more permanent workshops have been developed based on the museum’s collection of fine art and photography. The permanent workshops cover subjects such as press photography, portrait photography and *The Art of Colours and the Colours of Art*. Approximately 4,500 pupils and students participate in our three-hour workshops annually.

Our project with the educational schools is planned through dialogue with teachers and with a high priority on leaving significant room for the specific group’s or individual user’s voice and participation. The workshops are in this respect based on our experiences gained from other school and groups. Learning based on dialogue in art museums is well described and analysed by Olga Dysthe. According to Dysthe (2012), the educator’s role is to ask *authentic questions* that are open-ended and invite participation and new perspectives. The dialogic educator makes the participants’ answers valuable by incorporating them in the learning session.

The students’ own visual production is a central element in our workshops. Working with the visual language used in the exhibitions, students are given an opportunity to express themselves creatively and their productions then form the basis for further reflection and dialogue. Austring and Sørensen describe such aesthetic learning processes as “a way of learning by which, through aesthetic mediation, one transforms one’s impressions of the world into an aesthetic expression and, by doing so, is able to reflect what one communicates about oneself and the world” (Austring & Sørensen 2006:107, translated by authors). When participants share their experiences and reflections and present their productions, the educator’s role accordingly is to create a secure and safe space in students’ contributions and thoughts are made valuable.

At the beginning of every workshop, it is essential to make the students feel welcome and acknowledged. At the same time, this is when the museum educator receives the first impression of the students and listens to their previous experiences. Questions are our tool at this initial stage. At the outset, easy questions which can help to open the dialogue, are put, while more complex questions are posed at a later stage, to the extent that, in some cases, the museum educator may not necessarily know the answer. These questions establish an agreement that students’ answers are taken seriously and ensure that the students’ contributions are considered, in Dysthe’s view, valuable by being incorporated in further dialogue, shaping the content of the workshop. However, a balance between student input and the overall direction of the workshop is needed. The ideal workshop uses a combination of what Martin Nystrand refers to as authentic questions and mini-lectures (Nystrand 1997).  

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6. Authentic questions are questions with no predetermined answers, while mini-lectures are small-scale monologues that provide students with the necessary inputs for continuing the dialogue.
As a next step, the general direction of the workshop is set in such a way that we establish a common language based on a mix between the theme of the workshop and the students’ answers. This part is more heavily based on mini-lectures about art and less on authentic questions. By sharing his knowledge about the exhibition and related topics, the educator aims to provoke curiosity and promote new perspectives. However, it is still important to make room for student interaction, as well as acknowledge and apply students’ answers. This can, at times, be challenging and sometimes the museum educator has to take the workshop in a new direction, depending on the dialogue. This shift between questions and mini-lectures can take place in the learning centre or while attending one of the exhibitions.

The workshop proceeds through an assignment. This part of the workshop is not based on dialogue, but on making sure that the given instructions are as clear as possible. Simon stresses the importance of scaffolding learning processes, as well as any other participatory activity in the museum, because it helps people feel comfortable engaging in the activity and directs them towards a range of possible actions or responses to an exhibition (Simon 2010). In the assignment, the students work with a creative project. As Simon explains, “successful co-creative projects scaffold participation to help participants to achieve their goals without prescribing the outcome” (Simon 2010:269). There is, however, a subtle line between guiding students in the right direction and interfering or even disturbing their learning processes.

Students next present their work and obtain a response according to how the assignment was interpreted and performed. They discuss and use new expressions and concepts. This step of the workshop is extremely suitable for discussion and dialogue, given that it is based on student productions and experiences. Many participants feel eager to participate and share their opinions at this stage. Following student presentations, YouTube and Dropbox are used to share student productions and make them accessible. It is considered important that the workshop results in a tangible product, which can be used when back at school or simply to nail down the learning process at the museum. These productions demonstrate that students were involved in shaping the content of the museum visit.
OBSERVATIONS DURING THREE WORKSHOPS

In the following, we report on three workshops during the project at issue here, and the cooperation with the teachers.

Case 1: Stonemason apprentices

Prior to the visit, the teacher of social science made clear that the majority of the students had never visited the museum. They were at the end of a three-year education programme and preparing their apprenticeships, which also meant they might not approve of unnecessary interruptions. In the planning process, we agreed upon press photography as the most suitable topic/theme that could give the students new perspectives on topics from the social science class that the teacher was teaching. The teacher found that challenging the students in the workshop with their own production was important and a great opportunity.

The museum educator suggested that the workshop was run without making any significant changes in the standard set-up. However, the teacher expressed concern that three hours without a break (which is how the workshops are usually carried out) might be too long and a few extra breaks were agreed upon. In general, the teacher showed a great willingness to take a risk by bringing her students to the museum. She wanted the visit to be a success, but expressed her concerns regarding the students’ performance and attitude towards the museum.

We were informed that approximately 13 to 15 students would attend the workshop, but only nine showed up at 8:30 on a Friday morning – the only time the college could fit-in a three-hour workshop (the museum opens at 10:00 and workshops are usually during opening hours). Thursday night is popular among students for going out and some had chosen to stay at home, while others showed up for the workshop having not slept at all. One student was having a beer while waiting for the workshop to begin. At the beginning,
the students were very noisy and showed no interest in the museum. However, during the PowerPoint presentation, students’ attitudes changed. They were still noisy, but their energy was directed at asking questions during the presentation on historic and iconic press photographs. The teacher helped by initiating interesting discussions and, at the end of the presentation, the chaotic start had been resolved and the students were excited about starting the photo assignment. In groups of two or three, they were asked to work as photographic journalists; they were provided with cameras to go out in the ‘real world’, find a news story and document it with the camera. Generally, the PowerPoint presentation is followed by a guided tour of exhibitions, which connects with the theme of the workshop. As the museum did not open until 10:00, the visit to the exhibitions took place at the end of the workshop.

The students were given a deadline for their photo assignment (20 to 25 minutes) and had to return to the classroom in time to edit the photos for the class presentation. The teacher was concerned that the students would not return in time, but all the students came back prior to the deadline and with a fair selection of photos. Despite the topic for the photo assignment being fairly open/unspecific, all the groups managed to find interesting stories as well as used some of the theoretical terms introduced at the start of the workshop. They all showed a good understanding of the issues that a press photographer deals with, along with what it takes to create an interesting news story. One group used a pub visit for their assignment and produced an eye-opening story about society’s outcasts.

The students showed great spirit; their productions were interesting and proved that they had paid attention when introduced to the assignment. Finally, they were taken on a tour through the museum, where none of them had previously been. While the focus was on the links between press photography and the exhibitions, there was also time to take a closer look at an exhibition under construction. This seemed relevant, as many of the skills taught in their college are featured in the construction of exhibitions. The students were fairly surprised when they realized that their skills could be incorporated in a museum. In the evaluations of the workshop given a few days later, it was pointed out that they had been positively surprised by the museum visit. Although they had all expected it to be boring and of no relevance, this had not been the case. It was emphasized that they had felt welcomed at the museum.

The dialogue between the teacher and the museum educator was dynamic, with many adjustments and a willingness to take risks on both sides. The shared goal was to create a great experience for the students and open up the museum as a place for inspiration, learning and critical reflection. The scaffolding of the learning process in the workshop is still considered crucial in order to ensure dialogue, flow, speed, hands-on activities, and the students’ own presentations.

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7. The presentation is used to establish a shared oral and visual language, as well as a common understanding of the practical assignment in hand.
and reflections. When altering the methods as willingness to compromise, the museum educators might lose the grip of these complex learning processes, as the following example will show. Within the first 18 months on this project, this specific college has participated in 14 workshops. Very few changes have been made to the programme and many of the concerns expressed by both teachers and the museum prior to the workshops have been proven redundant. Responses from both teachers and students have been predominantly positive.

**Case 2: SOSU – social and health service assistants**

Prior to and during the workshop, the teacher clearly expressed what they wanted the outcome to be. In the planning dialogue, concerns regarding the workshop’s content were expressed and, as a result, major changes were made to meet the needs and expectations of the teacher and the students. The teacher wanted the workshop to be an extension of the curriculum, while, for the museum, it was important that the workshop was more than a ‘class away from school’. There had to be a clear link to the exhibitions and, in the communication leading up to the first workshop, the goal was to find a compromise as well as make sure that the planned workshop and museum visit would meet everyone’s needs.

In this group, most of the students were female, while the age variance was notable: the youngest student was approximately 20 and the oldest was approximately 50 years old. In this workshop/partnership, students had the most diverse backgrounds, cultures, languages and experiences. It was agreed that the subject of the workshop would be social media and how we use social media to communicate and to make sense of our lives through shared images. The teacher asked for a longer period of time to ensure that there was time enough for discussions and to link the workshop to the school’s curriculum. Therefore it was extended to a five-hour visit.

The workshop started with a group discussion, where a range of Instagram profiles were analysed to see how users of this social media platform use images to stage notions of the self. The students contributed with experiences from their own use of social media as well as questions and concerns regarding the influence that social media has on our everyday, social life. The collection wing of the museum, which includes classic paintings, sculptures and photographs, was used to discuss how images are used to tell stories, and how we perceive these stories differently depending on who we are and where we come from. In this dialogue, the students had the opportunity to share experiences and perspectives and to reflect on the diversity within the group itself. Finally, the students were asked to create their own stories about the use of social media using cameras and elements of the museum experience. These photographic stories were made into short videos and presented to the class at the end of the workshop.
In particular the discussion at the start of the workshop was successful with a high level of student activity and many engaging aspects were shared in the dialogue between students, museum educator and teacher. The assignment itself was not specific enough and the lack of scaffolding meant that some of the students spent too much time figuring out how to get started. This was evident when it came to the result of the productions (the short videos). If the assignment had included a clearer link to the exhibitions as well as to the initial discussions, then the task might have been easier for the students to work with and the result might have been more interesting and engaging.

It is relevant to consider whether the educator tried too hard to meet the needs and expectations of the school, as well as whether the teacher’s concerns about meeting the demands of the curriculum influenced the flow of the workshop. Furthermore, the educator found it difficult to explain the potential offered by the museum. The many hours spent planning and preparing this particular workshop did not necessarily lead to a learning and meaning making museum experience for these students. The workshop did, to some extent, turn into a ‘classroom away from school’ and the dialogue in the planning process did not build up enough confidence for the teacher to take risks, let go of control, and make room for curiosity and the magic that an art museum can offer. When Dys-the points out that “the academic content, that the museums manage, can be an important contribution to fulfil some of the curriculum goals” (Dysthe 2012:78, translation by authors), she finds that the academic content can enter the polyphonic room and make space for openness, the undefined and border crossing. This is how museums can offer an alternative platform for learning. We have reasoned that more time could have been spent interacting with the museum exhibitions, as well as on scaffolding the students’ assignment. Additionally, there was no need for the workshop to last two extra hours, as both speed and flow are important when it comes to maintaining the students’ attention.

**Case 3: Carpentry students**

A year into the project, a chance for developing new workshops turned up and proved itself very successful. A teacher from the carpentry division of a vocational college spoke to a colleague (a very active partner in CA VE) and expressed that he found none of our workshops relevant to his students. However, an upcoming reform meant that he had to teach sketching as a process of building constructions in wood. He was now motivated to discuss, plan and participate in workshops in the museum with his students and see how our mutual skills and competences could become useful. While the teacher wanted the workshop to include the architecture of the Brandts Clothing Factory area (where the museum is located), the coordinator and the educator from Brandts suggested working with the actual artworks. The compromise was a three-hour workshop covering architecture, sketching techniques, sensory exhibitions, concept development and the indoor architecture of Brandts’ permanent art exhibition. Furthermore, as all workshops at Brandts include students’ production and presentation, a curatorial and conceptual development of a sensory
exhibition was to be their challenge. To qualify our museum educators we discussed and shared ideas with the Danish Architecture Centre and the Arken Museum of Modern Art. The outcome of these workshops has been very positive, leading the painter division of the vocational college to participate in specially planned workshops as well.

As mentioned in the introduction, the students from the institutions involved are far from a homogeneous group, while the institutions themselves vary in many regards. In the CA VE project’s first 16 months, 28 groups have participated in our workshops. Some concerns show up in most preparations, others are more context-specific. When the dialogue works well, we establish a joint ownership for the workshop. We encourage the teacher to plan a more open learning process with us and have confidence in us, given our experiences with other groups. Taking risks on both sites, however, means that we also get new insight into expectations that at first stance can seem far away from art and visual culture. A majority of the teachers we work with are not museum visitors themselves and the dialogue accordingly starts with who we are as a museum and what we can offer.

Some teachers question the structure, duration and order in the workshops and claim that “the students need more breaks”, “it will work better if they see the exhibition without any introduction”, and “hands-on is hard to handle with students, as they are unlikely to present their productions”. Moreover, some teachers find a two-hour visit quite long enough. However, since many components are constantly changing for our educators (participants, topics, exhibitions, teachers etc.), the structure forms the basis of our scaffolding of the museum visit. As recommended by Dierking, we take responsibility for designing a visit, and try to make teachers feel confident that every step will work, that the duration is a must and that the students’ production and presentation is essential. Some teachers will express concerns about the students’ attitude and level of activity. As a museum, we have a unique chance to alter patterns and roles within a group, as well as how the teacher sees the individual student. By offering a welcoming attitude, establishing a polyphonic room and showing our interest in the students’ contributions, we in most cases experience a positive attitude among students, as well as a high level of activity. We express what we expect from the students and leave hardly any room for negotiation as to the structure. During and after the workshop, the students most often have been positively surprised as to what a museum visit can offer.

CHALLENGES: WORKING ACROSS INSTITUTIONS

In our work on involving new young users in the museum, we want to establish sustainable long-term partnerships with a number of educational institutions, because we consider partnerships as a more stable way of working together. The type of partnership in this project stems from a definition that Mette Hjære uses in her report on cooperation between public and volunteer organizations:
A structured, compulsory, mutually beneficial and dialogue-based voluntarily cooperation between organizations from different sectors that, by combining their resources and competences, work together on developing new social activities. (Hjære 2005:9, translation by authors)

These partnerships require equivalence, dynamic interplay and working jointly through dialogue. Although one part can contribute more than the other, the influence on and the responsibility of the project is still equally shared. Dialogue requires openness and good arguments. The outcome of the project must constantly be adjusted, expanded and improved upon and both parts must be ready to seek compromise and to take risks.

In the CAVE project, we expect some of the potential partners from the initial stage to drop out, while new potential partners will appear. Therefore, we work with openness towards new contacts, while being fully aware that the partnership model is time-consuming at all stages. The type of partnership we want to establish with educational institutions is what Hjære describes as external, meaning that we, by working jointly, aim to improve the conditions for a certain group of people and, by doing so, create better instruments for carrying out this task.

Personal relations play a central role in the process. Building up confidence can be time-consuming; partnerships, which require stability and consistency, are fragile when we experience replacements in staff groups. Personal relations, therefore, form a paradox because, on the one hand, they strengthen the partnership, while, on the other hand, they make it vulnerable. In the following, we look into how our work in building up partnerships in the CAVE project corresponds to Hjære’s definition and the other points mentioned above.

ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

To date, maintaining a personal relationship and an open dialogue with involved partners has proven crucial to the success of the project. Many of these personal contacts were established in the early stages, when museum staff visited a number of potential educational institutions. Meetings were held with teachers and, in most instances, the management of the institutions. These face-to-face meetings established an initial dialogue and ensured that the project got off to a good start. At the meetings, the following were emphasized in order to encourage voluntarily cooperation:

- being part of the project should not be too demanding for teachers in terms of preparing the museum visit and evaluating the visit
- a few simple phone calls or even e-mail correspondence should be sufficient for planning and booking the workshop
- all institutions involved in the project face drastic changes in relation to the upcoming vocational school reforms, and the aim is to make the project as manageable as possible
– although the institutions do not commit themselves to a binding agreement when they visit the museum, our goal as a museum is to establish a form of long-term cooperation
– the institutions pay for the three-hour workshops as any other group would, which also means that they can leave the project at any time

It is essential to establish and maintain personal contact between teachers and museum educators. The dialogue provides a platform for such cooperation and is focused on planning and evaluating the actual workshop and the students’ learning processes. In most cases, both partners show a readiness to seek compromise, as described in the third example above. In this process, both partners meet and combine skills. In the second example, we experienced a situation where the teacher’s concern about fulfilling the curriculum influenced on the flow of the workshop and the students’ experience. In most situations, however, we find that the dialogue makes the teachers feel confident that they are well received when participating in the workshop at the museum. They are committed and want the visit to be a success. The actual workshop forms a shared experience between the partners. Indeed, all the teachers involved in CAVE have thus far been very enthusiastic during the workshops, which have yielded positive results in almost every case. That being said, the relationship between schools and the museum is mostly centred on only one or two teachers at the school. This means that, if relevant persons, for whatever reason, are no longer part of the project, it becomes difficult to maintain the museum’s relationship with the school.

At this stage, we can already conclude that it is crucial to have school management on board. However, the best way to establish a sustainable relationship is through interested and engaged teachers. Our function as a museum is to make sure that one or two teachers are committed to attending at least two workshops during the school year, in order to test whether the workshops are useful for students and to discuss whether any adjustments need to be made. This model will ensure the commitment from teachers. If they are personally involved in the project, they will want to see it succeed. At the same time, they will share the responsibility in achieving this with a colleague and the museum educators.

We are aware that personal relationships are fragile and may even become exclusive and unprofessional. Therefore, we promote working as a team: teachers meet with all the museum educators involved and we encourage the teachers to relate to the museum. The project coordinator will maintain contact with many teachers, as well as the management at the schools and institutions involved through telephone calls, emails, newsletters, visits to the institutions and arrangements at Brandts. An example of the latter is “Spoil the Teacher”, which is an informal introduction to new exhibitions, upcoming activities and workshops, accompanied by the serving of coffee and cake.

Student and teacher evaluations play an important role in the ongoing development of the museum workshops, and the partnerships between schools and
the museum. From the start of the project, it has been noted that evaluating the museum visit should be an integrated part of the process. At the meetings held between museum staff and teachers prior to the museum visit, it was agreed that a short telephone call or even an email would be sufficient for ensuring that this part of the process would not be too time-consuming. However, as already pointed out, it has been difficult to find a sustainable model for these evaluations.

Eventually, the most sustainable model (however subjective this may be) has involved evaluations given by museum educators responsible for the workshop and members of the team participating as assistants or observers. These evaluations have been consistent and generated a transparent overview of how the different workshops have progressed. In the course of the evaluation, we look into the effectiveness of the cooperation, as well as the students’ responses, participation and learning.

Obviously, the museum must do more to ensure that teachers commit themselves to evaluating the museum visit. Although asking participants is obvious, in most cases we meet first-time visitors for whom a questionnaire or formal evaluation might ruin a positive experience, a point that has been highlighted by some teachers while others have asked for a more formal evaluation. This leaves us with observations besides the long-term exchange of experiences and competences, gained as a result of our partnership with a number of institutions. Evaluation will be an interesting question to work with within the partnership and we expect different forms to develop. The external evaluation, starting in the project’s third year, will provide us with useful and shared tools that will meet all our partners’ needs.

As mentioned in the introduction, we expect to develop four sustainable partnerships in the third year of the project, which will mean that participating in our learning programmes becomes a part of the annual programme for these institutions. In our upcoming evaluation of the partnerships to date, we will look into consistency, dynamic interplay, exchange of competences, willingness to take risks and the shared aim to improve conditions for young people who are otherwise unlikely to visit and participate in a museum experience.

**DISCUSSION**

Halfway through our project, we can already consider our work as an important and sustainable step towards the development of a more user-centered and participatory museum. By working with educational institutions, we have reached out to new users and contributed to general education. In this discussion, we will briefly address two questions that are important to our future work: How do we meet the expectations and needs of teachers and students? And how do we manage partnerships on a long-term basis? Before that, however, we briefly need to touch upon the question, who are the users?
When we talk about ‘users’, who do we have in mind? In this project, teachers are the gatekeepers in terms of deciding whether a workshop at the museum will dovetail with their learning programme and curriculum. Our collaboration has focused on teachers through negotiations regarding methods, content and student needs; meanwhile, we are attempting to establish a platform for discussions concerning these issues. During actual visits and workshops, our museum educators have focused on the students, their previous experiences, the construction of meaning and learning processes. This has, in some cases, created a paradox, in which teachers’ focus is on how to adapt the content to their curriculum goals, while our experience and methods – from a museum perspective about learning and scaffolding of activities – must leave significant room for individual user voices and participation.

In our contact with institutions, teachers and management, we have listened to their needs and expectations. We have discussed what may potentially motivate them to use the museum as a learning resource. Some teachers have never thought about visiting the museum with their students; others are sceptical when it comes to students’ motivation and actual performance within a workshop environment. Some teachers have never visited Brandts, while the majority of their students are also unlikely to use the museum in their free time. We encourage teachers to expect a workshop in which students participate and develop a positive attitude towards the museum as a meeting place that offers an overall good experience. Given that they evaluate students in terms of how they perform in class on a daily basis, teachers tend to have low expectations regarding their participation, which they, as mentioned earlier, express to us prior, and even during, a visit. In most instances, this project has shown students’ performance to be significantly higher than teachers’ expectations in terms of participating in discussions, students’ own production, their focus on the exhibitions and the reflections they share. This gives rise to a second paradox, in which, on the one hand, we collaborate with teachers and develop joint ownership in the learning process, content and methods, while, on the other, we – as a museum – maintain our high expectations and encourage the students to play an important role in terms of shaping the content of the museum visit. We take the risk knowing that, without students’ participation, the workshop does not work at all. Consequently, in the planning process and in our meeting with participants, it is considered crucial that we express what we expect from them.

In partnerships with educational institutions, our role is to develop sustainable forms of cooperation with teachers and management. We have already experienced the importance of useful exchange of ideas and aspects related to learning through our exhibitions at the museum. Some teachers felt well supported by their respective management, while others considered the collaboration more as their individual project. Our aim is to manage partnerships at a professional level. Mutual recognition is crucial when working across institutions, and many different approaches to meeting and working with teachers take form. We have experienced communicating with our partners as a constant process
of reaching out and we expect this to remain the case throughout the rest of the project, as well as on a long-term basis. While educational institutions face constant changes in their curricula, our challenge is to develop a solid platform for teachers and students in our learning centre and with experienced staff who can meet new needs and expectations.

During the first half of this project, we have created a platform for establishing partnerships with a series of vocational schools and colleges. The challenge that lies ahead is to make sure that this platform is further improved, strengthened and developed. This requires a continued development of museum workshops and the learning centre and of the museum as a whole. Exhibitions, curators, museum management, internal priorities, front staff, access, communication must be tailored to welcome this particular group of visitors in order to ensure the success of the project. It is essential that these new users not only feel welcome when participating in a museum workshop, but also to visiting the museum in other situations and constellations.

It is crucial that we involve experienced museum educators who are well informed about content, methods, museum pedagogy, the technology used and the museum’s exhibitions and profile. There are often significant differences between the groups that visit the museum and educators will never know which expectations and needs they may encounter. Flexibility, the ability to improve, and a sense of humour are invaluable qualifications alongside knowledge of the topics. As learning in the museum must be based on users’ prior knowledge and experiences, as well as the needs of relevant institutions and teachers, it is essential that museum educators are able to constantly adapt the content and format of workshops. This has been the case for all the workshops included in this project. Finally, using full-time museum educators, who work as a team in terms of self-assessment, evaluations and the continuous development of the workshops, has also proven to be beneficial and we look forward to gain new knowledge from the external evaluation.

Forming partnerships is not a goal in itself. We want to establish a platform where adult learning, motivation, cultural references and the scaffolding of creative learning processes can be discussed through questions, which are central to and create constant challenges for teachers as well as museum educators.

REFERENCES


