

Working Principles for Education at the Weltkulturen Museum Frankfurt

The Museum as a Site of Unlearning: Materials and Reflections on Museum Education at the Weltkulturen Museum. Stephanie Endter, Nora Landkammer and Karin Schneider (eds.), 2018.
<http://www.traces.polimi.it/2018/10/08/issue-06-the-museum-as-a-site-of-unlearning/>

These working principles came out of intense discussions between members of the museum's education team and researchers involved in the TRACES project. To some extent, they can be considered visionary, as a horizon of possibilities and as a continually evolving basis for discussion.



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We aim for our work to be...

transdisciplinary

The range of perspectives and backgrounds that our facilitators bring with them are essential foundations for our education work. We work with artistic, ethnological, pedagogical, and research-based approaches, and we understand transdisciplinarity not only as the harmonious combination of these approaches, but also the productive friction between them.

Everyone who we interact with through our educational activities also brings a diversity of knowledge and perspectives along with them. It is essential for our educational work to also understand these as opportunities for learning and dialogue.

political

Our education work in this museums is underpinned by a stance that is critical of existing power relations, and is anti-racist and anti-sexist. We are aware that we are implicated in societal, political, social, cultural, and economic structures and institutions that reproduce racist and colonial paradigms. For this reason, we have to permanently examine our own patterns of thought and action. In our work, we attempt a collective »unlearning« (Gayatri Spivak), and encourage others to do the same.

interconnected

(1) An important part of our educational work is that we exchange ideas with each other and correct each other's mistakes and oversights.

(2) Because we are concerned with identifying, criticising and altering racist structures and narratives, making connections with individuals and activists who are involved in anti-racist educational work is central for us. This means seeking and establishing dialogue and co-operation with the goal of achieving forms of solidarity and support that are critical and reciprocal. At the same time, we are aware that activists and educational collectives may speak from perspectives that diverge from our own and are not available to us – for instance, in making stringent critiques of institutions – and that they may be critical of our work. However, it is in these very contradictions, conflicts, and challenges that we see the potential and necessity for our work in these institutions.

(3) The relationship between museum and gallery education and other stakeholders in the museum is also one of interconnection. An institution is also a site of alliances, dialogue and disagreement. This means that we need to maintain a critical dialogue and also invite various departments of the museum to participate in our work accordingly.

self-reflexive

In think tanks and workshops both within our team and with critical friends, we scrutinise our practice by collecting feedback from colleagues, and exploring future actions. This also involves reflecting on privileges (for example, those available to white facilitators) and our own position in the museum. Through this, we seek to challenge our own comfort zones.

experimental

We see ourselves as a test site for experimentation. Education formats have defined goals, but no fixed procedures.

multi-perspectival

Our educational work draws on various forms of knowledge and we make an effort to disclose our sources. The focus here is on fostering an awareness of normative and hegemonic discourses of knowledge.

We consciously make it clear that knowledge regarding collections, our own knowledge as educators, and curatorial narratives all draw on a range of knowledge formations and speaking positions. It is important for us to be transparent about these sources and contexts in order to show how hegemonic discourse functions, as well as to seek out and favour those voices which oppose this discourse or are marginalised by it. This process of awareness-building is an ongoing one.

The question of “who speaks” is one that we continue to keep at the forefront of our minds and negotiate with museum visitors – this question aims to investigate who is heard and whose knowledge is deemed important. In this sense, we see multiperspectivity as plural, versatile and contradictory, but not arbitrary.

transparent

We strive to make our educational objectives clear to the participants of our programmes. We also encourage internal discussion of our goals within the museum and put them up for negotiation.

open to friction

In dealing with difference and inequality in our educational programmes, it is important for us to acknowledge that our positions, experiences of racism and/or privileges influence what we think and understand. For example, the possibility of ignoring racist statements or not being offended or hurt by them is only possible from a position in which we don't see ourselves as affected by



such statements; that is, a position of privilege. It is therefore important for us to allow ourselves to be affected and provoked. It is also vital for us to listen to others' views and their experiences, even when they are not presented as formulated statements but are rather expressed as anger, agitation or laughter.

Postscript: working conditions

We are aware that we operate under precarious working conditions that do not provide the ideal requirements for critical work. It is clear to us that it takes time to develop the improved conditions we have outlined here – time for reflection, for team development, reading, debate and supervision – and that this time must be considered work time, which is normally not the case. For this reason, we believe that it is important that educators who wish to align their work with the principles sketched out above advocate for the kind of economic conditions that this would require in their own workplaces.

Reference

Research team TRACES/Museum Education at the Weltkulturen Museum: ›Working Principles‹. In: Endter, Stephanie / Landkammer, Nora / Schneider, Karin (eds.): *The Museum as a Site of Unlearning: Materials and Reflections on Museum Education at the Weltkulturen Museum*, available online at <http://www.traces.polimi.it/2018/10/08/issue-06-the-museum-as-a-site-of-unlearning/>.

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