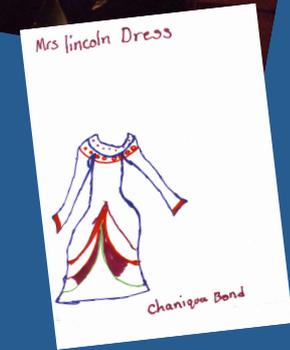


Museums for Us

Exploring museums with people with intellectual disabilities



Acknowledgements

Many thanks to everyone who visited a museum, took photographs and shared their ideas: Steven Powe, Michelle Hawkins and Deion Hawkins, Chaniqua Bond, Donna Njoku, Forbe Njoku, Samara Njoku, Pam Ogaugha, Taylor Brown, Victoria Watson, Dora Casey, Cappacani Kimble/Brown, Caprisha Powell, Courtney Montgomery and Yadira Reyes and their teacher Cheryl Gillette, Darius Holmes and Keith Morris and their teacher Marva Boatman. It was a great pleasure and privilege to share a museum visit with you.

Thanks to Project Action, Mat McCullough (Executive Director of the D.C. Developmental Disability Council), Gloria Belton (Mamie D. Lee School), Alison Whyte (The Arc of D.C.) and Toni Fisher and Rachel Brady (Georgetown University) for all their help linking me to people who might want to be involved in the Museums for Us project. Thanks too to Richard Sandell, Leicester University and Jonathan Rix, The Open University who pointed me in the right direction for useful thinking in the area of museums, disability studies and inclusive learning.

Special thanks to Beth Ziebarth and Krista Flores in the Smithsonian Accessibility Program who made me feel so welcome and for their enthusiasm for the Museum for Us project.

Finally, a big thanks to the Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies who funded the project through the Museum Practice Fellowship scheme.

Helen Graham, March 2011

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- What is 'Museums for Us?'
- Who is this booklet for?



That was good!



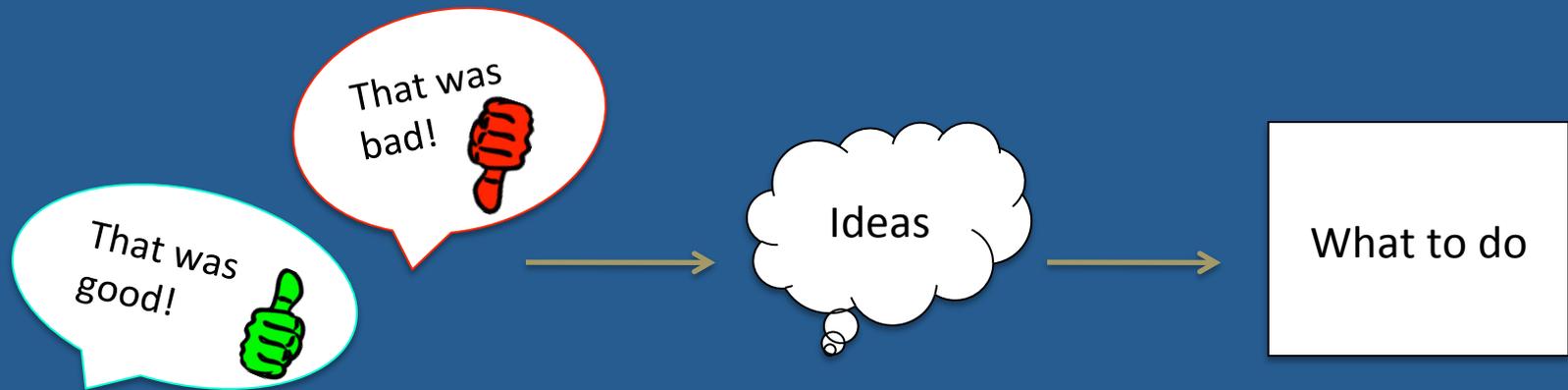
That was bad!



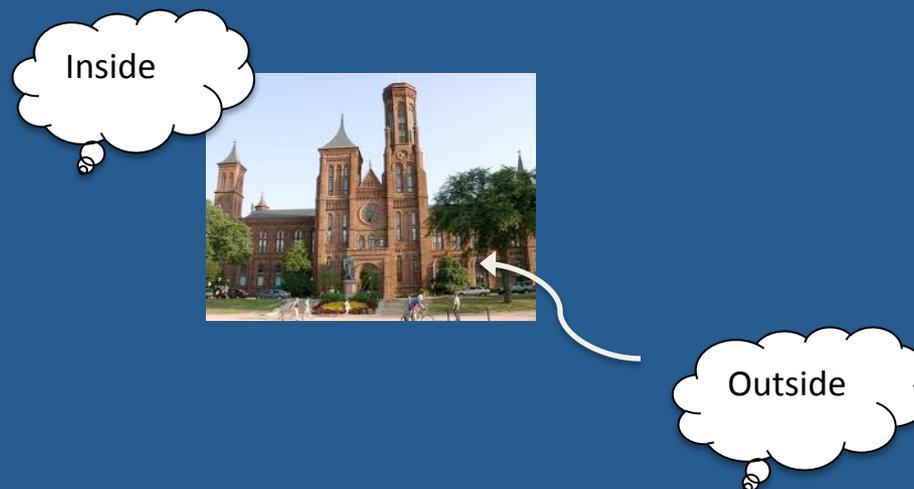
Part 1: What did you think about the visit?

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What is the Museums for Us project?

Step One

Which museum do you want to visit?



Step Two



Visit the museum, take photographs and record ideas



Step Three

Ideas

That was bad!



That was good!



Discuss ideas – What was good and what was bad?
What should the museums do?

What is the Museums for Us project?

Helen Graham



Make museums better



Advice – who to talk to

The Museums for Us project flows from a groundswell of work exploring how museums, galleries and heritage sites might provide more engaging and accessible experiences through active collaboration with people with intellectual disabilities.

This booklet aims to share the experiences and ideas of those people involved in the project and to make links between the experience of visiting museums and how museum practitioners might respond in practice.

Who was involved? What we did we do?

The Museums for Us project was based at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. between November 2010 to February 2011. The project was made possible through funding provided through a Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies' Museum Practice Fellowship, which enabled me to come to Washington D.C. for three months.

I met the individuals, families and small school groups who became involved in the project through avenues generously suggested by Mat McCullough, Executive Director of the D.C. Developmental Disability Council, Alison Whyte at The Arc of D.C. and Toni Fisher and Rachel Brady at Georgetown University and self-advocacy organization, Project Action.



As suggested by the more pictorial account of the project on p. 5, there were three distinct steps to the project. A first meeting where we got to know each other and used discussion and/or pictures to decide which museum to visit. A second meeting where we visited the museum and used photography and digital voice recording to capture the experience of the visit. Followed by a final meeting where we reflected on the visit (using powerpoint presentations which integrated photography and sound clips) and then used drawing and discussion to develop possible ideas for how museums might be better. At this meeting we also discussed possible designs for each person or groups' specific part of this booklet. A final stage of the process of reflection – though not one that everyone was able to be part of – was sharing and discussing the project at a seminar hosted by the Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies on 27th January 2011.

At this point in the project my Fellowship in D.C. ended and I returned to the UK so feedback on this draft of the booklet happened via e-mail and a couple of phone conversations. More time at this end of the project would have been ideal and is a reminder that collaborative research always needs plenty of time. Sharing and discussing revisions definitely work better face to face!

Reflecting on the research process: Different perspectives

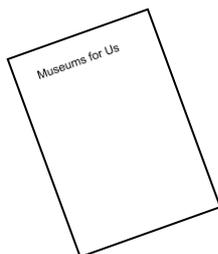
The design of the Museums for Us project was influenced by participative research approaches, both as used specifically in work by, and with, people with intellectual disabilities and as it is deployed in other disciplines (e.g. development studies and geography) (Kindon et al. 2007).

In recent years there has been a growing body of research led by, and involving collaboration with, people with intellectual disabilities, often linked to self-advocacy groups (e.g. Carlisle People First; Central England People First).

Key questions???



Shared point of connection:
'What makes a good museum visit?'



While the calls for research to initiated by disabled and learning disabled people have been compelling – and the self-advocacy movement has called for 'Nothing about us, without us – there is also a developing debate which reflexively explores the tensions of this kind of work (Walmsley and Johnson 2003). Key issues which have been identified are: Who initiates the research? What are the different roles of those with and without intellectual disabilities? What kind of knowledge is produced (empirical/theoretical)? How can research findings be made accessible?

In the case of the Museums for Us project there is no question about it being anything other than led by a non-disabled researcher. The project was initiated by me, as someone who has worked in museum learning and access teams, funded through a Fellowship application and in essence derives from a museum preoccupation – how best to serve their publics. Indeed the very funding for the project meant that the project was targeted at improving museum practice. However, I would suggest that the significance of people with intellectual disabilities leading research does not negate a concurrent need for research and practical collaborations which include institutions and researchers actively searching for shared interests and points of connection with people with intellectual disabilities. In the case of the Museums for Us project the shared points of connection were around the question of 'what makes a good museum visit?'

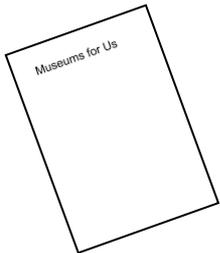
Museums for Us project has two key constituencies: people with intellectual disabilities and their families, supporters and teachers but also people who in museums. Therefore, the Museum for Us project booklet had to say what happened, what people liked and disliked but also what should be done about it. To make this work in a way which could be heard by museum practitioners



Experience of the visit



What to do?



the findings needed to link *what was experienced* and reflections on that experience – what was good, what was bad – to practical suggestions about what museums should do. However, one of major barriers to making museums better for people with intellectual disabilities is conceptual. It is about how museums think about themselves and their role. Therefore part of the role of this booklet is to make it possible for people working in museums to see how working with and for people with intellectual disabilities fits within their broader purpose as public institutions. In other words, between *experiences* and *what to do*, we also needed to reflect the *ideas* museums use to understand their broader mission.

The general purpose of ideas is to link together different things. Ideas allow a connection to be made between specific experiences and broader understandings of why that experience happened and what might be done differently. Ideas are also used by museums to understand what they are for and to communicate this to the people who might visit. In the case of the Smithsonian they have ‘values’ which express their purpose (see Part 3 of this booklet and Appendix 1). So ideas – if used in the right way – have the potential to allow people who work in museums to understand intellectual access as something which relates directly to their existing understanding of their role. Linking these two different places through ideas was one of my contributions to the project, and is an expression of the collaboration between different perspectives (people with intellectual disabilities and their families and museum worker) which was the focus of this project.

Jan Walmsley has noted that accessibility to facts (or empirical research) tends to be much more often attempted and easier to achieve than linking empirical findings with critical and theoretical engagement (2004; 2010). One way we have approached this problem in this booklet is to build up ideas from concrete and specific experiences and to then to apply experiences and views plus concepts to ‘what to do’.



Understand



Need...



This is done in three parts:

Part 1 is all about the experience of the visit. To explore the experience of the visit photographs taken by people on visits and photographs of the visit and comments people made are used. Inspired by Deion Hawkins' love of cartoons the booklet uses speech bubbles and colours that people like.

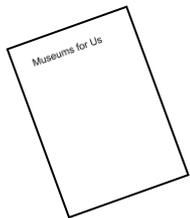
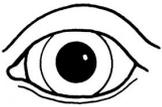
Part 2 is about making clear links between experience, ideas and what museums might do in practice. It does this by starting with specific experiences shared in the project, using thumbnails of the photographs and specific speech bubbles. It then uses the cartoon shorthand of a 'thought cloud' to reference a big idea or concept and then uses boxes to set out practical measures which can be taken.

Part 3 is a short essay written from my perspective. This final section is a response to both the complexity and practicality of Part 1 and Part 2, with the aim of developing a way of conceptualising museums which will increase possibilities of enjoyment, engagement and repeated use of museums by people with intellectual disabilities, their friends, families and teachers. It is very much in my voice and comes from the ways in which I see museums through my professional and academic roles. The key conceptual point I make here is to think about the museum *from the inside* – how exhibitions are conceived and made, interactivity planned into all aspects of display, training of security guards – but also to seriously consider museums *from the outside*. It is argued that it is only when considering museums from the outside that exclusions become able to be conceptualised as 'exclusions' and therefore the possibilities of 'inclusion' become more tangible.

Inside



Outside



In terms of booklet design, one of my role as the coordinator of the project was to come up with potential designs and discuss options – and background colours – with those involved in each group. One of the groups from the Mamie D. Lee School for example picked pink, because pink was a colour found in the National Museum of Natural History’s ‘Crochet Coral Reef’, an exhibit which which Cappacani Kimble/Brown, Dora Casey and Caprishia Powell really liked. Discussions with Courtney from the same group – who is partially sighted – suggested that having lots of different colours would not work for everyone and she said she’d prefer a plainer version. So we have done both (available at www.museumsforus.wordpress.com).

Museums and people with intellectual disabilities: A brief history

The Museums for Us project is by no means the first project to work with people with intellectual disabilities on improving museums and heritage accessibility or inclusiveness. In terms of US projects, the book shelves in the Smithsonian Institution’s Accessibility Program office house the publication from a 1976-1977 program based at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Metropolitan Museum of Art 1978) and inclusive guidelines such as *Please Touch: Sensory Tour for People with Disabilities* (Taft Museum 1995). There have also been earlier initiatives here at the Smithsonian: *The Smithsonian...in a few words* – which used pictures to describe the different sites. The late-1990s also saw an influential UK project followed by a publication: *Access in Mind: Towards the Inclusive Museum* (Rayner/ The Intellectual Trust 1998). And no doubt there have been lots of other



The Access to Heritage Project

projects based in local museums and with local schools, services and self-advocates which have not made it into print.

Recently, there have been two key projects exploring questions of intellectual access to museums and heritage, both based in the UK. As part of the *Access to Heritage* project – run through Liverpool Mencap – a group visited over 50 museums or heritage sites over a two year period and produced suggested guidelines (2007). Under the banner of the Me2 project – again facilitated by a local Mencap branch, this time in Birmingham and linked to Dudley County Council – a group of young people act as auditors for the ‘Me2’ mark which gives an inclusive seal of approval to any venue, service or setting which works with children and young people. The Me2 project have also been involved in recent training for museum practitioners funded by the UK Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

Both these projects are incredibly important because they essentially take an approach which gives time for people with intellectual disabilities to build up ways of critically engaging with heritage sites to create a basis for suggesting improvements. Those involved use their own experience but then move out from this to develop what Jonathan Rix and Ticky Lowe referred to as ‘heritage site literacy’ (Rix and Lowe, 2010, p. 217).

Me2 award





Audits are good but
it is also good to
think about...



the experience of
the visit

The methodology for the Museums for Us project has been influenced by reading about these reports but, I hope, has a complimentary contribution to make. Where an audit approach is taken in the Access to Heritage and Me2 projects, the difference of focus in the Museums for Us project is on the experience of the visit as a visit and then links the in-the-flow of experience and post-visit reflections to the concerns of museum workers.

At its most basic level, this is how change happens, especially in large institutions such as the Smithsonian. Change happens through worlds and viewpoints of those who might visit and do visit museums coming into relationship with those who work in them. It happens one new connection, shared experience and new idea at a time.

Helen Graham

Museum Practice Fellow, November 2010-February 2011

Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Practice and Smithsonian Accessibility Program, Smithsonian Institution

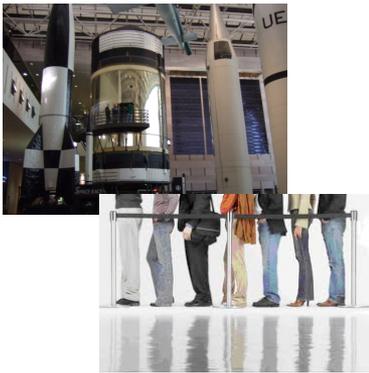
Part 1

What did you think about the visit?



Steven Powe: My trip to the National Portrait Gallery and American Art Gallery





Why did you want to get involved in the project?

I like photography. I been doing photography at New Vision photograph project for six years. I like the museums. I've been to mostly all of them. Not only is it good for regular people, but also good for people with disabilities to see all the good things they've got there. All the history, and everything. But they don't have Dr Who (from British TV) exhibits!

For the project, I want to go and visit the National Portrait Gallery. I like paintings and sculptures. I like to draw too. I draw on my own but trying to go to art school in Prince George's County. I went to the portrait gallery a long time ago. But they'll have some new things in there.

Best museum visit: Air and Space. They got rocket ships and all that and they've the IMAX in there. I've not been to IMAX but I want to go in there and watch them on the IMAX but they've usually got pretty good shows. Not too expensive just the same as a regular movie. It's the lines I worry about.



Mostly I like museums. I haven't seen one I didn't like. Before I go I make sure it's one I'll like. The National Museum of the American Indian is good but they could make it a bit better, by having a few more floors.

Mainly I go to museums with New Vision. I have been to Air and Space on my own and the sculpture garden and the portrait museum. When you go on your own you can basically see all the exhibit. If you go with the group you have to follow everyone else so you don't get lost. And if we go with New Visions then we have to be back by around 3.30pm because the van comes. But if I go on my own I can stay the whole day.

I'd be more likely to come on my own if they don't charge for them. People might pay for Air and Space if they had more simulators in there or video games.



My second visit

When I saw the sculptures, it made me wonder if I could do sculpture. I know I can draw. I used to do ceramics in 1978 because I got a medal for it from the Kennedy Institute (a D.C. school). They couldn't give me the thing I made because it too heavy but they gave me a first place medal instead.

I liked the sculptures and the food and drink. They have a good cafeteria in here. Sometimes I just come to the café, just for a treat. You shouldn't be afraid to spend money at the museum because you're not going to go every day. There are so many things to see and do, that you won't be able to see everything. Not in one day. I will come back. I didn't get to see everything. I liked the Elvis display and Rockwell.

To make it better, they could give discounts on the food to people with disabilities. The exhibition couldn't be better, they are great. The Smithsonian is so good it makes me think about working for the Smithsonian.

There's nothing that would stop me coming. I like museums. Air and Space is a good museum so you wouldn't mind paying, but some of the others have to be free because they are not as good.



I've been going to the Smithsonian for a long time. They changed things around here, it's nice they've made it bigger. I was about 22 when I first came to the museum. When I came the first time, I just looked at the sculptures and then I looked at the pictures. They didn't have much Security when I went here the first time. The guards were nice – that's important. Security doesn't put me off. I have always felt welcome. Security might stop other people. That puts people off, not being able to take pictures. My friends and family don't always come, they don't have time because they are working.

I come to the Smithsonian because I'm training to take pictures, it part of the work I'm doing at New Vision photography project. I hope I might get a job in photography.

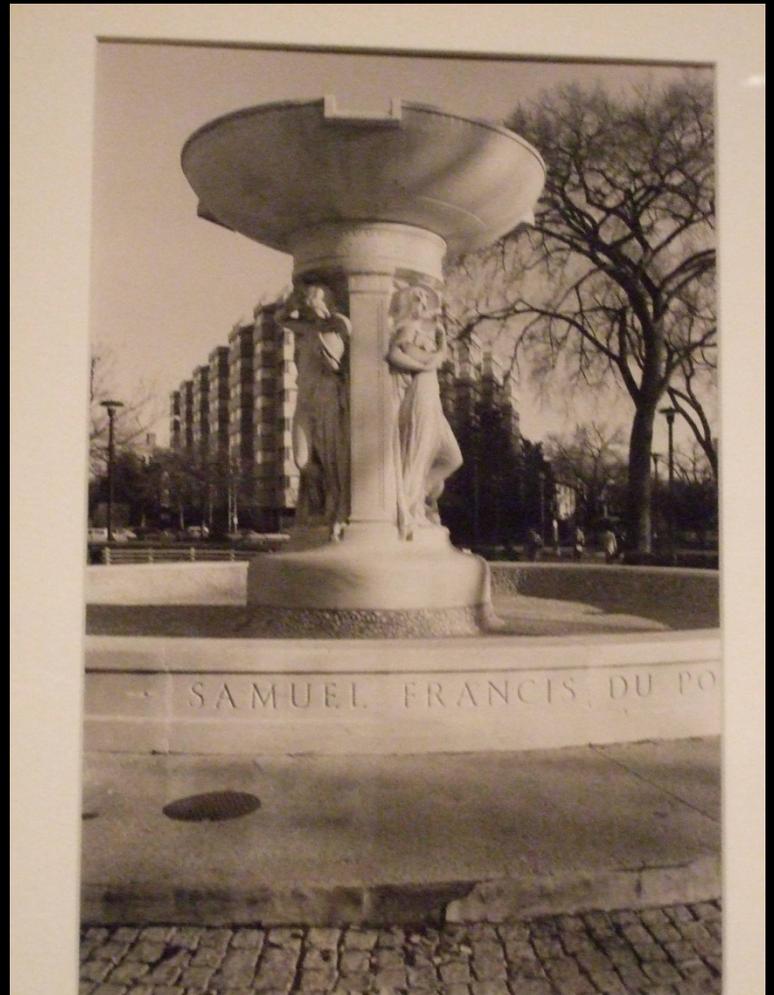
I like the Folklife Festival. I like the food and the entertainment. If I could do an exhibition, I'd do an exhibition in the Sculpture Garden. And I'd make the American Indian Museum have more art. They should have more sculptures.



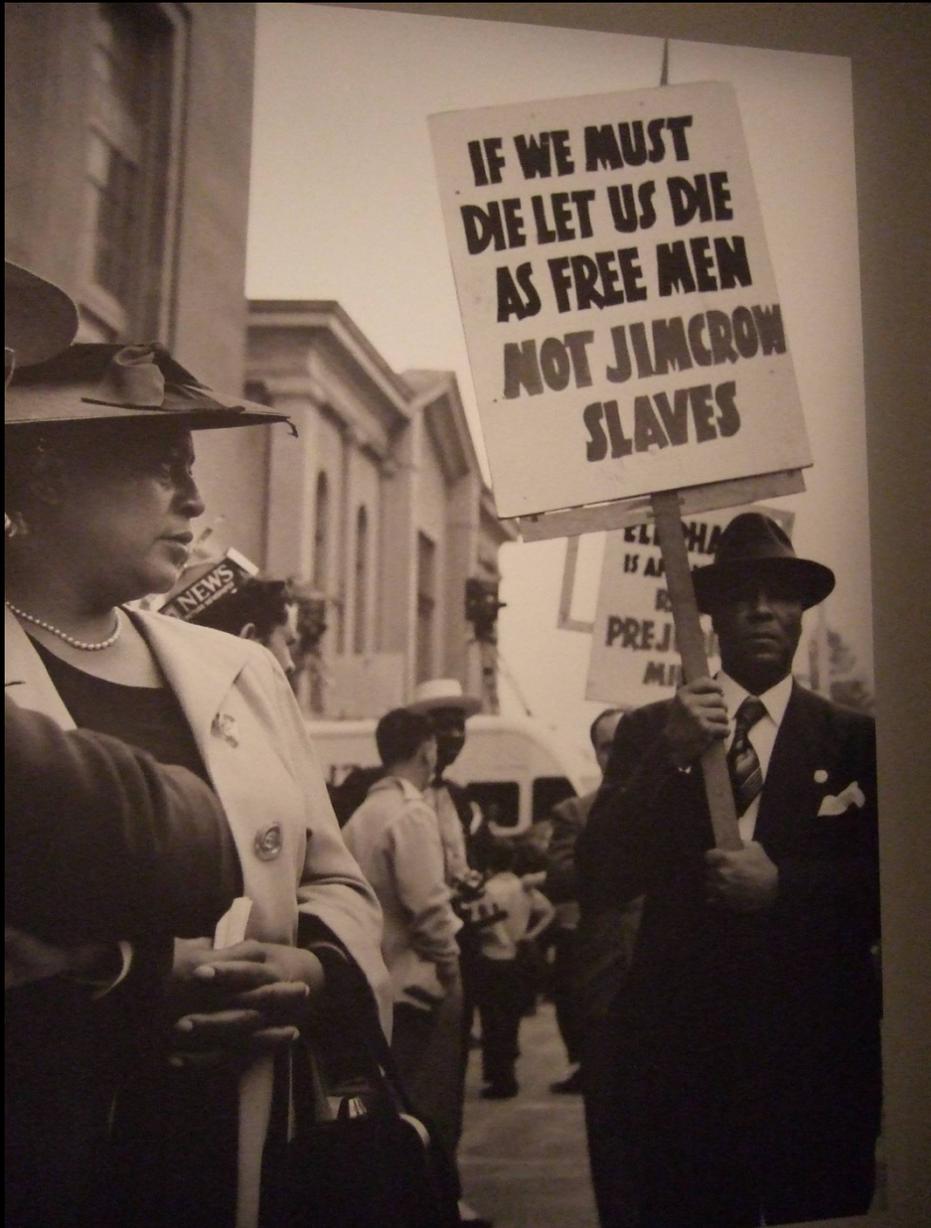
The way the pictures are displayed with labels is good for people that read but not good for people who can't. But at least they can enjoy the pictures and maybe someone can read the label to them.

I've never been on a tour in the museum. But I'm not sure I'd want to go on a tour because you have stay with the group. It's more fun by yourself. On your own you can take as many pictures as you want



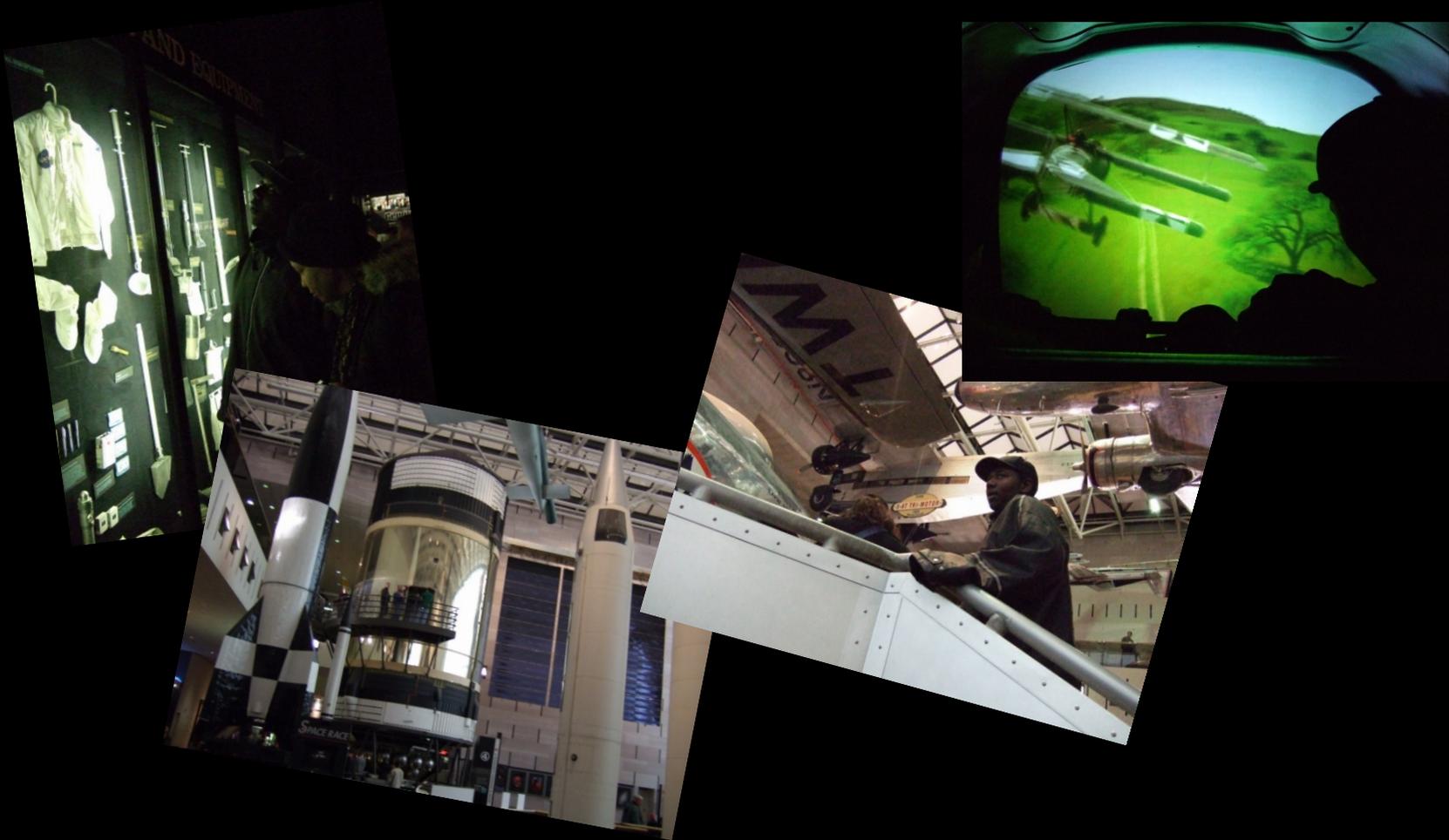








Deion Hawkins and Michelle Hawkins: Visiting the National Museum of Air and Space



Ideas about space which Deion brought to the museum visit

Deion:
Captain
Planet saved
the world!

Deion: Tom
and Jerry
went to the
moon

Deion:
Courage the
Cowardly dog
rode a
meteor

The cartoons Deion loves were of one the ways in which he interpreted the museum collections. Could the museum use more cartons to explore ideas?

On the visit

Deion: I took a picture of the rockets. The rockets. I like them. They go blast off into the sky.



Deion: Yeah, I'm going up there see.



Deion's picture of inside the rocket



Walking through a cockpit



The ride



Favorite part of the visit?

Deion: It was cool. Leaning.

Deion: The rocket ship in the sky. The one we rode in and we tipped.



Michelle's reflections and ideas

H: What were the best bits of the trip from your perspective?

M: The best parts of the trip were the simulators and exhibits he could walk through and explore. Deion is a visual learner. He likes to move around and observe.

H: How do you like to use museums with Deion?

M: I take pleasure in teaching Deion through exploration. As a parent you have to supplement your child's education. You can't depend on the school to do it all. Deion enjoys new experiences. He enjoys browsing through the bookstores. He brought home a book on volcanoes and weather. This is a strong indication that he likes science.

H: What could be done to make the experience of visiting the museum better for you both?

M: We discussed quiet rooms and McDonald's is a draw. I googled and found <http://exs.exploratorium.edu/exhibit-categories/smell-taste-touch/>. Exhibits that engage the senses would also be a memorable experience. The National Zoo is one of Deion's favorite places to visit. He loves animals. He likes to watch videos (the birth of a baby elephant) and the interactive panel where you push a button and can hear the variations in roars of the lions noting their moods. It would also be useful if:

(1) Deion was able to look at and bring home visuals about an exhibit he saw. Parents could read with them to help them fully understand what they saw. If it was a school outing teachers could review again the next day.

(2) Could make a visual slide show of the exhibit, which Deion could show while talking about the exhibit to teacher or parents.

(3) The slide show could be set to a particular type of music that would also help keep the child focused and interested. All children love music.

H: Would you like to come to special events aimed at people on the autism spectrum (e.g. early opening, exhibitions which included chill out spaces)?

M: Yes! I would be interested. It is a matter of preference. Some would like to be with the general public. I'd rather be in an environment where we could be perfectly comfortable with no stares and comments. It will take the general public some time to understand the behaviors of children on the spectrum.

I wanted to give an example of an organization that has been very respectful and understanding to our kids with special needs. KEEN of Greater DC collaborated with Kids Euro Festival held at the French Embassy. During a performance, one young man got up and ran to one of the Portuguese acrobats, took his hoola hoop and tried it. His Mom and I looked at each other, gave high five and giggled. He was able to be himself and everyone understood.

H: What do you think the barriers for families with children with learning disabilities attending museums?

M: The crowds, waiting in long lines, children not understanding what they hear or see and sensory issues are barriers.

H: How do you think museums should advertise to reach more families with children with intellectual disabilities?

M: The museums could advertise with the schools, social networks, newspapers and community calendars. Children could take the information home in their back packs. Public Service announcements on radio, TV and the internet would also be good. The hospitals and clinics that serve children with special needs would also be a resource.

Visiting the National Museum of American History

Chaniqua Bond, Donna Njoku, Forbe Njoku, Samara Njoku, Pam Ogaugha, Taylor Brown, Victoria Watson



Best things about the visit

Touching things and doing things



Taylor: It did [work]! Don't want to do it no more.



Pam: The windsurf interactive is a cool concept but it doesn't work. It needs to be a bit more simple to use.

Victoria: I'm making a flower. It's going to be pretty. This is what I do at home.



Chaniqua: My favourite bit was the birds. I like birds.

Samara looking at the birds



Victoria: It started good actually. I like it. Especially in this area which is more open for the kids to come and enjoy themselves. I like it so far...let's see how the rest of the day go.

Spark!Lab

The simulator ride



Samara: That was fun!

Forbe had his thumbs up all the way through!

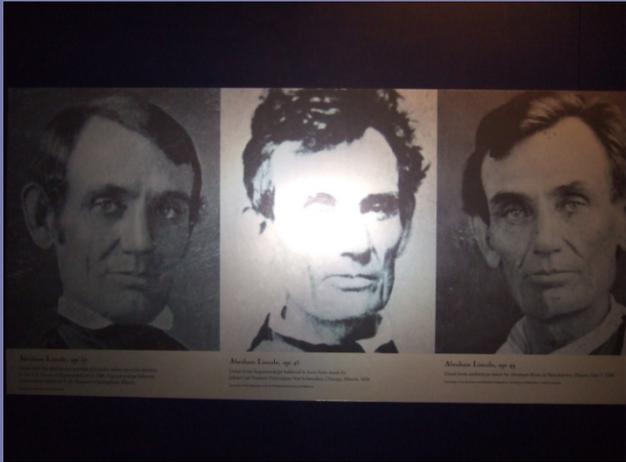
One of our favorite part

We'd come back here...

Taylor: I like the ride most. Whatever ride that was cost \$7. Abraham Lincoln...after that it went downhill.

Another one of our favorite bits

Abraham Lincoln



Taylor's photographs

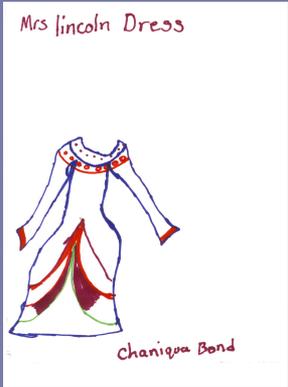


Samara's drawing of Lincoln's suit



Samara: My favorite bit was Abraham Lincoln's suit

Chaniqua: My favourite bit was Abraham Lincoln's wife's dress. It was pretty.



Chaniqua's drawing of Mrs. Lincoln's dress



Worst things about the visit



The simulator ride costs too much



The windsurf game didn't work very well

Taylor: We didn't get to see everything



Samara: The pop up books. It was scary and dark in there.



Not enough African American history



Donna: When you educating children you want them to feel that they are included it so when they are walking around they are seeing Indian children, they are see African American children they are see Caucasian children.



Pam: What about jazz...
Jazz is American, country
music is American.
Classical Music in
European.



Pam: It's a sensitive thing ...blacks used to be called baboons, we were told you're primitive, you're not human . . . is this the only thing you can spot light? When I go places I want to see me. When I tell my children about our proud heritage and the culture. You need to see where you've been. And we're Americans. Even though African Americans were kept separate we still had a full and thriving life.

Pam : So we are telling our children who have these disabilities and these differences, letting them know how great they are as individuals and how much they have the opportunity to achieve and grow. Without the diversity in the museum, if it's only mom and dad saying it, how are we going to convince them? You need to go out and see it ... how will Taylor believe it if she doesn't see it?

Pam: Even if the American Indian museum is over here and the black museum (Anacostia) is over here then I still thought that when you come to gather here, that you would see bits and pieces of all of America.

Donna: [The National Museum of American History] needs to encompass everything, so you can make one trip. You need to have enough information to learning about all cultures here.

Belonging in the public space of the museum
Donna: 'I want to be in a place where I can give my children the flexibility to be who they are'



Samara and Forbe
safely explore the
museum

Donna: There are other issue with my daughter and I have to work through those issues with her when I'm out in the public. I have to give her the flexibility to be who she is, to lay down on the floor [to watch a film in the Abraham Lincoln gallery] if that's what she wants. It's ok, she's watching and so there's no need to sit up and no need to force here to part of the norm. For that to be available in a setting where there aren't security guards wandering round going 'hey'!

Donna: [I went through that myself] as a young mother. If I was dealing with Forbe have tantrums [when he was a toddler]. You are just looking me up and down internally I'm sweating because it feels like you are critiquing me. And the fact that you are watching everything I doing and I don't know if you going to call security on me.

Pam: I've had people almost call 911 on me!

Donna: And then that panic turns to the child, they can feel that energy.

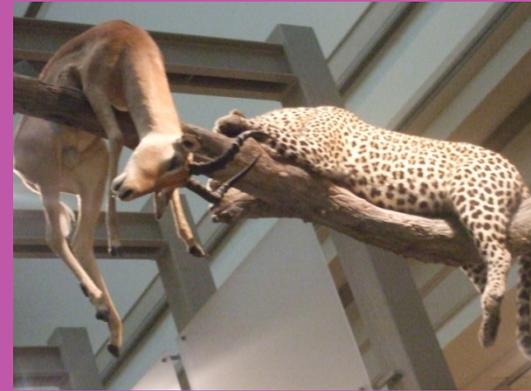
Pam: Taylor feeds off of energy ...and if it's good energy Taylor feeds off it and if it's bad she feeds off it. Today [near the end of the visit] Taylor disconnected, found a chill spot and took a moment. I went off and did what I wanted to do and then came back and she was good. But I might not be allowed that space [to give her the freedom to chill on her own] in another setting.



Dora Casey, Cappacani Kimble/
Brown,
Caprisha Powell, Courtney
Montgomery
and Yadira Reyes
and their teacher Cheryl Gillette

Visiting the National Museum of Natural History

Yadira and Caprisha went to a meeting about the Museums for Us project. From lots of different pictures – from rockets to paintings - they choose pictures of animals. Helen suggested they might like the National Museum of Natural History



We took pictures, recorded some ideas then we drew pictures and wrote ideas on the board



We choose pink for the report because it reminded us of a color in the crochet Coral Reef we saw at the museum

Animals!



Caprisha: I liked the giraffe.

Yadira: I liked the animals.

Courtney: The lions.



Caprisha: My picture of the rhinoceros.



Photo of Dora



Human Origins

Caprisha's photo



Dora taking a photograph of a statue



Yadira taking a photograph of a statue



Caprisha's photo



Cappacani: I like the crocheted coral reef. I like all the colours. All the pictures... I took a couple of photos. I like it.



Crochet Coral Reef

Dora: I liked the colours. Pink, blue, green.

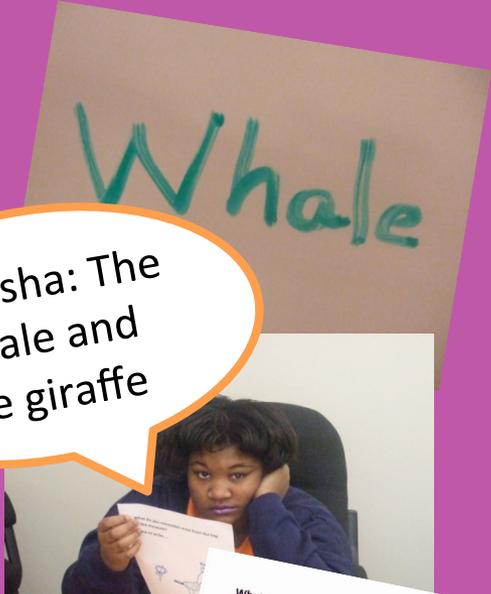
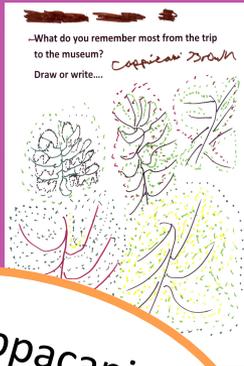
Caprisha's photo



Favorite things...



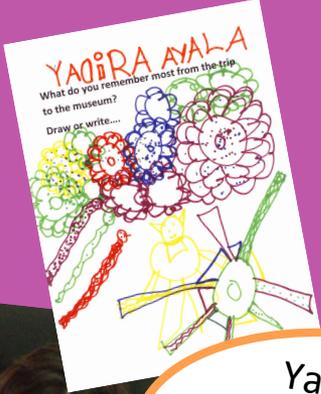
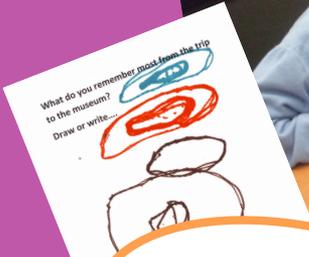
Cappacani:
The crochet
coral reef



Caprisha: The
whale and
the giraffe



Courtney: The
giraffe



Yadira: The
animals. The
tiger and the
giraffe.





Visiting the National Museum of Natural History

Darius Holmes and Keith Morris with their teacher Marva Boatman



Darius's visit



Darius: That one came out of nowhere. I got him!



Darius: Big Claws. I got him!



Darius: I liked the elephant, the giraffe, the monkey...



Darius: Elephant, elephant!





Darius's
photographs



Darius: Oh there's danger in the water, danger in the water...be careful now!



Darius: Good, I got him!



Darius's photographs



Darius: I want to come back. If want to see everything, the elephant, the giraffe and the monkey! Yeah I like it, it was fun.

Darius: We should do this more often!



Keith's visit



Keith: All the apes
Big and small.
They are all
fascinating.

Keith: I watch Safari on TV.
Program with animals.
Elephants, giraffes, tigers,
monkeys.



Keith: Very
dangerous.
It's for defence,
so they can
protect
themselves.

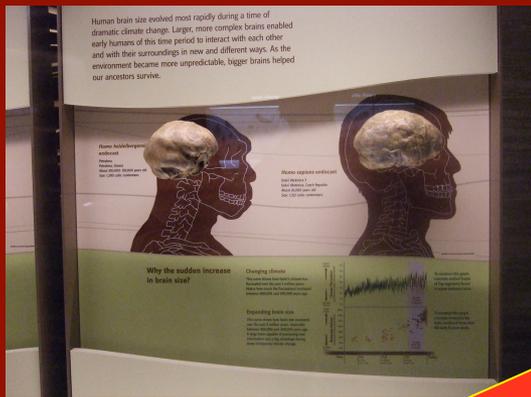


Keith: They are
attacking their
prey to get a meal.



Ocean





'Brain size increases'



Keith [reads] 'Are you related to living things?'
 Helen: Is that surprising?
 Keith: How are we related to chickens?



Dinosaurs



1 *Maiacetus*
(49–40 million years ago)



Maiacetus fossil

Fossils show that *Maiacetus* was well suited to life at sea.

It had flipper-like limbs, similar to those of a modern seal or walrus. And like some seals, *Maiacetus* probably spent much of its life in the water, returning to land only to mate and give birth.



Maiacetus fossil site

The fossilized animal is found in a shallow deposit of sandstone in the coastal plain of the state of New Jersey.

2 *Dorudon*
(38–36 million years ago)



Dorudon alive

Dorudon left the land behind. It lived its entire life in the ocean.

The animal's hind limbs, feet, and toes were much reduced from those of its earlier relative, *Maiacetus*. The tail of *Dorudon*, meanwhile, was longer and stronger to propel the animal through the water.



Dorudon fossil site

The fossilized animal is found in a shallow deposit of sandstone in the coastal plain of the state of New Jersey.

3 *Basilosaurus*
(40–35 million years ago)



Basilosaurus skeleton

A streamlined body and paddle-like flippers allow *Basilosaurus* swim a few meters. Saw-edged teeth suggest it was a top predator. Its hind limbs reveal that it descended from land dwellers.

Scientists who discovered *Basilosaurus* first thought it was a reptile and named it "sea lizard." Today we know it was a dinosaur.

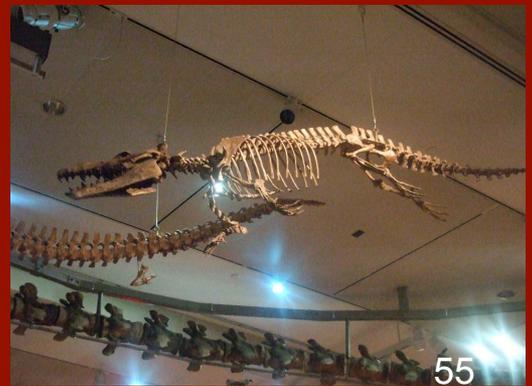


Basilosaurus fossil site

The fossilized animal is found in a shallow deposit of sandstone in the coastal plain of the state of New Jersey.



Keith: T-Rex [is my favorite] big and a strong and they are meat eaters.



Favorite things

What will you remember most?

Keith: Dinosaur exhibit, ocean.
Tigers and lions, hippopotamus.
I'll remember all.

What did you find most surprising?

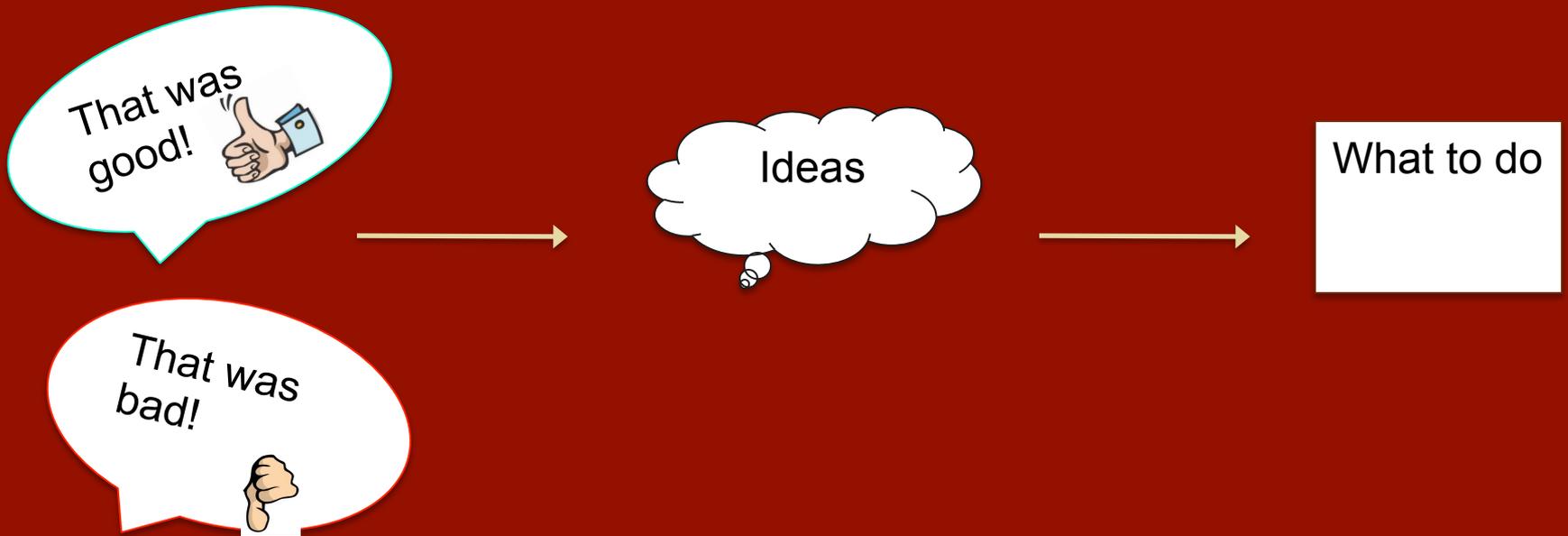
Keith: Human brain. If you have a small brain your head is small. If you have a big brain then you have a big head.

Will you come back?

Keith: I'll come back on my own or with other people, maybe with a friend or with my family.

Part 2

Linking experiences,
concepts and 'what to do'





Freedom to explore on my own



Knowing what to expect

Somewhere to chill out



Being able to take photographs

'Inclusion' – Feeling Welcome

Exhibitions designed with spaces to explore

Pre-visit information, photographs of the exhibition and social stories

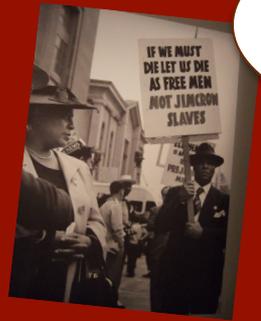
Seating in quieter places and/or places with lower light levels



Coming with friends and family



Seeing yourself in the museum



Lying on the floor to watch a film



Talking and sharing (sometimes loudly)

'Inclusion' as Belonging

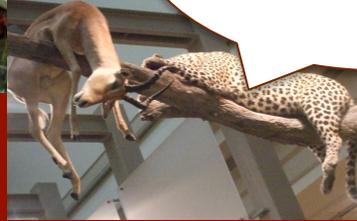
African American and disability history

Security guards understanding people have right to behave in different ways in a museum

Other visitors not staring



Surprising displays



'Access' –
Feeling
Engaged/
Excited



Creative use of objects works – communicate visually

Planning in interactivity in all displays linked to key messages

Being able to take photographs.

Linking the simulators more to the collections or finding more multisensory ways on interpreting collections/topics.



Touching things and doing things



Taking photographs



The simulator!





Connections between cartoons and displays

'Access' – Being Interested

Use popular culture as reference points and use cartoons to help communicate

Post-visit resources (photographs and activities). Use different levels of text

The museum supporting links to career plans – volunteering and internships



Looking back on the visit – linking it to school work

Makes me think about jobs I'd like to do



Part 3

Changing museums from the inside;
Understanding museums from the outside





What makes a museum a museum for you? What makes a museum – in more official policy or academic language – ‘accessible’ or ‘inclusive’?

The answer from those involved in the Museums for Us project: big effects come from many little things.

And many little things – as well as some very big things – can make a museum exclusionary and unwelcoming too. (We’ll come back to that).

In other words, there’s no quick and simple answer to making a museum which works for young people and adults with intellectual disabilities. But that also means that neither does increasing ‘access’ or ‘inclusion’ for young people and adults with intellectual disabilities have to be a big, expensive project. The issue isn’t a big one off investment, but an investment of ongoing small thoughts and actions.

Following the visits to the museum described in this booklet, the ideas which came up most in the Museums for Us project precisely linked things which seem to be intangible – ‘inclusion’ as ‘welcoming’ and ‘belonging’ and ‘access’ as ‘excitement’, ‘engaged’, ‘interested’ – with the tangibility of the very concrete suggestions offered about what a museum might *do* in practice.

Inclusion



Access



That's
good!



'Inclusion' is:

- *Feeling welcomed* is about how the security guards behave and knowing what to expect in advance of the visit through pre-visit resources.
- *Belonging* is about having the freedom to explore without others intervening, about whether you get stared at and whether you know other people who come to the museum.

'Access' is:

- *Being excited* is a display of a lion jumping out of a wall, taking photographs and remembering watching a safari program.
- *Being engaged* comes from your whole body and mind being absorbed in a simulator ride.
- *Being interested* comes from the museum presenting something you know about in advance of the visit and it linking into your personal plans.

A good visit comes from all these things being felt and is created by all these actions (from exhibition design to behavior of security guards) coming together positively.

?



People are
expected to
change and
not museums

'Inclusion' and 'access'?

The notion of 'inclusion' has been widely critiqued. One major criticism has been that 'inclusion' ignores issues of inequality (Lister 1998), another has been that 'inclusion' evokes a sense of space where there is a 'centre' or a 'core' into which people are then included. The implication being that it is people who are expected to adapt (rather than the 'centre' adapting) and therefore acts as more accurately as a form of 'social insertion' (Winance 2007, p. 635).

The concept of 'access' has been critiqued for roughly the same reason – it creates a conceptual 'inside' to which barriers must be dismantled. While this way of thinking about 'access' as removing 'barriers' works for some issues (steps and ramps), the argument goes that it does not work for all (Shakespeare 2006, p. 46). And the danger is that 'access' is understood as an 'add on' which doesn't require what is 'inside' – again conceived as the 'centre' or the 'core' – to transform at all.

A more museum-specific implication of the idea of 'access' is explored by Kevin Hetherington in his theoretical work on logics of access provision for people who are blind and partially sighted. Hetherington argues that practices of access can be characterized by institutional 'disposal'. Following legal shifts – such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) or the UK Disability Discrimination Act (1995),



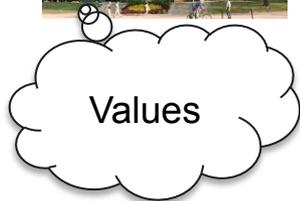
+ Add ons



CHANGE

museums have an identified blind and partially-sighted people's lack of access to objects, collections and visually-orientated displays as an 'issue' requiring 'accommodations' (ADA 1990) or 'adjustments' (DDA 1995). Following the identification of the 'issue' specific resources (tactile models) and programs (touch tours) are organized which then are understood institutionally to have addressed that 'issue' (2003, p. 110). The danger is, Hetherington argues, that a broader engagement with what 'access' or, indeed, 'inclusion' might mean is negated. However, I want to make a bid for the use of 'inclusion' and 'access' and suggest they may not stabilize the 'inside' of the museum as the 'centre' in the ways it might be assumed.

'Inclusion' has been used in different ways in different contexts. While in the context of adult social care it is very possible to suggest that inclusion can effectively evoke 'insertion' (Winance 2007, p. 635) or 'fitting in' (Johnson and Walmsley with Wolfe 2010, p. 134), in the inclusive learning tradition an 'inclusive' approach to learning has always been imagined as requiring a complete transformation in how we imagine 'education' (Barton 1995). Inclusivity in the inclusive learning tradition has drawn attention to an individual's needs whatever their ability and precisely places a focus on increasing personalization within group and collaborative settings rather than one-size-fits-all classroom teaching (McIntyre 2000).



Are some labels useful?

One of the problems with the idea of ‘inclusivity’ for museums is that they are institutions which do not deal in personalization, they deal in ‘audiences’ and ‘visitors’ as the general and as the imagined. ‘Audiences’ are segmented on this basis (e.g. families, adults or via socio-economic groups) and broad interpretative approaches are developed. As such inclusivity in a museum context, is an abstract imaginary – a motivating principle which comes from the original mission of the civic museums as ‘for all’. This can be clearly seen in the Smithsonian Institution’s ‘mission’, ‘vision’, ‘values’ and ‘priorities’. The mission implicitly imagines a non-specific world into which ‘diffusion’ takes place. Sharing resources is with ‘the world’, a key ‘value’ is to ‘be of benefit to the public’, it is the ‘visitor experience’ which is a priority for improvement (see Appendix 1).

And this is where ‘access’ comes in. If ‘inclusivity’ is a conceptual strategy, then ‘access’ is tactics. If ‘inclusivity’ is a value and a vision, then ‘access’ is what must be *done* to move towards that vision. If inclusivity – in the inclusive learning tradition – is critical about labels and one-size-fits all, then ‘access’ requires labels in the form of subtle audience segmentation, it needs to consider general approaches to certain groups.

This is a line of argument taken by Jonathan Rix in answer to the question of how to strike a balance between ‘identifying a learning profile and delivering inclusive education’. He shows that some general knowledge about – in his example – Down’s Syndrome – can be useful: ‘teachers may also feel better prepared if they have access



REVISED



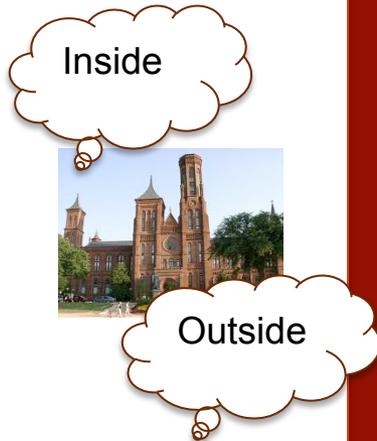
WORK

to a learning profile, which outlines typical characteristics of the syndrome'. However he strongly argues that any such profile needs to be understood as a 'conglomeration of possibilities' (Rix, 2009, p. 101). Specifically he argues that what is known in general about a 'syndrome' needs to be constantly qualified by the needs, motivations and interests of the person themselves.

For museums this suggests a need to more explicitly understand people with intellectual disabilities as included in their general mission and ethos. However, Rix's argument also suggests museums might use more informed generalizations in developing exhibitions and programs (using broad profiles such as 'autism' or Down's Syndrome) but also that they might work to create exhibitions and programs with increasing possibilities for personalization for people with intellectual disabilities (via pre- and post visit resources and interactivity).

Internal' and 'external' access work

This relationship between general approaches and personalized approaches is a key theme in publications deriving from a project – 'Concepts of Access' – based in the UK in 2005-2007 and initiated by Melanie Nind and Jane Searle. The project brought together people with intellectual disabilities, people who support them and people who research intellectual disability to discuss the meanings of 'access'. A key idea which emerges from the 'Concepts of Access' project – is that access is too often fleeting and therefore that access can only be made possible through ongoing work (Duncan Mitchell cited Nind and Searle 2009, p. 278).



In order to conceptualise this work a 'multi-dimensional model' of access was developed:

1. physical access to things (essential but not sufficient; access goes beyond the physical means of entering or approaching);
2. knowledge (being able to find out about things);
3. power (having the ability and influence to achieve and maintain access);
4. relationships and communication (personal facilitation and interpersonal interaction);
5. advocacy (making real choices and voicing them – an overlapping concept with access);
6. participation (in groups, events, democratic processes);
7. quality of life (belonging to communities, enjoying independence/interdependence and social networks)

(Nind and Searle 2009, p. 277)

In the light of the idea of access as multi-dimensional, 'access' to museums can be understood as evoking two types of institutional work: *internal work* and *external work*.

The impact of effective *internal work* can be seen in a number of the comments in the main section of the booklet.

For example when Darius Holmes exclaims in surprise at the tiger with his dinner displayed up a tree in the National Museum of Natural History, the interpretative plan was a success. Or when Taylor Brown praised the interactive touch screen in the National Museum of American History

It
doesn't
work!



Money gallery, it was an instance of the planned interactivity working. When Victoria Watson suggested that the L-Train in the *American on the Move* exhibition (also National Museum of American History) should have been moving, she was suggesting what might be built into future exhibitions.

The 'access work' here lies in formative evaluation: What do visitors and potential visitors already know that might they like to see? It is in interpretatively-relevant interactive and multi-sensory routes through the exhibition spaces. So when Pam Ogaugha, Donna Njoku and Forbe Njoku couldn't get the windsurf interactive in the National Museum of American History to work then it shows the necessity of more work on trying out, testing and improving interactives. As Pam Ogaugha notes of the windsurf interactive, 'it was a cool idea'... but it just didn't work in practice.

When Taylor Brown mentioned the fact that there were seats for her to go and take a few quiet moments near the end of her visit, she is showing the importance of planning spaces and seating in museum design. When Steven Powe remembered a positive interaction with the security staff at the Museum of American Art and the National Portrait Gallery, it shows the importance and potential importance of Front of House staff training.



Special
sessions?

Mainstream?

Then there is *external work*.

By external work I mean link-by-link building the very social networks that mean that people will visit. This is the side of access referred to as ‘relationship and communication’ by Nind and Searle. This is about slowly and deliberately – through outreach and organized trips – building the lines of connection which make it possible for an individual or a family to visit.

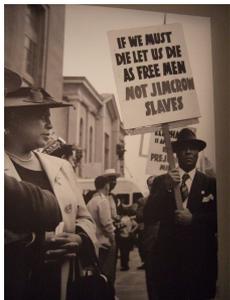
These links are about practicalities such as how to get to the museum and, crucially, feeling confident you know what to expect when you get there. Pre-visit resources mentioned by Michelle Hawkins are a key part of that. Perhaps the best way of thinking about good pre-visit material (along with all the other internal work) is as creating the sense that you know you will be welcomed before you walk through the doors.

Special or mainstreamed?

A key practical question raised by the different imaginaries of ‘access’ and ‘inclusion’ is the question of specially organized sessions for people with intellectual disabilities. At the Georgetown University self-advocates were clear that they favored a universal design approach to tours and exhibitions. However, Michelle Hawkins questions this and argues:

Special sessions?

Mainstream?



It is a matter of preference. Some would like to be with the general public. I'd rather be in an environment where we could be perfectly comfortable with no stares and comments. It will take the general public some time to understand the behaviors of children on the spectrum.

I would suggest that we need to see the special sessions as part of 'access work' which supports familiarity and confidence – part of what the museum can do to make the solid foundations which will enable for future visiting, whether in specially organized sessions or with everyone else.

The other key aspect of linking specialized provision and mainstream inclusion was raised by Victoria Watson, Taylor Brown and Steven Powe was in terms of the way the museum might support career development. The internship program for people with disabilities already run by the Smithsonian is key here (<http://www.si.edu/ofg/intern.htm>).

Experience of exclusion

One of the key experiences of the visit for Pam Ogaugha was that African American History was not present enough in the National Museum of American History. People who know that museum could think of examples of African American history in the museum. For example

EXCLUSION

more powerful than...

Inclusion

some of mannequins in *America on the Move* are of African Americans. However, to search for qualifiers to Pam Ogaugha's argument is to miss the point. From Pam's perspective the lack of a concerted approach to African American history or to the history of people with disabilities negated the very reason she wanted to visit the museum with Taylor, her daughter:

So we are telling our children who have these disabilities and these differences, letting them know how great they are as individuals and how much they have the opportunity to achieve and grow. Without the diversity in the museum, if it's only mom and dad saying it, how are we going to convince them? You need to go out and see it ... how will she believe it if she doesn't see it?

The absolutely key point here – a point we discussed at the seminar to share the Museums for Us project held at the Smithsonian Institution by Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies on 27th January 2011 – is that one experience of exclusion is more powerful than other more positive experiences. Even if the latter experiences outnumber the former. What this requires is a thorough-going approach to inclusive history which does not simply 'add in' but actively takes on key issues in American history such as slavery, segregation and desegregation and civil rights.

Here the full dynamics of the multidimensional approach to access need to be felt. Involvement in museums should not be just as 'audiences'. But as co-producers of knowledge and exhibitions. But involvement should also include participation within democratic structures, such as at trustee level or on strategic advisory groups (e.g. around collections).



Final thoughts

If it is true that museums need to deal in generalizations in terms of audience segmentations' and imagined visitors, it is also true that what allows the categories that are used for institutional work to be effective and not fixed is connecting up people with intellectual disabilities and curators, designers and managers – a point made very strongly by the Access to Heritage Project, based in Liverpool, UK (2007). The best and most usable generalizations – which are certainly necessary for exhibition planning – come from constant revision and from being required to taken into account the complexity of daily life and the complexity of every museum visit.

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Appendix 1

Smithsonian Institution: Our Mission, Our Values, Our Priorities

Our Mission

The increase and diffusion of knowledge

Our Vision

Shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world

Our Values

Discovery: Explore and bring to light new knowledge and ideas, and better ways of doing business

Creativity: Instill our work with imagination and innovation

Excellence: Deliver the highest-quality products and services in all endeavors

Diversity: Capitalize on the richness inherent in differences

Integrity: Carry out all our work with the greatest responsibility and accountability

Service: Be of benefit to the public and our stakeholders

Our Priorities

Four Grand Challenges: Focus on the four grand challenges outlined in the Smithsonian Strategic Plan (Unlocking the Mysteries of the Universe, Understanding and Sustaining a Biodiverse Planet, Valuing World Cultures, Understanding the American Experience)

Broadening Access: Digitizing our collections, exploring next-generation technologies and improving the visitor experience

Revitalizing Education: Serve as a laboratory to create models and methods of innovative informal education and link them to formal education system

Crossing Boundaries: Establish interdisciplinary consortia around each of the four grand challenges

Strengthening Collections: Develop collections plan to support Institution-wide initiatives

Organizational Excellence: Strengthen organizational services that allow us to deliver on our mission

Measuring Performance: Establish performance indicators that will specifically and annually measure progress toward our goals

Appendix 2

Taken from the Museums for Us website:

The Georgetown University University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities invited the Museums for Us project to attend its Consumer Advisory Council meeting yesterday (12th January 2011).

After introducing the project and the ideas suggested so far, I then took the opportunity to tap into the fantastic expertise of the Council's self advocates, parent advocates, professionals and researchers.

Lots of very useful and inspiring ideas and opinions were shared but a key theme was a sense of being welcomed and that you – and your way of being in the world – was understood and accepted both by staff and by other members of the public.

A welcoming atmosphere is key

Nothing is less accessible or inclusive than being asked to leave the exhibition or the museum! Some museums were thought to already be very welcoming of noise and interaction. The National Air and Space Museum was given as an example of a museum where no-one worries too much and you don't feel like Security is going to intervene. However, a more welcoming understanding of the multiple ways people interact in the world was thought to be essential in museums which have traditionally been more exclusive, such as art museums.

Staff training was mentioned by a number of people. As was the importance of exposure: that museum workers get to meet people with intellectual

disabilities and that people with intellectual disabilities get used to being in, and interacting in, lots of different situations.

Universal design: Tours, speed and language levels

We discussed the issue of special tours aimed at people with intellectual disabilities. One of the self advocates in the room strongly argued against this and instead argued that tours should be pitched at a language level and at a speed which works for as many people as possible. It was noted that this might also work for people who have English as an additional language. We went on to discuss this as a 'universal design' approach. This would mean that rather than creating special tours for people with intellectual disabilities, differentiation would be better introduced through offering a standard inclusive tour but then with extra options for more in-depth tours.

Virtual reality: Multisensory and Interactive (might work for pre-visit resources and 'social stories' too)

I shared with the Council one of the findings of the project so far – that the Smithsonian's simulators are not at all an 'add on'. They are rather one of the experiences which are remembered most – and perhaps act as a key to rest of the visit.

The Council responded strongly to this and suggested the possibility of deploying more virtual reality approaches. This could work in the displays themselves but one of the Council members also suggested that this could tie into pre-visit recourses. One of the ideas that is emerging is the importance of museums offering 'social stories' to help prepare people on the autism spectrum for the visit.

We discussed that the social story approach could well deploy online opportunities so that people could practice navigating the exhibition virtually and even use a pre-visit website to help practice with interactive interfaces.

Building in calmer, quieter alcoves into exhibitions was also thought to be helpful for visitors on the autism spectrum.

Involvement in displays: Use the resources in the community (and think about Spanish speakers)

Finally, get people involved. One of the Council members suggested getting families involved in sharing plans for the exhibitions and in developing aspects of the display. She suggest that this might be especially useful for reaching out to D.C.'s Spanish-speaking community and that individuals and groups might be interested in getting involved in developing appropriately-pitched Spanish language resources.