

Museums and Education – Linking students, teachers and their communities.

Public Programs and Exhibitions at the Immigration Museum in 2008.

At the recent Connecting Schools and Communities conference, in Wodonga¹, the question was posed – how do you as educators engage with community? The conference explored through guest speakers and nine case studies the ways in which school communities and their facilities were contributing to creative and connected local communities, lifelong learning and successful local partnerships.

David Jones, Year 9 Multi media teacher and Advance Program co ordinator at Wodonga Middle Years College Felltimber Campus, Simone Hogg, Wodonga Art Gallery and myself reported on an exciting partnership program that began at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne in June 2007, developed into an exhibition at the Wodonga Arts Space from December 2007 to January 2008 and will finally be showcased in the ground floor gallery at the Immigration Museum from August to November 2008. The ways in which community connections developed through the life of this school project offers an example of how a regional school can connect to its local community but also to the big city and how large cultural organisations can be actively involved with their communities.

The year 9 students at Wodonga Middle Year's College, Felltimber Campus investigated the migration stories in their community and created an exhibition of these stories for the community to experience. The exhibition was launched in the local Art gallery and will travel to Melbourne, to be exhibited at the Immigration Museum in August.

The Immigration Museum is one of the three venues of Museum Victoria and is located in the Old Customs House, a heritage listed building in Melbourne's CBD at 400 Flinders St. Our museum celebrates its 10th Birthday this year.

The Immigration Museum explores the stories of real people from all over the world who have migrated to Victoria. It re-creates their stories with a rich mix of moving images, personal and community voices, memories and memorabilia. From the reasons for making the journey, to the moment of arrival in a new country, and the impact on indigenous communities, these stories are sometimes sad, sometimes funny, but always engaging. We see over 40,000 students during the school year with programs for primary, secondary and tertiary students. Our programs use the objects and artefacts in the museum as the means by which students can connect to migration stories. We also provide off site and on line support materials to enable class room teachers to extend the learning experience beyond the onsite activities. However our learning partnership established with the year 9 Felltimber students is our first foray into a Regional school partnership. How did it begin?

¹ At La Trobe University, Albury -Wodonga Campus, Wednesday 25th June.

The Advance Program – Schools and Community Organisations

Advance – A Victorian Government Program for Youth Development – is a partnership between the government, schools and community organisations*Through the Office for Youth, funding is available to all Victorian Government secondary school campuses to deliver Advance.*

...Advance is a school-based program for young people to volunteer in their community. It is a partnership between the Office for Youth, Victorian government secondary schools and community organisations. Advance gives young people a chance to do something great in their community based on their choice. Young people are able to plan projects, meet new people, build skills and make a difference in their community. (This is an extract from the Advance Web page.)

Wodonga Middle Years College – Felltimber Campus Advance Co ordinator David Jones approached the Immigration Museum with a view to establishing a school community project, early in 2007 and by term 3 2007 we had developed a program which would see students visiting the Museum fortnightly during term 3 and participating in an on going research project into the migration stories of their community, using on line support materials from the Immigration Museum website. The project also involved a visit from an Immigration museum staff member to the school.

The Advance Project and the requirement for active community connections by students supported the development of meaningful activities between the school and the Museum's collections and programs. We were not developing a relationship by remote connections. Through fortnightly workshops at the museum, students from regional Victoria were able to build a very strong relationship to the city based museum and this was a key aspect of the project. Not only did the students connect to their local community through investigation of the stories of migration to Wodonga – many of these students had never been to Melbourne and one outcome of this project was that regional Victorian students commuted to their capital city and participated in learning in a public institution.

The Immigration Museum – Community Engagement

The Immigration Museum's Statement of Purpose is to

... reach out to an increasingly diverse audience through our collection and associated knowledge, using innovative programs that engage and fascinate. We will contribute to our communities understanding of the world and undertake our stewardship of the collection in a way that ensures our inheritance is augmented and passed on to future generations. We will shape the future as a networked museum that fosters creativity. *MV Strategic Plan 2008-2013.*

Any city based organisation has to work hard to build partnerships and connections with regional groups. At Museum Victoria there is a commitment to ..

Engage all Victorians through innovative exhibitions ,on line experiences and stimulating programs at our venues and through out the State, to increase understanding of Victoria's place in the world.
MV Strategic Plan 2008-2013.

This aspect of Museum Victoria's Strategic Plan offers the Immigration Museum the opportunity to work with schools and communities especially in relation to working with CaLD² communities.

Exhibitions and Festivals at the Immigration Museum;

The Immigration Museum collaborates with culturally and linguistically diverse communities to explore, document and present stories and experiences of immigration and cultural diversity in Victoria.

We work together to create Community Exhibitions and Community Cultural Festivals and invite community members to contribute towards planning for future initiatives, projects, research and development of collections.

Each community is unique, and this requires the museum to be adaptable and flexible in its approach to working with communities. The process for establishing and developing relationships with communities is on the basis of mutual respect, shared goals, open and honest dialogue and collaborative attitude. This process is important in establishing and building long term connections with Victoria's diverse communities. What the community has to say.

Community contribution is key to the success of these projects. The Immigration Museum seeks feedback about the process from community representatives after each project; and this informs future approaches and processes. The Museum maintains ongoing relations with communities through annual community consultations and special projects.

The Museum is committed to developing strong and sustainable relationships with Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

While school representatives have been involved in planning groups associated with festivals and exhibitions over the past 10 years at the museum, we have not had any specific relationship with student projects and an actual student exhibition at the museum.

² CaLD –Culturally and Linguistically Diverse.

2008 marks the 10th Anniversary of the Museum and it is an exciting addition to our exhibition program to have a completely student developed exhibition opening in the ground floor space.

Please come and visit the exhibition and see what year 9 students at Wodonga Middle Years College were able to discover about their community, how they communicated what they learnt and how a public institution can offer the means by which those stories are shared with the Victorian Community.

All participants in this project are proud of what has been achieved and we hope this will be the first of many meaningful community and school partnerships.

Jan Molloy

Programs Co ordinator Humanities

Immigration Museum.

Links :

Visit the Advance website

<http://www.youth.vic.gov.au/web21/ofy/dvcofy.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/grants+and+programsadvance>

Visit the Immigration Museum website

<http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/>

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