A reflective toolkit on museum inclusiveness

**How is culture viewed and portrayed? Are culturally diverse visitors and staff sought out?**

A common but ineffective approach to culture is the transmission approach, which sees cultures as distinct and possessing identifiable traits that people can learn to become more informed. Instead, cultural practices and identities should be viewed as dynamic, interactional, and rooted in history (Convertino et al., 2016). People from different cultural backgrounds have different experiences and perspectives that influence their approaches to and interactions in museums. *Is cultural diversity valued in both visitors and staff? What are the challenges to promoting diversity for different groups?*

**What makes a good educator and learning experience to different visitors?**

Different cultural groups have different attitudes about what constitutes a good educator and effective learning (Delpit, 1995). Working with the communities and families that visitors are a part of is key: they can provide forums for exploring the relevance of education in their own contexts and extend discussions on educational improvement to places outside of the museum. Community organizations and families can cultivate the support necessary for reform and growth (C. Banks, 2016). Meaningful learning entails making connections between cultural repertoires of practice and educational experiences (Convertino et al., 2016). *How can people from different cultural backgrounds be accounted for in structural designs of learning processes?*

**How are diverse perspectives included in the learning process?**

Diversity, difference, and multiculturalism can be incorporated into a museum space in various ways. For instance, individual programs or exhibits can be inclusive; an entire gallery can be dedicated to inclusiveness; the pedagogical structure of how museum learning occurs can be inclusive; and visitors’ perspectives can contribute to creating inclusivity (J. Banks, 2016). Incorporating multiculturalism in structural ways allows the museum to institutionalize cultural competence. The museum experience should be culturally relevant: this is a shared endeavor between educators, visitors, communities, and organization (Ladson-Billings, 2009). *What are the cultural perspectives of people who currently influence the museum structure? What perspectives are missing? Who are some potential collaborators to achieve cultural relevance?*

**How is physical space used in the museum?**

The way a physical space is constructed and used is a key part of education. In the museum setting, intentional design, chance, and personal choice and interpretation play a role in learning (Bell et al., 2009). *What do you notice when you first enter the museum? How is space used differently throughout the museum to different educational effects? How do different spaces make you feel? How might the uses of space make others feel?*

**How is race viewed and talked about? What can be done to combat institutionalized racism in the museum?**

Despite widespread beliefs that the United States is a post-racial society in the 21st century, copious research on modern racism show that negative racial attitudes have not disappeared; rather, modern racism, rooted in past racisms, has adapted to fit changing norms about the acceptability of overt discrimination (Picca & Thompson-Miller, 2016). Further, the legacy of racism towards people of color includes a history of racism enacted through educational institutions. Museums, as educational and cultural institutions, operate within a larger social context and therefore reflect and reinforce ideas about race. *How racially diverse is the museum? Who is leading conversations and decisions about race?*

**How is accessibility built into the museum space and exhibit designs?**

Disability is a socially constructed concept that can entail physical, developmental, emotional, and a multiplicity of other kinds of traits. Thinking about the various ways a museum may be more educationally adaptable ultimately comes down to treating every person with a disability as a visitor and learner first and a person with a disability second. This cultivates a more positive perspective that allows disability to be seen as a set of special needs (Bicard & Heward, 2016). *How can the museum accommodate the needs of people with developmental disabilities? How might a person in a wheelchair interact with learning experiences differently? How can people with disabilities be included in conversations about accessibility?*

**How is gender approached implicitly and explicitly?**

Historically, education has relied on male-defined curricula that see the male experience as universal (Thompson Tetreault, 2016). People of other genders should be considered in the structure of museum practices and content. *What are some factors that cause people of a particular gender identity to feel unwelcome at the museum, and how can those be addressed in the museum environment and structure?*

**How can LGBTQ visitors, staff, volunteers, and stakeholders be supported in the museum?**

LGBTQ people have historically faced opposition and hatred in educational contexts and continue to today. Making the museum space explicitly supportive for LGBTQ staff and visitors is crucial. Using gender-neutral pronouns (‘they/them’), knowing community resources, and deep reflection on assumed normality are some ways to become more inclusive (Mayo, 2016). *What can the museum do to support LGBTQ people and help them feel valued?*

**How is language used and how can multilingualism be built into the museum space?**

The language used in the museum entails what languages people speak, the text of signs and exhibits, and more. There is a critical interplay between the linguistic skills visitors bring with them and the linguistic and educational contexts the museum offers (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). Visitors will always learn best when their culture and language is acknowledged and developed through educational experiences (Varghese, 2016). *How is linguistic difference approached? Are there English-only supports, bilingual or multilingual supports, or structurally multilingual learning processes?  How can people’s linguistically diverse perspectives be incorporated in museum processes?*

Works Cited

Banks, Cherry A. McGee. (2016). Communities, Families, and Educators Working Together for School Improvement. In Banks, James A. and Banks, Cherry A. McGee (Eds.), Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives (9th ed.), (pp. 275-294). United States: Wiley.

Banks, James A. (2016). Multicultural Education: Characteristics and Goals. In Banks, James A. and Banks, Cherry A. McGee (Eds.), Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives (9th ed.), (pp. 2-23). United States: Wiley.

Bell, Philip, Lewenstein, Bruce, Shouse, Andrew W., and Feder, Michael A. (2009). Learning Science in Informal Environments: People, Places, and Pursuits. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

Bicard, Sara C. & Heward, William L. (2016). Educational Equality for Students with Disabilities. In Banks, James A. and Banks, Cherry A. McGee (Eds.), Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives (9th ed.), (pp. 213-234). United States: Wiley.

Convertino, Christina, Levinson, Bradley A., and González, Norma. (2016). Culture, Teaching, and Learning. In Banks, James A. and

Delpit, Lisa. (1995). Other People’s Children. New York: The New Press.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. (2009). Dream Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mayo, Cris. (2016). Queer Lessons: Sexual and Gender Minorities in Multicultural Education. In Banks, James A. and Banks, Cherry A. McGee (Eds.), Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives (9th ed.), (pp. 132-147). United States: Wiley.

Picca, Leslie H. and Thompson-Miller, Ruth. Backstage Racism: Implications for Teaching. In Banks, James A. and Banks, Cherry A. McGee (Eds.), Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives (9th ed.), (pp. 171-187). United States: Wiley.

Suarez-Orozco, Carola, Suarez-Orozco, Marcelo, & Todorova, Irina. (2008). The Challenge of Learning English. In Learning a New Land (pp. 146-166). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.