Outside the Comfort Zone

When Listening is More Important than Talking

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Topics for the presentation:

• The museum’s effort to define and measure its social impact led to the realization that OMCA could serve as a force for social cohesion. That realization influences the how special exhibits are developed and how parts of the core galleries have been redesigned.

• These exhibits and the changes in the core gallery have moved docents out of their comfort zone.

• How do you train docents to tour in these exhibits.

• What are our takeaways from our experiences.
Social Impact ➤ Social Cohesion.

At the museum, we create the space and context for greater connection, trust, and understanding between people and social groups. This leads to greater social cohesion in our community.
Exhibits and gallery bays designed to build social cohesion.

**Exhibits:**

- Altered State: Marijuana in California
- Over the Top: Math Bass & the Imperial Court SF
- All Power to the People; Black Panthers at 50
- Respect: Hip-Hop Style & Wisdom
- Queer California: Untold Stories
- Día de Los Muertos
- Hella Feminists (spring of 2020)
Exhibits and gallery bays designed to build social cohesion.

**Art Gallery bay**
Question Bridge

**History Gallery bays**
Sent Away (Japanese Internment)
Black Power (Black Power movement)
Taking Native Lands and Lives
(State sponsored genocide of Native Californians)
Do these exhibits challenge docents?

Grappling with change.
What differences are you making.
The effect of what we do.
“Traditional visitor vs. new visitors”
Develop new opportunities; comfortable or uncomfortable.
Discuss new possibilities; comfortable and uncomfortable.
Can we influence the behavior of our community and vice versa?
Do these exhibits challenge docents?

Docents and leadership (museum, docent, board) composition may or may not reflect the community composition. Develop our assets with educators, curators, experts, community leaders, gathering spaces. Foster tolerance and acceptance in a potential “non-dominant” culture.
Queer California: Untold Stories

How does comfort level get measured?

The essentials of training:

- Docent to docent
- Curatorial walkthroughs etc.
- Work groups
- Field trips/community exposure

Shared perceived and actual experiences with feedback and reactions.

How do you work with new audiences?
Respect: Hip-Hop Style and Wisdom

Connections between Black Panthers and Hip-Hop.

What is Cultural Appropriation?

Culturally Relevant Education?

Educators who are part of Hip-Hop culture.
THE CHICANO MOVEMENT Responds to oppression and inspires Día de los muertos in the U.S.

El movimiento Chicano es una respuesta a la opresión y da inspiración al Día de Los Muertos en EE. UU.
El Día de los Muertos

Chicano Rights movement arose from injustices towards people of Mexican ancestry.

Cultural Appropriation or Special Exhibit?

Evolution of the exhibit at OMCA.
TAKING NATIVE LANDS AND LIVES

The raid of 1850 brought disaster to California's Native people. Between 1846 and 1860, the Native population shrank from nearly 100,000 to 3,000. Great for land and a deep rooted culture led to brutal violence that was sponsored by the state government and carried out by its residents. This legacy continues to effect California today.

WHAT IS GENOCIDE, AND WHY DOES THIS MUSEUM USE THE TERM?

Genocide means intentional group extermination. It is a word invented in 1944 to describe the Holocaust. Genocide can be either physical or cultural, against an entire people or a particular group. It can occur anywhere, at any time, and to any group. It can be carried out by individuals, groups, or entire states. The goal is always the same: to destroy an entire people or a particular group.
Challenges: Outside our comfort zone

The content of the exhibit is outside personal experiences.
   Often edgy and challenges us to think in different ways.
   Challenges what we think we know about a subject.

Docents do not in general reflect the diversity of the community of Oakland.

Puts us in the position of confronting unconscious biases.

We have to acknowledge we don’t agree with one another on some topics.
Challenges: Outside our comfort zone

We learn vocabulary and need to gain comfort with using that vocabulary.

Not all docents will feel the same way.

We will be confronted with disagreements and discomfort when we train for, talk about, or tour in one of these exhibits.
When listening is more important than talking

Allow visitors to share their experiences; hold on before you give your opinion.
Invite participation by asking questions and listening.
When you listen, listen with empathy and NOT judgement.
Be aware of issues of identity and how your responses may be interpreted by visitors.
Don’t assume you are have become an expert in the subject; lead gently and always leave room to include the personal experiences of the visitor.
Takeaways

Training is a key component of becoming more comfortable in these exhibits.
The more training there is, the better.
More time to do practice tours and to engage with other docents in conversations about how to tour in the space.
Docents need to have time to process what’s in the exhibit.
Practice builds fluidity and confidence
Professional facilitators and trainers from the specific identity group.
Accept discomfort and difficulty as a part of the process.
Not everyone will be comfortable enough to tour.
Approach these exhibits from a place of humility; we are co-learners not content experts.
Be ready to stop talking and listen to what the visitor has to contribute.
Listening and responding to comments demonstrates respect for the visitor.

Collaborate with other docents; check in with each other to hear new stories and to see how visitors are responding to the exhibit.

Make the exhibit a safe space for visitors to share personal experiences.

Be open and honest when we say we’re ready to take visitors into these exhibits.

Own mistakes that you make.
Why do Page and I do this?

Questions?
Resources


• Unconscious Bias, Vernā Myers TEDxBeaconStreet
  https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them?language=en