



University of Brighton

**CETLD Joint Project Strategy:
Behind the Scenes Research Project and
Co-learning with Museums and Archives
March 2008**



Royal College of Art
Postgraduate Art & Design

RIBA 

V&A

Joint Project Research Strategy

Background to projects:

Both the CETLD Student Placement Programme and Behind the Scenes research project respond directly to the needs of design students' use of museum collections at the V&A, in particular students' clearly perceived desire for behind the scenes access. This joint research and evaluation strategy will provide a framework to the research conducted into behind the scenes access and evaluation of the Student Placement Programme.

The research will take the form of mainly qualitative research using a version of grounded theory, whereby we gain 'an understanding about how persons or organizations or communities experience and respond to events that occur' (Corbin & Holt, 2004; 49). This will help to identify concepts or emerging themes, which can be analysed and tested with subsequent data collection. Research conducted as part of the Behind the Scenes project will influence evaluation questions conducted with students on placement. Responses from students on placement will shape future research questions as part of the Behind the Scenes programme. In this way, data collection and analysis are alternated so concepts can evolve and refine. The resultant grounded theory provides a sound basis for making recommendations and judgements about behind the scenes access and the success of the Student Placement Programme.

The concept of situated learning developed by Lave & Wenger will provide a theoretical underpinning to this joint strategy. Cope, Cuthbertson et al. (2000) argue that the placement is a complex social and cognitive experience in which there are elements of situated learning. Situated learning is of great interest to pedagogy because it emphasises the importance of contextualised learning (Brown, Collins et al. 1989).

Acceptance by the host institution's community of practice is another significant issue, which may impose certain difficulties for students unfamiliar with work-based culture. The term 'community of practice' was created by Lave and Wenger (1991) as a means of exploring the notion of situated learning within a particular domain of social practice (Benzie, Mavers et al. 2005). It seeks to define how we can each be grouped into communities by our interests, skills and areas of knowledge, which we are all informally bound to. Both situated learning and the communities of practice theory are pertinent to museum based learning.

Research outline:

Both projects will work closely together to maximise the impact of each other's research.

The first stage of the Behind the Scenes project is working with the following people:

6 University of Brighton tutors (Interviews)
13 museum staff, from curatorial and educational backgrounds (Interviews)
11 University of Brighton undergraduate students (Personal Meaning Mapping exercise in conjunction with museum visit).

The data collection for this stage will be completed by the end of May 2008.

Museum Perspective

The research interviews with museum staff are aimed at investigating what a variety of museums currently offer in the way of behind the scenes access, and also what they consider the purpose of such access to be. Analysis of this material should lead to the development of a number of concepts surrounding these issues.

The Student Placement Project has worked with 9 members of staff from the partner institutions (V&A, University of Brighton, RIBA and RCA) to develop summer placements for students from Brighton and the RCA (Level 2 and Postgraduate students were initially invited to apply).

This research aims to consider the effect of the placements not just on the students that undertake them, but on the staff that oversee them as well.

These will take place at the end of each placement. Interviews will continue to be conducted with museum staff from other institutions for the Behind the Scenes project. This will take place in September 2008.

This phase of research will eventually comprise:

- a) An overview of current behind the scenes provision in museums
- b) Consideration of the constraints faced in offering this access
- c) Awareness of the benefits of this access
- d) Detailed information about 9 placements in 4 institutions.

Student Perspective

A behind the scenes visit to the V&A will be conducted with 2 separate groups of undergraduate students from the University of Brighton: a total of 11 students.

Both groups will visit the Fashion Department, and be given a tour by Susan North, Curator of 17th & 18th Century Fashion. Afternoon activities will be different: one group visited the Blythe House archive, and the other will visit the China Design Now exhibition at the V&A.

All students will undertake a personal meaning mapping exercise. This is designed to try and understand what students understand by the phrase 'Behind the Scenes', and how they relate this kind of access to their work and their learning within the museum.

There will also be eight students undertaking placements at the four partner institutions over the course of 2008. They will be having very individual and directed experiences, and it is important to capture the effect of these.

All eight students will be required to keep an online diary/blog of their experiences, with weekly or fortnightly entries, and all will undertake a short post-placement interview.

It is proposed to conduct a more detailed case study with one placement student from each of the four institutions. This will involve a pre-placement interview with the students as well as the blog and the post-placement interview. Students will be contacted six months after the end of each placement to review the impact it made on their studies and future career aspirations.

The aim of this research is to

- a) Evaluate the placements as both learning experiences for the students, and as useful activities for the host institutions.
- b) Inform and enrich the Behind the Scenes research with detailed exploration of student learning in a behind the scenes environment.

All the placements will be completed by November 2008. It is proposed that a further tranche of behind the scenes research with a group of students may take place in the Autumn term, to investigate further the results and conclusions drawn from the student placement project and analysis of the initial research stages.

A final report will be completed by the end of March 2009.