

THE MUSEUM EDUCATOR'S MANUAL: EDUCATORS SHARE SUCCESSFUL TECHNIQUES, Anna Johnson, Kimberley Huber, Nancy Cutler, Melissa Bingmann, Tim Grove.

Plymouth: Altamira Press, 2009; 250 pp; photographs, notes, bibliography, sample forms, index; paperbound \$36.95.

Since the 1980s, education programs and staff have become an increasingly significant part of museums. Thirty years on, the authors of this practical manual believe that there remains a strong need for creativity, excellence and accountability in museum education programs. This manual aims to contribute to this need by offering an 'all-in-one', experience-based perspective on the basics of the field and practice of museum education.

The authors bring together a great deal of expertise, which they share with readers in a very personal and friendly way. Each author introduces themselves and how they came to the museum education field through a 'personal story' box: Anna Johnson, who has worked as a curator, educator, director and consultant mostly in history museums; Kimberley Huber, who, from background in anthropology and teaching has been a museum volunteer, intern, educator, curator, consultant, administrator, consultant and board member; Nancy Cutler comes from a background in interpretation and education in botanic gardens; Melissa Bingmann, assistant professor of history at Indiana University, teaches public history and museum studies; and finally Tim Grove, an education specialist from the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum.

The manual is structured into four main parts. Part 1 'Training and Management' includes chapters on the role of the museum educator, working with volunteers and training guides and docents. Part 2 'Programs and Outreach' contains chapters on professional development for teachers, family programs (intergenerational learning), planning and managing programs and special events, evaluation and online education. The third section looks at 'Working with Others' both within the museum (as part of an exhibition team) and outside through partnerships and collaborations with schools, libraries and other museums, community groups and sponsors. The final section comprises a very significant appendix containing more than 100 pages of sample forms, checklists, charts and programs – a basic strategic plan table,

volunteer application form and timesheet, sample lesson plans, evaluation forms, event planning timeline, and more – some perhaps more useful than others.

The book is friendly, chatty and easy to read, although at times borders on the patronising ('Let's do a little exercise to help recognise some of the features of a volunteer'). Similarly, its fondness for citing dictionary definitions of everyday words (such 'guide', 'volunteer' and 'reservation', as in making a booking) can become a little irritating. More helpful are the boxes and 'sidebars' which provide case studies from outside the authors' experience, checklists and summaries.

The chapters cover all the fundamentals and give a clear understanding of what it means to be a museum educator. The standout chapters in terms of moving beyond the basics to a deeper level of discussion that can inform action are Tim Grove's chapter on online education and Nancy Cutler's on evaluation. My favourite is Anna Johnson's chapter 'Taming Wild Docents', directed at dealing with docents who put 'too much spice' in their tours, although really it's a chapter about structuring and leading guided tours. Perhaps the most unexpected aspect of the book is the focus on 'homeschool' teachers and students, suggesting a trend that is obviously far stronger in America (or at in least Arizona) than in Australia.

What's missing? The manual would benefit from including examples and case studies from a broader range of museum types to support its claim of being useful for those working in or with museums of all kinds, from zoos and botanical gardens to art museums and heritage sites. It would also benefit from an 'experience-based' listing of key references and sources of further information as a framework for building a professional library and for taking readers from this general introductory volume and connecting them to more specialised avenues of support.

The manual claims to be ideally suited for educators and volunteers working within a broad range of museums, for school teachers as a preparation for museum excursions and for students and teachers of museum studies and museum education. While students, volunteers, beginner educators and those working in small museums or without formal training may find this manual helpful and reassuring, those with even relatively little experience would probably find it of limited value. Nonetheless, this is a book that delivers exactly what the title promises – it's a practical manual where the authors share with readers the methods and experiences that have worked

well for them – and delivers them with passion, enthusiasm and great generosity.

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