Inspiring Learning

IMPROVEMENT TOOLKIT FOR MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

Strengths of different research methods in generating statements about learning

With all these methods you will need to consider the language and literacy levels of users and find the most appropriate way of helping them to articulate their learning experiences.

Method	Strengths	Things to consider
Response cards Comments cards Comments books	■ Are a flexible way of engaging with users ■ Can be used to stimulate a response linked to a specific Generic Learning Outcome or be open ended ■ Can be used as part of a display and other people can be encouraged to read them - it can be made "fun" and interactive to catch users' attention (see Graffiti Walls) ■ Need minimal administration as users can complete the card or write in a comments book themselves ■ Can encourage users to write, draw or record their comments about learning in their own way and take into account different levels of ability ■ Can target people engaged in particular activities or in different parts of a site depending upon where the response cards or comment books are placed	■ Posing questions in a comments book or on a card will improve the quality of the comments relating to learning ■ Provide good quality pens and paper to indicate to users that their comments are being taken seriously ■ Place comments cards so that all users can see them and are encouraged to share their views
Questionnaires	■ Are good for large-scale collection of evidence of learning outcomes where broad information is required rather than in-depth exploration ■ Are flexible and can be used in a variety of formats - on-site, by email or post ■ Can be framed around the GLOs to collect evidence of learning outcomes ■ Can include closed or multiple-choice questions to collect broad evidence of learning for computer analysis ■ Can be open-ended to collect more general comments from users about their learning ■ Can be used flexibly - they can be self-completion or administered by a staff member who can help explain questions that may not be straightforward for some users ■ Collect demographic information comparison of learning outcomes across age / gender ■ Have the potential to collect information from participants over time about their learning experiences	■ Questions need careful phrasing to reflect age, language and ability levels of the target group ■ The 'look' of the questionnaire is important and good design is crucial ■ Be aware of questionnaire 'overload' - is this method suitable for the users you are trying to reach? ■ It can be difficult to control who completes self-completion questionnaires ■ Make them manageable so that users are not put off by (perceived) length or difficulty of questions about learning ■ It is essential to develop skills in using spreadsheets to analyse information especially for large-scale collection of questionnaires

Inspiring Learning

IMPROVEMENT TOOLKIT FOR MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

Strengths of different research methods in generating statements about learning

Method	Strengths	Things to consider
Interviews	- Can take place face to face or on the telephone - Can help you to explore learning outcomes in more depth around the GLOs - Conducted by peers, may be good for eliciting learning outcomes following a shared learning experience - Used one to one, can provide good information about learning, attitudes, feelings, opinions and behaviour - Have the potential to collect information from participants over time about their learning experiences	- Find ways of setting participants at ease - they need to feel comfortable about sharing their experiences with the interviewer - If language is an issue use a translator or peer interviews where one person could translate for the other - Plan how you will analyse the data in advance - an interview may produce a large amount of evidence that may be time-consuming to analyse unless the interview is structured (then answers may be more predictable)
Focus groups	- Can elicit in-depth information from participants about their views and experiences of learning in museums, archives and libraries. - May encourage people to share their attitudes, beliefs and experiences more openly through group interaction - Can be structured around the GLOs to focus discussion although experience suggests a broader discussion on learning will often flow better - Are a good way of collecting and reinforcing evidence of learning from groups participating in a learning experience - Enable you to collect different perspectives of the same topic/experience or at different time periods if focus groups are carried out at different stages in a learning experience. - Can involve activities that could help participants to convey their learning experiences in different ways	- The facilitator needs to be skilled in leading the discussion and keeping the group focused. He/she needs to ensure that everybody feels comfortable about sharing their experiences and opinions equally - Make practical arrangements clear for all involved including location, maps, furniture and refreshments - You may need to pay for participants attending a focus group or provide an incentive - It may not be easy to extract the individual's learning outcomes from the group learning outcomes - You will need to take notes (which may require a second moderator) or record the discussion (See downloadable guide to setting up a focus group for more guidance)

Inspiring Learning

IMPROVEMENT TOOLKIT FOR MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

Strengths of different research methods in generating statements about learning

Method	Strengths	Things to consider
Graffiti walls	■ Are interactive as comments can be made to look attractive as part of a display - people can read others' comments and may be encouraged to add their own ■ Can include a single question based on the GLOs so that people's responses are focused on learning ■ POST IT notes can be used as a colourful / cheap way of getting people to share their comments	■ Comments need to be fixed strongly to the wall or they might be lost ■ Provide a posting box for respondents wanting to keep their comments anonymous
Drawings	■ Are useful when writing skills are limited and may be more "fun" or engaging ■ Can be used in combination with written comments to aid analysis	■ These are challenging to interpret without questioning and mediation
Observation	■ Observation can work well if participants "talk out loud" about their experiences while the observer walks around with them - an accompanied visit	■ Observation without explanation shows what people do but not why they do it so evidence of learning outcomes may be limited ■ May need to be combined with interviews or questionnaires ■ If people know they are being observed their behaviour may be affected ■ If the observer is hidden it may be complex to recognise learning from people's actions / speech
Video	A Video box/booth ■ Could be used with a single question based on the GLOs as a prompt to record people's learning ■ Is an appealing alternative to traditional comments cards - may be more fun and engaging for some users than writing comments ■ Is potentially a powerful tool for gathering evidence for advocacy purposes	■ Analysis of video may be time-consuming with too much material e.g. from a discussion ■ Needs to be edited properly if material is used to show learning outcomes ■ Not easy to set this up unless integrated into the design of a space

Inspiring Learning

IMPROVEMENT TOOLKIT FOR MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

Strengths of different research methods in generating statements about learning

Method	Strengths	Things to consider
Role-play / acting	■ Can invite participants to act out a role in order to facilitate discussion about learning. It could be a good way to introduce positive and negative experiences of learning or act as an icebreaker to engage people through activity ■ It may stimulate people's memories of a learning experience by asking them to re-live it	■ Some participants may be reluctant to act out their experiences so you need to introduce the idea of role-play carefully ■ Requires a skilled moderator to carry out
Photographs and images	■ Can be used to stimulate discussion about learning outcomes in a focus group or interview, as a memory aid or to represent new concepts of learning to participants ■ Can be used by participants to convey their learning experiences creatively ■ Can be used with speech bubbles in a display to convey learning experiences to others	■ May be difficult to analyse if the context for the photograph is unknown
Artworks / sculptures and things produced from visits to MAL	■ Help individuals express their learning ■ Can be used in conjunction with other methods e.g. interviews and focus groups with participants to obtain the context and help articulate the learning	■ As for images, it may be difficult to interpret and analyse if the context is not known
Letters, emails	■ Letters and emails to museums, archives and libraries can show evidence of learning	■ Unpredictable and ad hoc source or learning outcomes ■ Analysis may be time-consuming
Vignettes	Vignettes/case studies could be used as a stimulus to ■ Present different learning experiences to participants in interviews or focus groups ■ Explore participant's perceptions, beliefs and experiences in relation to a specific situation ■ Get people talking and to present a broader view of learning ■ Introduce the GLOs as a tool for analysis - using vignette with highlighter pen method of analysis	Vignettes need to be ■ Chosen carefully so that participants can relate to the learning experience ■ Not used in isolation as it may only give participants' views about the experience contained within it rather than a reflection of their own experiences