Engaging the Community: Empathizing with Refugees through Art Museum Interpretation

**Presenter:** Hilary Katz – master of arts student; Ohio State Department of Arts Administration, Education, and Policy; former Education Fellow at Dublin Arts Council
Engaging the Community: Empathizing with Refugees through Art Museum Interpretation

Hilary Katz
M.A. Student in Art Education & Museum Education
Department of Arts Administration, Education, & Policy
Community Engagement Conference
Presentation Objectives

- How does your organization engage with communities without in-person facilitation?
- How can text and other forms of engagement appeal to the community?
- How can your organization allow the community’s voice to permeate?
What is interpretation?

- Wall labels
- Seating
- Methods to encourage deeper engagement
- Text read or image viewed by the public
What is interpretation?

Digital Interactive: *Create, Connect, Contemplate*.
Case Study

• **Exhibition:** *The Columbus Crossing Borders Project*

• **Exhibition themes:**
  • Understanding of and compassion for refugees
  • The challenges and rewards of “border crossings”

• **Location:** Dublin Arts Council

• **Date:** Summer 2018
Interpretation Strategies

- Participatory Design
- New Media
- Analog Interactives
Goals of Interpretation Strategies

- Increased accessibility
- Break down barriers
- Multiple perspectives
- Equalize and empower voices
- Possible social change
Strategy 1: Participatory Design

Conversation Starters: Chairs & Bowls.
Strategy 1: Participatory Design

Examine an artwork closely. Imagine you could step into the artwork.
What do you see?
What sounds do you hear?
What do you smell?
What can you reach out and touch?

What does the word “home” mean to you?
Does “home” need to be a physical space? Why or why not?

Conversation Starters: Chairs.
Strategy 1: Participatory Design

Conversation Starters: Bowls.

How hard is it to be a refugee

How do refugees end up in places like where they used to live

When refugees get to another country are they afraid it will be like their other country

Why do some people not like refugees
Strategy 2: New Media

Welcome Screen

Digital Interactive: *Create, Connect, Contemplate.*
Strategy 2: New Media

Screen Shots. Create, Connect, Contemplate.
Strategy 2: New Media

Connect & Reflect

This activity helped me better understand the challenges and rewards of navigating an unknown space.

Dual Purpose:

1. For Participants – Reflection
2. For Institution & Project – Evaluation

Strategy 3: Analog Interactives

WEBS: We Each Begin Somewhere.

1. **Identify** - What country is your homeland?
2. **Reflect** - Write about or draw a time when...
   - You thought being from your country was an advantage, and/or
   - You struggled with being from your country
3. **Connect** - After pinning your card, connect a string from yours to another story to which you relate.
Strategy 3: Analog Interactives

Visitor Responses

• “Homeland - USA - Sometimes I struggle knowing that people in the world see me as inferior simply because of the melanin in my skin. However I find comfort in having a strong community of people who DON’T see me in that way.”

• “Pakistan - hard to raise children”

• “USA - struggle - Because I wear a hijab (headdress) a man moved away from me in a restaurant.”

WEBS: We Each Begin Somewhere.
Strategy 3: Analog Interactives

Visitor Responses

• “1. Iraq 2. The way other countries treat us [like] we are nothing. But we still are humans like others! <3”

• “United States: We are the great American experiment. Even though we consistently have growing pains (many of them right now), I do believe in the power of our democracy to overcome these growing pains and remain a place of refuge in the world.”

• “U.S.A. - I have freedoms that others may not imagine.”

### Implications & Applications

| 83% agreed or strongly agreed that after viewing the exhibition, they could better empathize with the realities refugees face | → Increased empathy  
→ Equalize voices |
|---|---|
| 77% of survey respondents found the interactives deepened their compassion for refugees | → Break down barriers  
→ Increased accessibility of exhibition themes |
## Implications & Applications

| 75% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed the exhibition inspired them to learn more about the refugee experience and consider further action | → Break down barriers  
→ Promotion of social change |
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<td>86% agreed or strongly agreed that they heard from multiple perspectives in the exhibition</td>
<td>→ Offered multiple perspectives</td>
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Implications & Applications

What can you do at your institution?

• Culturally-responsive language
• Multiple perspectives
• Placement & design
• Accessible
• Appropriate formats
Thank you!

References


