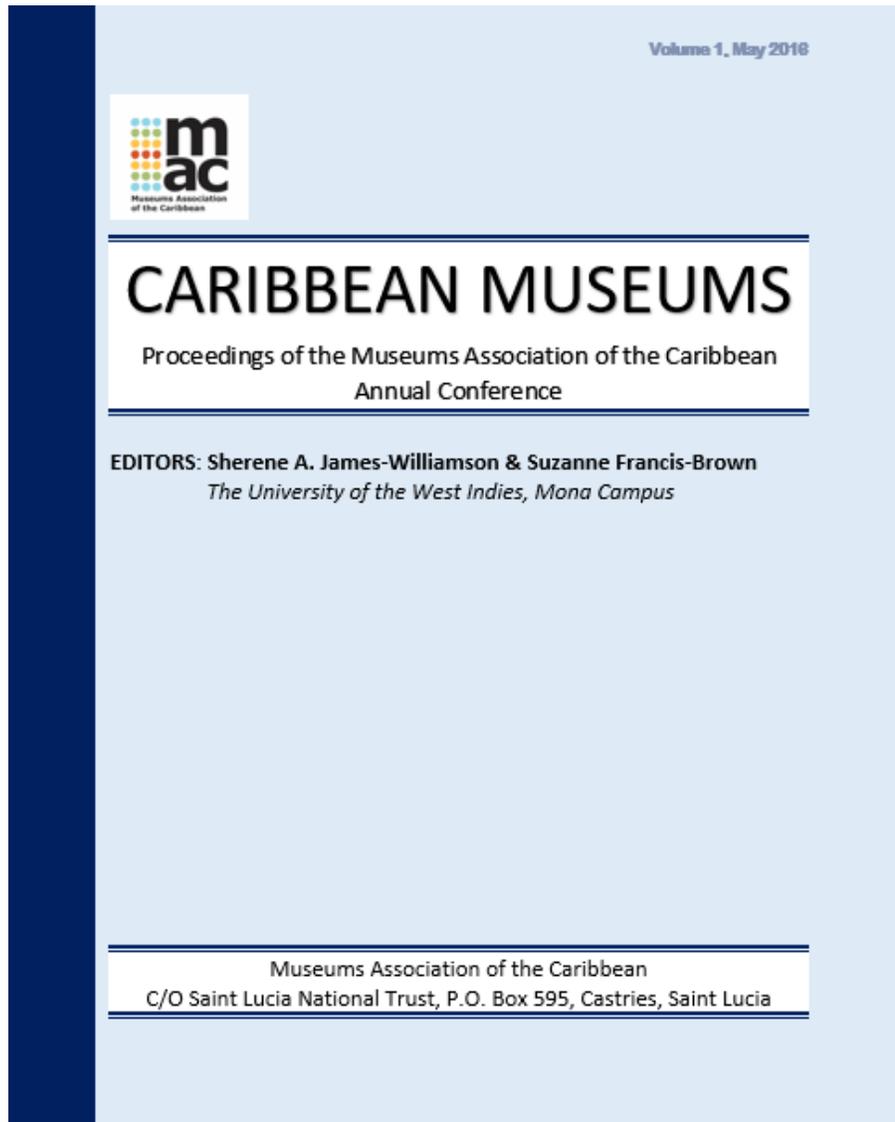


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Barnett-Davidson, M. and Lyttle, D. 2016. Adapt or Perish: An Assessment of Emerging Museum Educational Strategies at the National Gallery of Jamaica. *Innovation, research & education – the future of Caribbean museums*. *Caribbean Museums*, Volume 1, 17-26. ©Museums Association of the Caribbean May 2016.

Adapt or Perish: An Assessment of Emerging Museum Educational Strategies at the National Gallery of Jamaica

MONIQUE BARNETT-DAVIDSON & DWAYNE LYTTLE

National Gallery of Jamaica, Ocean Boulevard, Kingston, Jamaica

mbarnett@natgalja.org.jm

ABSTRACT. The National Gallery of Jamaica (NGJ) caters to a wide range of audiences with varying social and educational backgrounds, as well as objectives for visiting the museum space. The Education Department, the NGJ's public outreach centre, is the access point where all visitors to the gallery can make queries about exhibitions, artworks and artists, as well as access or participate in other educational activities such as guided tours. Through these interactions, the staff members of the Education Department have observed that certain groups of visitors required additional support in order to comprehend and appreciate their museum experience, as well as to effectively utilize the services of the department. Overtime, the staff members felt that more concentrated effort needed to be placed on diversifying avenues for these groups to really engage with the collection and operations of the NGJ. Overall, the groups that make up the larger percentage of visitors to the NGJ are students and teachers of educational institutions, from early childhood to the tertiary level. One sub-group, comprising of art educators and art educators-in-training, were observed to be particularly keen on gaining information that would enable them to understand the finer details of exhibition development, presentation and content. With this in mind, the department held a pilot seminar entitled *Art Educators: Exhibitions as Teaching Tools*, to be targeted at the aforementioned group with a specific focus on utilizing exhibitions as educational resources. The seminar was comprised of three sessions along with a requirement for each participant to fill out a survey sheet and an evaluation form.

This discussion, which can be subtitled under the broader heading of 'Audience Engagement for Museums' will use the example of the art educators' seminar at the National Gallery of Jamaica to explore how a Jamaican museum such as the National Gallery has attempted to tailor its conventional approaches of engagement in order to provide more support for special interest groups. Such processes are not without challenges, which can include a lack of the necessary human resource, with the specific expertise to plan and execute specialised projects. However, with stereotypical perceptions of the art museum as an institution that is only accessible to a select audience and with pressures from museum stakeholders to maintain relevance to Jamaican social context and progress, it becomes imperative that the art museum must continually adapt by being able to extract and illustrate various social and academic dialogues using the artworks as the vehicles of articulation.

Keywords: educators, exhibitions, visual arts, tours, visitors

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Gallery of Jamaica (NGJ), currently the oldest and largest public art museum in the English-speaking Caribbean, was established in 1974. Its permanent collection – numbering at just over two-thousand pieces – presents a largely comprehensive overview of historical, modern and contemporary Jamaican art, along with other smaller regional and international collections. One of the seven divisions of the Institute of Jamaica, the NGJ has become well-known for maintaining a rigorous exhibition programme that includes retrospectives as well as thematic and guest-

curated exhibitions, to name a few (Figure 1). In recent times, it also has become known for other aspects of its programming such as public seminars and workshops, as well as its more recently established Last Sunday events. This event was initiated in 2012 and is held on the last Sunday of every month. It features the waiver of all admission and tour fees for the day, along with providing free guided tours and short entertainment segments for visitors. In 2014, the NGJ – which is based in Kingston – expanded its operations to Jamaica’s second city Montego Bay, through the establishment of National Gallery West, located inside the Montego Bay Cultural Centre.

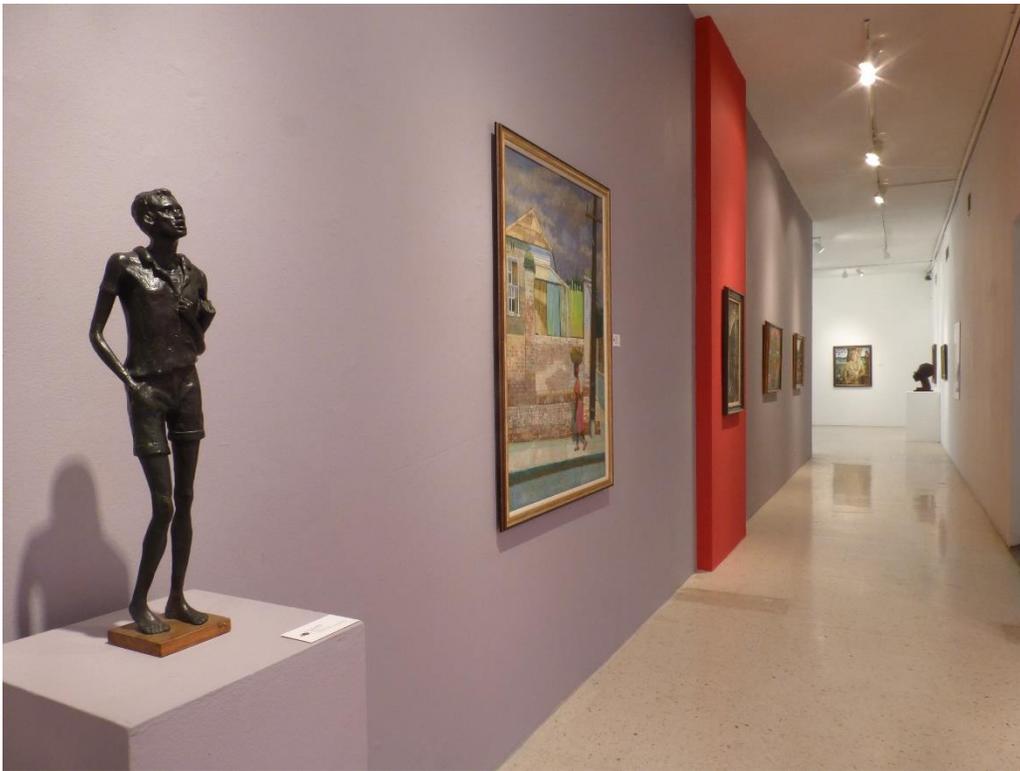


Figure 1. Photograph showing the Exhibition space at the National Gallery of Jamaica in 2014.

Through its operations, the NGJ has been able to cater to a wide range of audience groups, both local and international. School groups appeared to be among the most regular users of the gallery, making up a significant percentage of the museum’s

visitor statistics. For instance, in a recent assessment of NGJ guided tour bookings, it was identified that in 2013, 82 out of 170 booked tours were made by school groups only (NGJ annual reports, 2013 and 2014). Similarly in 2014, they were accountable for 85 out of 122 booked tours (NGJ annual

reports, 2013 and 2014) (Figure 2). Additionally, individual participation in school group tours is greater than for other groups. At the end of 2013 to 2014, as a two year period, the NGJ recorded a total of 6,274 tour participants. Approximately 4,165 individuals had participated in school group tours. (Figure 3).

Such figures indicate that the NGJ is not only acknowledged for its collection and promotion of Jamaican visual arts heritage, but is well recognized as a key resource for exploring the visual arts as a component of educational development. Therefore, the development of an Education Department as one of its operational units has proven to be integral in gradually encouraging the development of a more diverse and socially integrated audience.

Accessibility to the NGJ's collections and research via targeted educational programming has become foremost among the department's objectives. The implementation of systematic strategies to develop more targeted educational programming appears to have been initiated in the 1980s, particularly after the establishment of the Assistant Curator post. This new position, which was assigned with specific responsibilities for education, could be seen as a key component of the rationalization of the department, along with the hiring of other staff members with expertise in visual art training, art historical research and education. Formats such as guided tours, lecture programmes for teachers-in-training, public artists' talks and the offering of presentations to other audience or stakeholder groups.

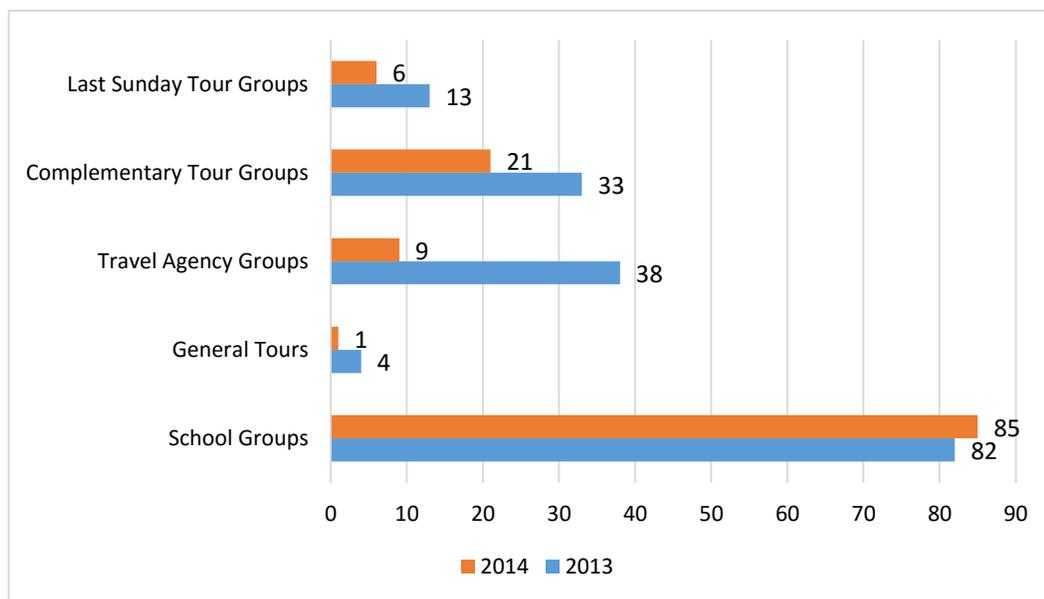


Figure 2. Number of Participants in Booked Guided Tours at the NGJ for calendar years 2013 and 2014.

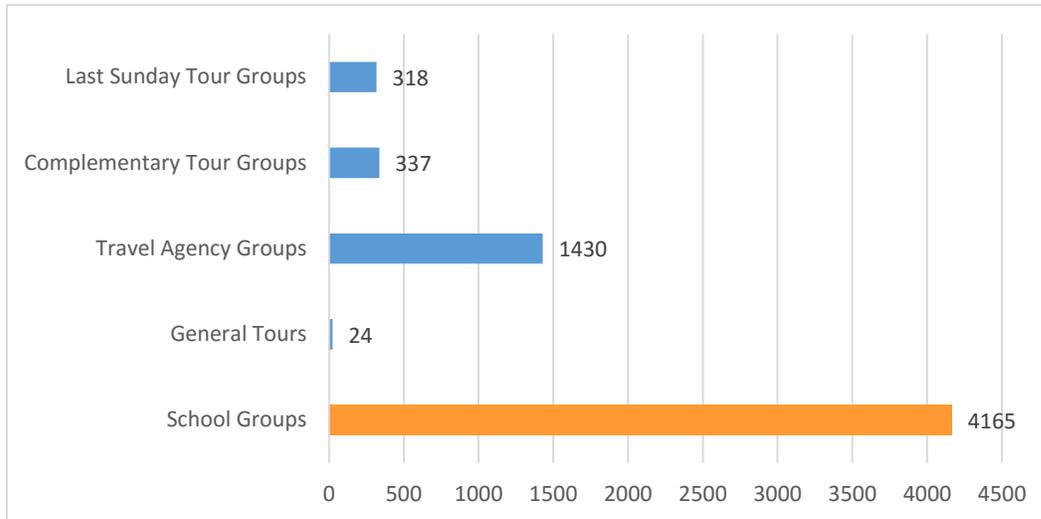


Figure 3. Estimated Number of Participants in Booked Tours for period January 2013 to December 2014 (24 months).

These had apparently included insurance company staff – with specific regards to the development of private collections - as well as patients residing in health care facilities, along with a strong association with the local schools began to characterise the work of the department. Maintaining this trajectory to the present day, interactions with audiences using the gallery continue to be assessed in order to find ways in which the department can improve its standard programme offerings as well as to introduce brand new formats.

With our colleagues at the 25th Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Museums Association of the Caribbean, we wanted to discuss some of these strategies as demonstrated through the recent developments of one aspect of NGJ educational programming – seminars or workshops for teachers. These programmes, which are targeted to professionals as well as those still at the training level, have been crucial tools in bridging the gap between the NGJ’s museum practice and teachers’ pedagogical needs. In 2014, the department seized an opportunity to coordinate an edition of the seminar that was specifically targeted to visual arts teachers, with an objective to

demonstrate to them how they could utilize art exhibitions as educational resources for their students. This seminar was entitled *Art Educators: Exhibitions as Educational Tools*. With the 2014 seminar as its main example, this essay will begin by briefly exploring some of the work done by the current staff of Education Department on other forms of educational programming and how these informed the seminar’s development. Additionally, we will describe some of the conceptual and theoretic underpinnings that aided in focusing the content specifically for art educators. Finally, there will be a brief analysis of the survey and evaluation elements that were used as a part of the programme in order to develop a profile of the participants and to gather immediate feedback from them on the seminar. As with any other public museum, the NGJ Education Department believes that failing to maintain recurrent strategies of analysis and revision for educational programme development, could result in the loss of audience engagement and negatively affect the heritage value of our collections as well as our institution.

2. LEARNING FROM OTHER IN-HOUSE PROGRAMMES

Routine assessment and revision are key strategies used by the Education Department to re-adapt standard educational programme formats. Revisions are generally motivated by a directive to reform, observations by the department's staffers, as well as feedback gathered from visitor comments and queries. The conceptual underpinnings of the 2014 art educators' seminar can be traced back to previous revisions of two other educational programmes or services: the child art workshops and the guided tours, which yielded valuable insights that would inform the objectives, discussion topics and activities for the seminar.

The first revision was initiated in 2010, with a review of the NGJ's child art workshop series *Saturday Art-Time*, originally piloted for one year beginning in 2009. Promoted as a fully-funded programme that was free of charge for participants, it was targeted towards children between the ages of 8 to 15 years old (Figure 4). The pilot initially had very positive feedback from the regularly attending children and their families. However, it was noted that at about midway through the one-year period, the programme experienced a variety of challenges, which included increasingly dwindling attendance figures as well as unsatisfactory workshop outcomes, which seemed to stem from workshop objectives that were found to be too vague or broad-based.



Figure 4. Photograph showing teen participants in the NGJ Saturday Art-Time programme.

Following the programme's re-implementation in October 2010, a key change was the revision of these objectives, along with increased diversification of lesson

planning approaches. Other changes included improved customer relations with parents and guardians, standardized monthly planning and evaluation meetings and the development of a child art exhibition entitled *Art'iT* - the

first of its kind organized under the auspices of the NGJ. Additionally, it was discovered that instructional sessions utilizing the NGJ's permanent collection, proved to be more successful when children were introduced to the collection via teaching aids and process-based discussion. This would later prove to be a fundamental step towards conceptualizing the teachers' workshop, as the Education Department envisioned the teachers being able to apply similar approaches that had references in education technology.

With regards to the guided tours, the customary approach generally focused on a historical survey of Jamaican art. Initially, it was observed that this format seemed well suited for people with a background or even mild interest in the arts or general Jamaican cultural history. For others however, the tour delivery – inclusive of perspectives presented, the language used and the duration – proved to be perplexing or even boring. In our observation of educators accompanying student groups – particularly from the early childhood to junior high level – the Education

Department deduced that the art historical approach was, again, too broad-based and that for the above-mentioned groups, the guided tour could be re-focused towards meeting certain curriculum needs as well as to include more tactile activities. The use of teaching aids as well as opportunities to physically interact with objects related to the creation of an artwork.

To address this, the standard tour format was revised by subtracting content and presentation elements from it in order to create alternative formats. Two new tour formats were added to the department's repertoire: the 'Forms of Art' tour and the 'Special Activity' tour. The Forms of Art Tour discussed a selection of art forms as well as definitions of key art terms, details about materials and techniques as well as notable Jamaican practitioners, whether alive or deceased. The Special Activity Tour, generally recommended for children attending early childhood institutions (Figure 5), comprised of a presentation of no more than two examples of artworks on display, followed by a short art activity, such as making drawings



Figure 5. Photograph showing early childhood students on a tour of the NGJ.

Additionally, it was found that quite often, touring groups may have objectives that may lie outside of the visual arts, in areas such as socio-economic history, religion, tourism and even technological development and application. Based on that observation, the narrative for the historical tour was revised to become flexible enough to accommodate these other interests and educational objectives for which the collection could be referenced. Following the development of these options, the Education Department felt that the permanent collection was now made accessible to a wider pool of educational and recreational interests. As such, we were stimulated to find ways in which we could make more persons, especially teachers, aware of the relevance of these changes to their needs.

3. RE-INTRODUCING THE TEACHERS' SEMINAR

Background: As mentioned previously, programme formats for teachers were innovated at the NGJ during the 1980s. These were geared towards engaging teachers with the NGJ's art collections, in order for them to be sensitized about Jamaican art and artists. According to documentation, these had included small lectures as well as slide presentations that could be made "available upon request". (Jamaica Journal 1983). Maintaining a partnership with major teaching colleges in the island, particularly the ones in Kingston, was reported to be an important element in the organization of these programmes. Ongoing research on these early initiatives have not yet revealed further details about their objectives, structure or impact on the participants. Additionally, these initiatives were discontinued for a number of years prior to 2014. Regardless, the current education staff and the NGJ management were convinced that the absence of such a programme needed to be addressed.

The factors that contributed to the revival of programme initiatives for educators can be organized under two main themes: the role of

teachers in contributing to visitor engagement at the NGJ and the enrichment of educators' museum expertise. With regards to visitor engagement, the Education Department identified teachers as key and very active players; they are the main coordinators behind school group bookings and visits which, as mentioned before, have had a huge impact on NGJ visitor statistics. They also are much better positioned to extend and re-enforce the museum experience of their student groups before and continually after their visits, within the context of various lesson objectives and strategies. For NGJ education staffers that period of contact time with visitors or users mainly exists from the time they enter the museum, up until when they leave. The Education Department is able to engage with audiences outside the NGJ through outreach activities. However, the frequency of these projects have been increasingly hampered by a decrease in resources including funding and available personnel.

Reviving teacher-focused workshops was considered to be a good move towards improving how they are facilitated by the NGJ as well as to re-address the development of more long-term partnerships with them. With regards to the enrichment of educators' museum expertise, it had been observed by the staff over time, that a number of teachers appeared to display or voiced uncertainty about their ability to effectively tour their own students in an art museum. While booking a guided tour may be an effective way to address that issue, there are many who find self-tours to be more economical. However, their expressed concerns seemed to stem from a lack of skills and knowledge about the organization of an art museum exhibition as well as critical analysis and discourse about works in our collection. So the department, therefore, resolved to re-establish ways in which they could be empowered to learn and apply standard tour methodologies for their own use.

Seminar Design: Bearing in mind the above-mentioned factors, in 2014 it was determined that the best way to re-engage with educators was to co-ordinate a seminar series that would discuss topic areas relevant to the application of pedagogy for the enrichment of the art museum experience for students. It was also decided that the pilot seminar should be tailored for Visual Arts teachers, including senior students pursuing art education at the teaching colleges or other tertiary institutions. Aside from their familiarity with certain art terms and concepts, it was believed that this target group would stand to benefit the most from building a rapport with the NGJ, specifically through the Education Department. Unfortunately, because the only available time to conduct the seminar for that year was during a period when most professional teachers were unavailable, the tertiary students, with their accompanying lecturers ultimately became the main participants.

As mentioned in the introduction, the seminar was entitled *Art Educators: Exhibitions as Educational Tools*. It was believed by the department that by providing an overview of how an art exhibition is typically defined and organized, then exploring its components within the context of educational technology, teachers may be better equipped to make decisions about how to incorporate the art exhibition and its content as a part of a lesson

strategy. In further dialoguing with teachers, it was noted that teacher-training in Jamaica generally includes a component which examines the instructional development and execution of field trips. However, this component does not always take into specific consideration how to conduct a tour of an art exhibition. This knowledge allowed us to design the programme so as to complement those instructions, rather than to substitute them. The contents of the seminar was made available to the participants free of charge.

On the day of the seminar, the participants were required to fill out the registration form and additionally, were each given a survey sheet and an evaluation sheet, to be completed and handed in at the end of the seminar. The survey sheet required participants to input information such as personal data, contact information and visitor history to the NGJ. The evaluation form was designed so they could assess the value and outcome of the each session and the entire event as well.

The seminar was divided into three sessions: ‘Introduction to Exhibitions’, ‘Utilizing an Art Exhibition as an Educational Resource’ and ‘Case Study: In Retrospective’. Each session was used to introduce the participants to various terms, concepts and practices relevant to the use of an art museum and its related exhibitions as educational resources. A brief description of each session is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Table showing session topics and descriptions.

Session Topics	Description
Introduction to Exhibitions	Participants were introduced to activities which assisted them to form a definition of an exhibition. They were also introduced to the physical and intellectual characteristics of exhibition design.
Utilizing an Art Exhibition as an educational resource	Participants were taught activities and concepts which would allow them to identify the different stages of an exhibition tour, plan an instructional sequence for an exhibition and discourse systematically about a work of art.
Case Study: In Retrospective	Two volunteers from each of the invited institutions were asked to select one work from the exhibition on which they would give a three-minute presentation, using the discourse strategy outlined in session two. At the end of their presentations, each group was asked questions by the seminar presenters and the other participants, along with receiving feedback on their presentation technique.

Although the seminar's design was crafted primarily to address observed practices and

voiced concerns, there were also long term goals that guided the department's choice of content and instructional delivery. It was hoped that participation in the seminar would establish the foundation for a mind-set that would lead the participants to think about the museum and its resources as complements to educational planning, no matter their discipline or grade level focus.

Based on this perspective, the seminar's design was carefully chosen so as to encourage the participants to take into account three key considerations when planning educational excursions or visits to the museum:

1. Exhibitions mounted at the NGJ are to be thought of as educational resources from which various discourses related to the visual arts can be developed, instead of them being seen as fixed lists of facts and objects to be viewed and memorized.
2. Any educational discourse which is developed for an exhibition mounted at the NGJ, should be placed in a lesson construction context versus a descriptive tour script context.
3. The seminar should essentially be seen as a starting point for the development of a long term professional partnership between the NGJ's Education Department and educators. This could facilitate the sharing of ideas which can be used to improve the educational services offered by the NGJ, as well as the instructional activities which can be used during professional teaching practice.

In other words, the department strongly believed that what was needed for educators

was an introduction to, and an appreciation of the potential for educational as well as cultural enrichment for children. By

deliberately and strategically applying pedagogical attitudes as a part of the museum tour experience, they can create the platform for that enrichment in a case where a guided tour of the collection is not possible. A true indicator of the degree of success of this strategy will not be evident in the short-term. However, the immediate feedback gathered from the participants, via the evaluation sheets, appeared to resonate with the seminar's objectives and has justified that the department has indeed addressed a need among members of the NGJ's audience group.

The evaluation sheet was designed for participants to indicate ratings of 'Poor' to 'Very Good' for each of the three sessions, for the time allotted for activities, as well as for overall ratings of the seminar. Approximately 72% of participants gave the seminar overall ratings of 'Good' and 'Very Good', with similar ratings for the individual sessions (Table 2). The session entitled 'Case Study: In Retrospect' appeared to particularly resonate with the participants, as this was the session in which they got a chance to use the exhibition display to demonstrate how well they had assimilated the content of the previous sessions. They were also able to hear immediate critiques and recommendations from the presenters and other participants regarding their presentation approach (eg. adapting content delivery for various age groups, length or duration of delivery, etc). It was satisfying to note that a number of the participants had visited the NGJ before and had experienced a guided tour. With this recognition, it was anticipated that any assimilation of seminar content by those participants may be enriched by their previous experiences.

Table 2. Table showing participants' Ratings of the 2014 Art Educators' Seminar*

SESSIONS	RATINGS					
	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Fair	Poor	No Rating
Usefulness of <i>Introduction to Exhibitions</i> session	21	9	1	0	0	0
Usefulness of <i>Utilizing an Art Exhibition as an Educational Resource</i> session	19	12	0	0	0	0
Usefulness of <i>Case Study</i> session	19	9	3	0	0	1
Adequacy of time allotted for presentations	8	17	6	0	0	0
Overall rating of the seminar	19	9	3	0	0	0

* Only 31 out of 39 participants filled out the Evaluation Sheet.

Post-Seminar Conclusions: The findings gathered from the analysis of the evaluation and survey sheets corroborated with some of the comments expressed by the participants at the close of the seminar. Many had found the seminar informative and there were also comments requesting that the event be kept again. Given these responses, the Education Department arrived at a number of convictions regarding the future of an initiative such as this.

Firstly, it was agreed that the art educators' seminar would be reinstated as a permanent feature of the department's educational programming and kept annually. Details to be considered in this regard include strategically hosting the event during a time when most students of teaching colleges are available to attend. This can be determined with the help of course lecturers and coordinators, who were very helpful in organizing their students to attend this initial seminar.

Secondly, the seminar could be further developed to include teacher training colleges situated in rural areas or generally outside of the Corporate Area (In Jamaica, the Corporate Area refers to the combined parishes of Kingston and St. Andrew, administered by one parochial board, the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation). With the establishment of National Gallery West in Montego Bay, it is anticipated that the space there will be utilized to host future seminars

and alleviate some of the travel challenges for these institutions. Due to specific challenges

regarding time and travel to Kingston, a decision was taken to not invite these institutions for this run of the seminar. Finally, the department has already begun to explore other relevant topics for future art educators' seminars that could be targeted at teachers-in-training as well as practicing teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

In recent times, adjustments made to educational programming at the NGJ have provided the Education Department with a number of lessons and moments of reinforcement, through activities of investigation, self-reflection and programme analysis which should typify any revision process. As a result of those experiences, the Department now has a much more diverse set of approaches which it can use to engage children in visual arts instruction, as well as for informing school groups with their accompanying teachers about the national collection and Jamaica's visual arts historiography.

1. With the teachers' seminar - along with future programmes like it – we are also creating more structured opportunities through which we can interact with select categories of frequent visitors, so as to make our research and tour services even more applicable to their needs. Also, by continuing the use of survey

instruments as a part of programme coordination and assessment, it is believed that future developments will be more informed and focused, narrowing the gap between what museum professionals may assume to be visitor expectations, versus the actual variety of audience needs. This is exemplified by our visiting teachers, who are key partners in our aim to disseminate information about the visual arts in general, the development and practice of visual arts in Jamaica, as well as the appreciation of visual expression and visiting museums as an important contribution to one's quality of life.

2. As it relates to the degree of impact of the recent educational programme revisions or initiatives at the NGJ on the wider public, in general they have been well received by the audience groups identified in this essay, based on the department's numerous receipt of positive verbal reports. As the examples that were referenced in this paper have just recently been developed beyond their pilot stages – with the exception of the Saturday Art-Time programme - a more quantitative analysis of impact on overall visitor or user figures is presently still ongoing. These points identified, the department will not become complacent with its results, but is motivated to do even more work to cement the NGJ's relevance to the Jamaican public. With stereotypical perceptions of the art museum as an institution that is only accessible to a select audience, and with pressures from museum stakeholders to maintain relevance to Jamaican social context and progress, it becomes imperative that the art museum must continually adapt by being able to extract and illustrate various social and academic dialogues using the artworks as the vehicles of

articulation. To perish would be the inevitable outcome, should we fail to respond strategically and accurately to the emerging demands and uses of our National Gallery.

Acknowledgements. We would like to thank the Museums Association of the Caribbean for the opportunity to share our experience and findings with the rest of our colleagues in the Caribbean. We would also like to thank the NGJ Executive Director, Dr. Veerle Poupeye for her support of our ideas and innovations. Finally, and most importantly, we would like to thank all our programme participants, young and old, for their valuable support for our institution.

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