Evaluation of School Programs at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House

Australasian Parliamentary Educators’ Conference 2011

30 November 2011
Deborah Sulway
Introduction to the museum

Our Vision Statement
To celebrate, debate and experience the journey of Australian Democracy.

Our Mission Statement
We are committed to fulfilling this vision and providing an inspirational experience for our audiences by:

- Engaging with them to enrich their understanding of Australia’s past, present and future democracy;
- Providing a range of dynamic and engaging programs relevant to our vision; and
- Managing, conserving, interpreting and presenting our heritage building and its collections. (MoAD Strategic Plan 2009-2012)

Our Statement of Curatorial Integrity
‘At the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House (MoAD) we are the custodians of the political heritage, passions and commitment of all Australians. As a site on the National Heritage List, the Old Parliament House building demonstrates Australia’s parliamentary political process. It is a site that has provided a physical focus for events that reflect Australian democratic values, and political and social rights. It also stands for the right to argue and dissent, and reflects the orderly succession of governments through the democratic process, as reflected by the seven changes of government that took place during the years in which Australia’s Federal Parliament sat in the building. The building is an important place in the story of the creation of Australian democracy. As a cultural institution which interprets that history and these values in many ways, including exhibitions, events, and in the development of on-line content; we will allow room for all voices to speak, including those outside parliament who struggled for change and reform and those whose efforts brought about the growth of our inclusive parliamentary democracy. We will honour the parliamentary system and its traditions of argument and measured debate, and will present the different sides of those moments which have divided Australia as well as the underlying democratic practices which unite us. We will accord legitimacy to all who have been trusted by Australians with the honour and burden of both government and parliamentary representation. This is a place for all Australians to recognise, reflect on and take forward their political, democratic and parliamentary values and traditions, shared and individual.’
(MoAD Interpretation Plan 2008 – 2013)

These policy documents together with MoAD’s Business Plan 2011-12 and the Old Parliament House and Curtilage Heritage Management Plan 2008 – 2013 underpin and inform the initiatives, development and evaluation of all MoAD public programs, including MoAD school programs.

Background
The Museum of Australian Democracy is located in Old Parliament House. As one of Australia’s most iconic buildings, it has been a symbol of Australian democracy for over 83 years. This experience of stepping inside the glass case allows us the opportunity to draw upon the stories and fabric of the building as a key part of the story of Australian Democracy. This is the only place in Australia dedicated to telling the story of our nation’s democracy and to making links to the past, present and future of Australian democracy.

At the museum we tell this story through a range of innovative exhibitions, exciting public events, daily tours, multimedia interpretation, school programs, scholarly research and
interactive activities all within the national heritage listed building of Old Parliament House. These experiences provide visitors with a hands-on cultural experience of Australia’s history. We have found that engaging with the historical, social and cultural aspects of the museum allows visitors to explore democracy while applying their own personal values. Creating an engaging and educational visitor experience is a core MoAD mission. It is a place where Australians can come and renew their knowledge of our history and be inspired, indeed challenged, by the role they may play in its future.

Learning at MoAD
Our goal is to empower students to take an active role in democracy by inspiring them to explore and participate in democratic practices. We provide high quality learning opportunities using objects and stories for all students to engage with democracy in a meaningful way.

With the development and introduction of the national curriculum, participation in Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER), assessment of national civics and citizenship, ongoing commitment of MoAD to quality learning experiences (these are outlined in our MoAD Business Plan KPIs), and the museum’s focus on democracy; MoAD Schools Learning developed a Schools Learning Strategy to embed the following learning principles into all our programs and products and provide a platform for evaluation of our school programs.

These learning principles are to:

- Be Democratic – to encourage choice
- Be Welcoming – a positive experience
- Be Accessible – an equitable learning opportunity
- Be Engaging - its real and fun experience
- Be Relevant – to construct meaning
- Be a Leader – pedagogy & practice is up to date and at the forefront of best learning practise.

Evaluation
MoAD Schools Learning uses evaluation as a mechanism to measure our program outcomes and uses these findings to meet our corporate governance objectives; assess the effectiveness and quality of our current programs; inform the development and design of new programs and products; and to plan future initiatives.

To assess our programs and products and achieve these outcomes we have utilized evaluation and feedback in a variety of forms:

- Survey Monkey as an online survey tool to gain feedback from teachers on specific programs & products
- In-house designed paper surveys
- Anecdotal feedback from students and teachers as verbal, email and letters
- Repeat and new bookings of school programs
- Website statistics
- MARS (Market Attitude Research Services) are externally designed surveys which provide monthly key summary outcomes of quantitative & qualitative evaluation results.
The MARS surveys are our most recent evaluation tool for onsite school programs. The survey has two formats – one for teachers and one for students. The survey forms are offered to teachers and students to provide feedback on all onsite school programs, including the Radio Frequency Identification Device (RFID) programs. The following overview illustrates the key findings of the full year report by MARS for 2010/11.

Student survey outcomes:
- Almost all of the students (97%) participating in the MoAD School Learning Program during 2010/2011 expressed positive ratings – expressed as a “good” to “excellent” assessment level at 97% - for the learning program they experienced at the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD).
- Students participating were in school education years 5, 6, or 7. Most aspects of the students learning program were highly rated, particularly – “using technology to learn”, “hearing, seeing real objects”, “experiencing a heritage building”, and “the quality of MoAD staff presenting the learning program”.
- Students also expressed views that the MoAD students learning program was – “interesting”, “fun”, and “a good learning experience”.
- Many of the students enjoyed the “role play” and “debating” activities undertaken.
- Finally, almost every student acknowledged that – “I learnt something about democracy”.

Teacher survey outcomes:
- Teachers expressed very positive satisfaction ratings for the MoAD Student Learning Program presented to their students – a 98% “good” to “excellent” satisfaction rating was expressed.
- Teachers particularly rated the Learning Program highly on:
  - “engaging with students” (96% satisfaction was expressed);
  - “facilitating students to discuss democracy” (94% satisfaction expressed); and
  - “the program had relevance to the school’s classroom curriculum” (92% satisfaction expressed).
- Teachers also expressed strong interest in receiving “MoAD classroom learning information” downloadable to them on the following topics:
  - “Online timeline of democracy”; and
  - “Fact sheets on democratic history”.
- Teachers also believed that their students enjoyed the MoAD Learning Program and came away with new facts and knowledge.