

Young Curators Project
Chaired by Steve Mavers, Museum London;
Reporter, Amanda Tamul

Section 1	
Summary	“Young Curators of the Future” is an innovative project that uses social media and open source software to allow young curators to experience the work of a museum professional and to communicate with each other about the project http://www.museevirtuel-virtualmuseum.ca/Search.do?ex=on&R=VE_2152
Background	Museum London is Southwestern Ontario's leading establishment for the collection and presentation of visual art and material culture. Through public and educational programming, special events and exhibitions, Museum London strives to promote the knowledge and enjoyment of regional art, culture and history. http://www.londonmuseum.on.ca/
Challenges	Museum London wanted to engage high school students in a museum/gallery setting.
Approach	The young curators – students in grades 10-12 (ages 16-18) from area high schools – experienced behind-the-scenes visits to the partner museums and galleries and met with personnel to learn more about the museum profession. On the theme of “The Living City: inclusive, sustainable, creative,” which was the theme for the Canadian Pavilion at the 2010 International Exposition in Shanghai, and working with their local museum or gallery, students chose one or more artworks and researched and wrote a curatorial record for that object. Many students also provided creative responses through their own artworks inspired by or in response to a work in the museum partners’ collections. Using social media, the young curators added their work to the project site in the Experimental Lab of the Virtual Museum of Canada.
Intended outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school students will learn about and become interested in curators and what they do
Intended outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos • Social media • Writing • Facebook Page for students to communicate with others across the country
Section 2	
Obstacles and issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all students in the nation-wide program were on the same semester/school schedule. This made it difficult for them to work together as planned.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were issues related to technology. It was difficult to get students to use Facebook because it had been banned in schools. • The website was continually delayed. • It was challenging for students to develop a curatorial writing style e.g. proper citations, academic writing • Students wanted to do a <i>real</i> exhibit in the gallery space
Actual outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) funded Museum London \$15,000 to cover time & exhibit, curators to talk to students, photography work, etc. • Museum London staff learned how to use WordPress http://wordpress.org/ • Museum London collaborated with other galleries across the country
Actual outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual Museum of Canada exhibit • Museum London hosted a month-long <i>real</i> gallery exhibit by the students • Teachers loved the enriched learning experience that the students had
Section 3	
Lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real gallery experiences are valuable for students. They liked having exhibits, meeting curators and seeing the vaults. • Keep privacy issues in mind when working with Facebook. In this case participating students were required by CHIN to delete their personal accounts. ((Note: The students rebelled against this and refused to terminate their personal accounts) • It's important to get commitment beforehand from teachers and students.
Next steps	This was really a pilot project. Next steps are dependent on funding and other museum programming priorities.

Questions and answers are drawn from two sessions, with 10 and 9 participants respectively.

Question: Museum London selected the artworks the students would use, why didn't the students get to choose?

Steve – There was some debate about who would do this. It came down to copyright issues.

Question: Why did you edit student writing?

Steve – We had to insure that there were proper footnotes. As well, the material had to be translated so that makes the use of slang difficult. Yet we tried to maintain the essence of their

writing styles. Were we to do this again, we'd ask CHIN for more guidelines i.e. a word count. Students wrote very thorough material.

Question: What happened to the student artwork after the show?

Steve – The pieces were digitized and returned to the students.

Question: How did teachers respond to the project?

Steve – Art teachers saw it as an opportunity for students to learn new skills. The project was incorporated into the curriculum and became a key project for academic credit.

Question: Tell us about the collaboration between galleries, how did that work?

Steve – Museum London "problem solved", through a series of teleconferences with all the project partners (The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, The Beaverbrook, The Musee de Joliette, the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, The Kamloops Art Gallery & CHIN).

The students from Museum London communicated through Facebook, primarily with the students working with the Southern Alberta Art Gallery in Lethbridge.

Question: How long will the virtual exhibit be available?

Steve – Five years.

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Steve Mavers grew up in London, Ontario, where he went to the University of Western Ontario and earned a B.A. in History and a M.A. in Public History. He has worked at the Huron County Museum, the Joseph Schneider Haus Museum, the Homer Watson House and Gallery, and the London Regional Children's Museum. During his museum career, he has been involved in public relations, interpretation, and developing education programs and exhibitions. He is currently employed as the Curator of Education at Museum London, in London, Ontario, where he lives with his wife Diane, their daughter Melissa and their cat Clio (the Greek muse of history).