



a touring exhibitions
resource for regional
gallery directors

schools connections for gallery directors



MERVYN SMITH, RED SUN IN THE WATER, WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER, 94 X 66 CM, 1968 [DETAIL]



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ARTSsmart
*a strategy for arts education
in South Australian schools*



*Learning Connections is
assisted by the Regional Arts
Fund, an Australian Government
initiative supporting the arts in
regional and remote Australia.*

introduction

Learning Connections is a hands-on arts access program developed by Country Arts SA for regional South Australian school communities.



SAYED MUZAFAR HUSSAINI, *WHERE SHOULD I GO? FUTURELESS*, LINO PRINT, 2003

Its broad objective is to encourage and support schools' access to touring art exhibitions and associated arts programs.

It offers teachers specific resources and strategies for using Country Arts SA exhibitions as curriculum resources to encourage meaningful and engaging encounters with art from the earliest years.

It is also an ARTSsmart project. ARTSsmart is a strategy for arts education in South Australian schools and preschools and is a joint initiative of the Department of Education and Children's Services and Arts SA. More information: www.artssmart.sa.edu.au

getting connected

Getting schools connected with and regularly visiting your gallery are key objectives in terms of building audiences.

Why do schools come?

The general answer is that schools come because something within the gallery's calendar (usually an exhibition) appeals as a 'learning resource' or supports 'learning outcomes'.

Teachers, regardless of what learning area (e.g. Arts, English, Science) they specialise in, all teach within the framework of learning programs. These programs may be designed to take place across a full school year or operate as units of work across one or two terms.

When these programs are being designed, resources (which may be excursions, books, DVDs, music, visiting experts/artists, websites etc) are built into the programs.

What will make your gallery an attractive 'education resource'?

A school group visiting your gallery constitutes an 'out of school learning experience'.

The value of 'out of school learning' is recognised and promoted within South Australian curriculum systems. This is because:

- out of school learning offers unique experiences and access to resources not available within schools
- while the internet and other data resources provide information, the experiential component of engaging with 'the real thing' (such as studying animals at first hand or looking at original works of art in a gallery setting as opposed to looking at reproductions) is valued because it adds a dimension to the learning experience.

- such experiential learning offers multiple opportunities for self-directed research
- the social dimension to school group excursions is a value-added component

In summary, a group visit to an exhibition will look attractive and worthwhile if the structure of the session will involve active learning i.e. recognise the students' prior knowledge and experiences and engage them in purposeful, challenging and inherently interesting activities.

Using Learning Connections teaching strategies will ensure this.

Do schools come for the same reasons?

Schools generally come because:

- the experience of visiting an exhibition in a gallery (or seeing a play for example) is seen as an important cultural 'rite of passage' that acts as a window on the wider (post school) world of cultural experiences and opportunities
- art teachers want their students to learn things about art at first hand (i.e. by engaging with quality and varied 'originals')
- Arts, English (and other language and cultural studies) teachers want their students to learn to use and respond to artworks as a means of generating ideas, researching or extending language and communication skills
- Society and Environment teachers want their students to be able to research and interpret art works as 'texts' that can provide them with information or insights into the way societies relate to the environment
- Teachers who want their students to become aware of and understand Indigenous perspectives within regional, national or global contexts regard certain exhibitions and works as key resources in accelerating or opening up this process

Challenges

Schools will or won't come for a number of reasons:

- **Information about programs:** Teachers need to know what's on offer (across the year) as soon as possible into the new school year.
- **Relevance:** Teachers want some indication about the content, year level and learning area focus of individual exhibitions.
- **Teaching strategies:** Teachers look for support in terms of having some depth of knowledge about selected exhibitions and options for engaging their students within exhibitions.
- **Timing:** Schools do not visit exhibitions in holidays, and usually not early or very late in the school year. Senior secondary student groups (Year 11 – 12) will not be available in Term 4. It's useful to remember this when scheduling exhibitions that are particularly relevant to secondary schools.

- **School calendar** (see Timing): Term 1 for example is often a busy excursion period due to sporting fixtures.
- **Excursion budget:** Schools budget for a finite number of excursions. Teachers planning excursions will need time and information to successfully negotiate
- **Excursion resources:** Most excursions involve buses and additional staff/supervising parents. Planning for this requires considerable lead time.
- **Excursion approval process:** Excursions are usually negotiated and approved early in the school year.

Meeting the challenges

The following initiatives and strategies are currently being successfully used across regional South Australia:

Information delivery

- **Get Connected:** Plan with Country Arts SA to run a Get Connected session for your local teachers early in Term 1. Schedule one each year and promote it to schools as a 'one stop shop' opportunity to learn about what's on offer across the year

Networking

- Establish a teacher reference group to advise on ways to build relationships with schools in your local area.
- Use **Get Connected** and **Contemporary Connections** teacher workshops to invite participants to register an email or postal address for priority notification regarding gallery activities. Email is ideal as its free, quick and easy to reply to.
- Consider establishing a contact teacher in every school to act as 'go to' person for distributing information. Don't forget to have a special social occasion during the year to recognise the contribution of this group.
- Build a database of individual teachers who have responsibility for different learning areas. In some cases (as in secondary schools) this may be learning area coordinators.
- Contact with the local regional education office may pay dividends in identifying senior managers who can become advocates for your programs.
- If there are any regular local meetings, conferences or conventions of school principals, consider hosting a 'special viewing' where one of the Learning Connections team or a local teacher can do a presentation on arts-based learning opportunities.
- Ensure that teachers who are active users/participants/ contributors are on your gallery invitation lists.

Scheduling

- When bidding for and scheduling your exhibitions, draw up a calendar into four terms (plus holidays) and, within each term, label each week as Week 1, Week 2 etc. When communicating with schools it pays to realise that scheduling is structured in this way. You can find the school terms at www.decs.sa.gov.au/custserve/pages/default/pubhols/
- Use your local school contacts to develop a picture of when it is easier or harder to schedule excursions.
- Note that selected exhibitions likely to have broad Middle Years (primary – lower secondary) appeal would attract interest into Term 4.

Communicating

- Sending sample Learning Connections Education Packs to each local principal is good politics, but realise that the road to the right teacher's in-tray might be long and winding. Subject coordinators also are busy people and getting the message across will often take time and perseverance.
- Use the key teacher email network to speed things up. The pro-forma fax forms with Faxback sheets (provided by Country Arts SA for workshops) really do work to get a speedy response.
- Don't forget to follow up any mail outs with selective telephone calls to the principal or relevant coordinator/teacher. Once you have built up good working relations with individual schools this may not be necessary.

Resources

- Be confident in advocating the quality and relevance of the Learning Connections education resources (particularly the **Education Packs**) that now complement a number of touring exhibitions. Teachers across the state value them in terms of supporting meaningful engagement.
- Remind teachers to bookmark and use the Country Arts SA website – www.countryarts.org.au - to access and download a full range of education resources



WHO TO CONTACT

General Information: contact Jo Pike, Senior Project Officer, Statewide Initiatives Unit 8444 0400 or jo.pike@countryarts.org.au

Workshop bookings and school visit bookings: contact your local gallery or your Country Arts SA arts officer

Downloads and other information: www.countryarts.org.au.

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- The **Contemporary Connections** Teachers' Workshops series is offered with a number of touring exhibitions. These workshops offer an excellent opportunity to build teacher motivation and involvement
- Promote teachers' participation in the **Art Connections Practical Workshop** series as a means of further involving teachers and their students
- Art Games (in the Learning Connections Education Pack) can be adapted for use in family programs and activities designed for younger visitors
- **DIY Discovery Trails**, which are hung with selected exhibitions, are a simple way to get gallery staff and volunteers better connected with the exhibitions.
- Consider taking advantage of the visit by a Learning Connections presenter and hold a **Hosted Discovery Trail** for the public on the same day as the teacher workshop.

Background briefing

- Take time out to scan the Learning Connections Education Packs and linked Country Arts SA Learning Connections website resources. Apart from providing insight information about selected exhibitions (that will also be useful and relevant to volunteers) these resources give a snapshot of the learning context in which teachers and students are operating when visiting an exhibition.

Good luck!

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