

Tate's Turnaround: Practice becomes Research

What are the benefits and challenges of situating the work of a learning team in an art museum as a form of practice-based research

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Head of Research Tate

Background

Head of Learning Practice and Research at Tate 2010 - 2019

AHRC Leadership Fellowship, Sept 2017 – August 2018

Research Question:

How can practitioner-led co-produced research practices be embedded within the art museum?

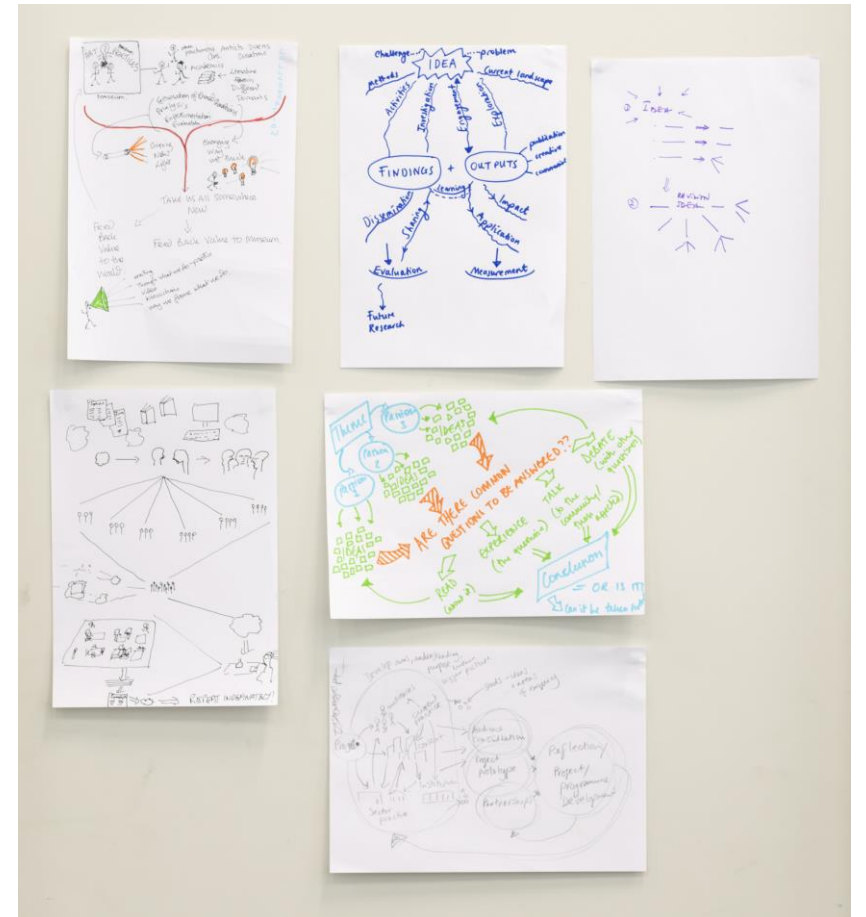
Appointed Head of Research at Tate in February 2019

Methodology

- Practice as research – emergent, exploratory, interdisciplinary, personally situated
- Case studies – Harvard Art Museums (USA), Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) (Ireland), Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC) (UK), Tate Learning (UK), Trapholt (Denmark)
- Interviewed 30 museum/ arts professionals
- Facilitated 2 seminars at Tate Britain to test findings
- Blog – PRAM (<https://www.practitionerresearchintheartmuseum.com>)
- Book – ‘Rethinking Research in the Art Museum’ – published by Routledge in 2019.

Starting with questions

- What does the term 'research' mean to you?
- Do you consider yourself a researcher?



Four discourses of the Art Museum

Discourse of artists and the collection



Discourse of financial sustainability

Discourse of academia

Discourse of democratic participation

The implications for research – interview feedback

- **Confusion** - people did not have a common understanding of research
- **Differentiation** – people identified a hierarchy of research within the museum
- **Exclusion** – people did not think they could do research and/or that their research was not valued by the museum

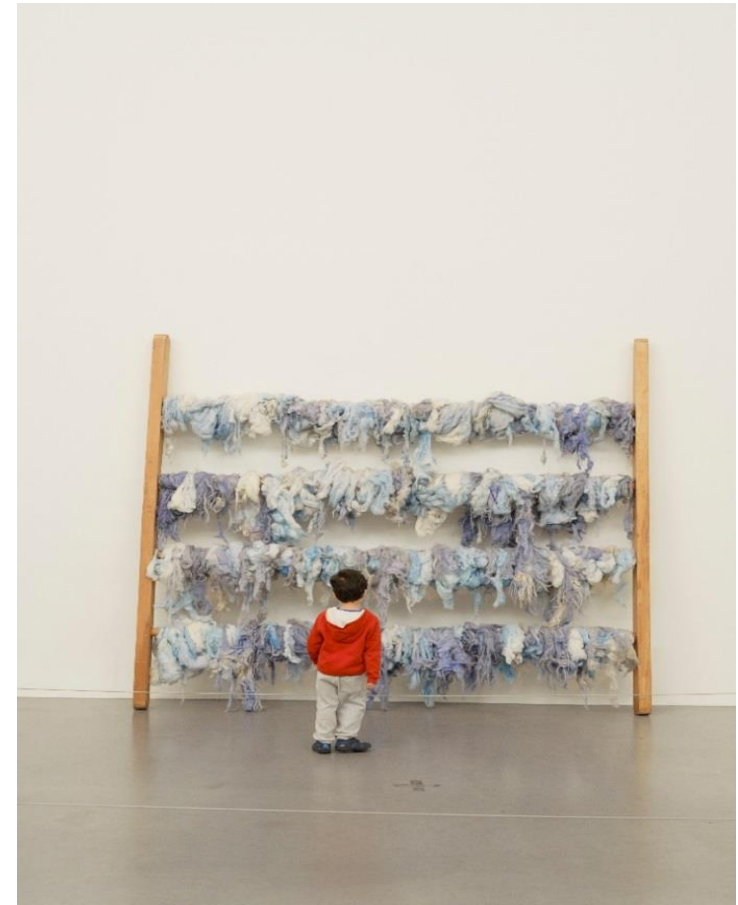


How can we rethink research in the art museum?

- Address the inbuilt hierarchies around what is seen as ‘valuable knowledge’ and broaden our conception of research
- Reframe our understanding of the museum professional as a practitioner researcher
- Broaden our understanding of who can do research (including our audiences) and recognise the varied expertise that is needed within the twenty-first century art museum
- Put in place systems and structures that support ongoing practitioner-led co-research.

Three characteristics of research

- The importance of questions
- The process of enquiry
- The generation of new knowledge that goes out into the world



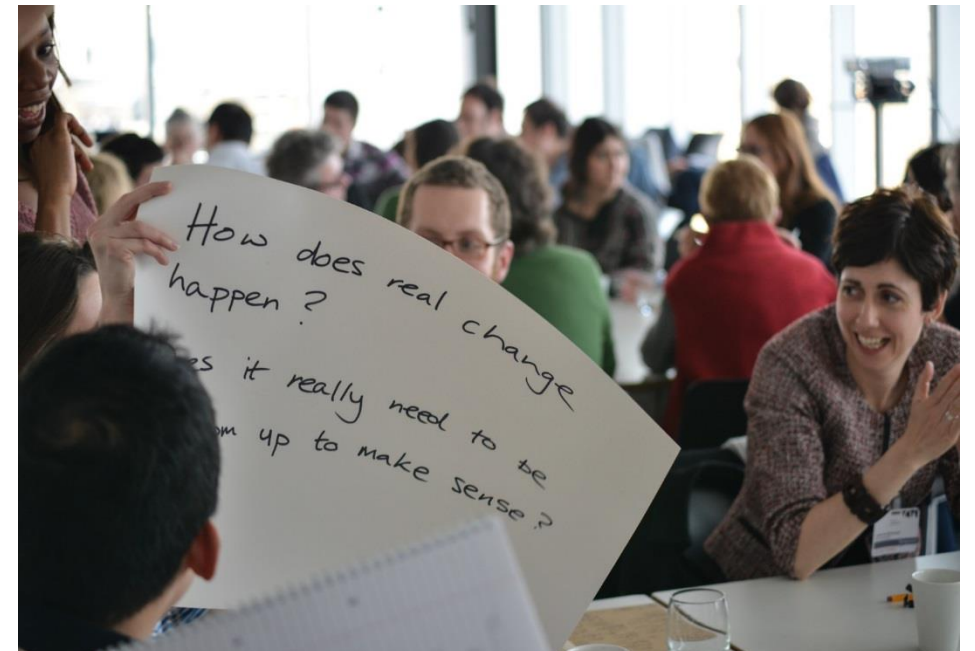
Practice-based/practice-led/practice as research.....

- Practice = 'what we do' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009)
- Theory = set apart from practice as set of abstract ideas about something
- Praxis = knowledge and theory are not separate, but embodied in practice, operating in a dynamic relationship with it
- Practice as Research = 'Programmes of careful enquiry and reflection prompted by questions related to practice that generate new knowledge through and about practice. (Pringle, 2019: 72)

The Scholar Practitioner

An ideal of professional excellence grounded in theory and research, informed by experimental knowledge and motivated by **personal values, political commitments and ethical conduct.**

Charles McClintock, 2005



The Qualities of the Practitioner Researcher

- Motivated by curiosity and ongoing questioning
- Committed to developing their knowledge of practice and understanding of theory
- Engages in reflection and the assessment of changes brought about by their work
- Collaborates and actively exchanges knowledge with practitioners and others – artists, academics, community members, museum visitors
- Communicates their knowledge and make their expertise visible to others in ways that are useful
- Works with integrity, generosity and care

Tate Learning

- Values-led approach (2011)
- Practice as Research (2016)



Developing shared values – more questions

- What are the core values of the department?
- How are these values embedded in all we do – and what we expect to see?
- What documentation and evaluation do we need to capture and account for the experience of participating in our programmes and activities?
- How do we draw together and analyse findings to develop broader understandings?
- How do we feed those findings back into practice and communicate them internally and externally?

Tate Learning values = generosity, trust, openness and risk

The Practice as Research programme - four interconnected elements

- Research through practice across Learning
- Specific research projects emerging from the research through practice activity
- Research projects in collaboration with colleagues internally
- Research projects in collaboration with external researchers – academics, teachers, community members, young people



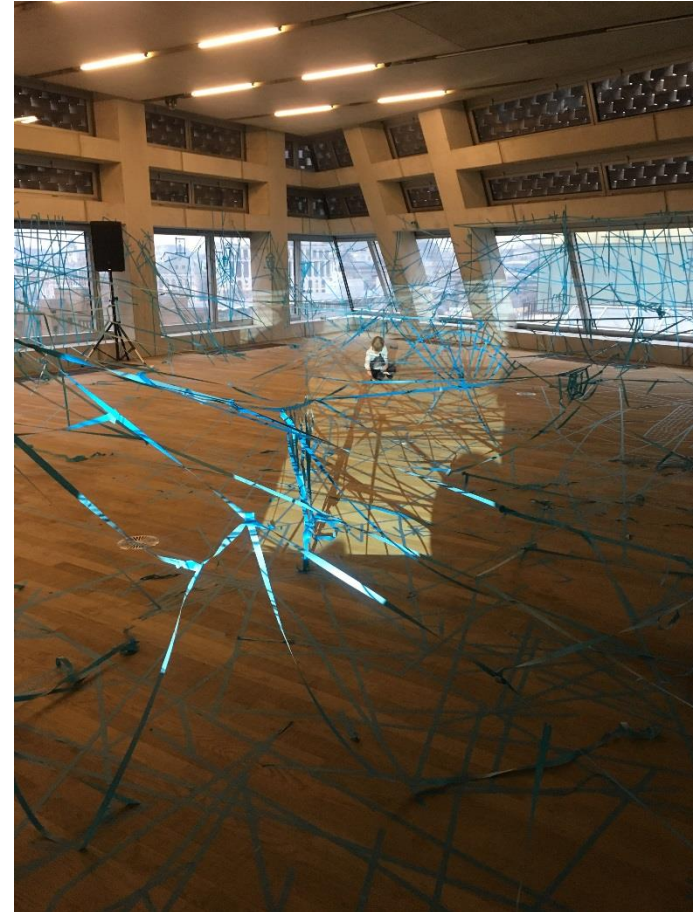
Research through Practice

- Move from 'delivery' to 'enquiry'
- Activities framed around particular, but open questions
- Programme = an investigation of the question undertaken with participants
- Activities can follow familiar formats
- The expectation is that staff question, reflect and remake programmes as they progress



Research through Practice - challenges

- Making time for questioning, reflection, analysis and writing
- Broadening our understanding of what is a research 'output' – going beyond the written word
- Entrenched research hierarchies
- Staff changes – new people joining the department who are new to this way of working



Research through Practice - benefits

- Instils rigour and quality into all areas of practice
- Makes visible processes and practice
- Interrogates & makes explicit the skills and knowledge in the museum
- Encourages critical and reflective practice
- Supports the development of cross-disciplinary practice

