

Chapter V

From Concept to Conference: Developing a Distance Learning Lesson Using a Museum/School Collaboration Model

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses various points of view regarding the process of developing a videoconferencing lesson that focuses on an architectural landmark, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. This lesson was the result of collaboration among provider educators from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and three teachers. The project involved a working partnership that lasted a year and a half, culminating with the launch of the videoconference lesson. Information on establishing the goals, developing the program, and assessing outcomes are provided. This chapter includes input from the museum and from teachers at the participating schools about the collaboration process and its value to participants.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In the autumn of 2001, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum was poised to open the Sackler Center for Arts Education on the lower level of its famed Frank Lloyd Wright-designed landmark museum. In this visionary facility, the presence of videoconferencing technology provided the museum with the ability to reach and engage new audiences. Museum staff, however, had yet to

answer several key questions about the videoconferencing process: How could the museum identify new audiences? What would those audiences find compelling? What was the best way to structure the outreach? How could the museum manage staff and resources to allow for developing and delivering videoconference lessons?

In surveying the museum education landscape, it was apparent that the readiness to delve into new technology similar to that available in the

From Concept to Conference

Guggenheim's new facility ran the gamut from fully capable to nonexistent. Some content providers already were well on their way to integrating videoconferencing into their museum mission. For instance, by 2000, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art (New York City) had established extensive videoconferencing programs. Other parallel institutions had neither the equipment nor the staff to devote to the new technology. As a result, the Guggenheim was in need of an opportunity to collaborate with another institution to develop its own readiness to embark on a new course in program delivery.

It was at this time that *Project VIEW*¹, a federally-funded Technology Innovation Challenge grant program based in Schenectady, New York, approached the museum and offered an invitation to join a community of schools and content providers who were working to create infrastructure for delivering world-class education to students using interactive educational technology. VIEW involved a development model that simultaneously trained teachers in the use of videoconferencing methods for the classroom and also facilitated content providers' efforts to share their resources through interactive videoconference programming.

For the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the invitation to collaborate could not have come at a more perfect time. Although the museum receives many requests to participate in programs, it rarely is able to accept the offers; however, the VIEW model possessed unique and practical attributes that addressed the then-current needs of the Guggenheim. First, VIEW was committed to alignment of project focus with museum mission; and second, it required the in-depth involvement of teacher teams (consumers) in program development.

Institution-Aligned Project Focus

Under the VIEW model, it is important that partners recognize that the content provider (in

this case, the Guggenheim) determines the theme or focus of the videoconferencing lesson. This is a simple yet crucial premise. Once the focus that met the provider's educational philosophy is established, school-based teacher teams can participate in collaborative planning and curriculum design that determine the final specific content and structure of the videoconference. This basic procedure ensures that the topic for the lesson will be one central to the museum's mission and will reflect the needs of the schools.

To this end, the initial phase of the Guggenheim collaboration asked museum education staff to identify a general theme for a pilot lesson. After careful consideration, it was decided that the videoconferencing lesson would focus on the museum's unique Frank Lloyd Wright architecture. The design of the museum is both central to its identity, and, based on visitor surveys, is an important factor in determining why audiences locally, nationally, and internationally decide to make the museum a destination.

The architecture focus was a broad-enough umbrella to subsume various curricular areas and diverse grade levels. Architecture can serve as an effective means of teaching social studies and demonstrating that art forms are a reflection of the cultural milieu in which they were created. For art classes, architecture in general, and Frank Lloyd Wright in particular, provides opportunities to explore aesthetic and functional problem-solving and the design tenet of "form follows function". For middle-school art students, architecture provided a perfect stimulus for a study of three-dimensional design elements and constructive techniques. The Guggenheim's unique architectural design and well-known reputation provided an additional aura of interest.

Development Readiness

Educators from the Guggenheim recognized that they needed some fundamental training in classroom videoconference integration and deliv-

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