



SHARING KNOWLEDGE THROUGH RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

Members of each project panel addressed several questions during the conference sessions, but for the sake of brevity we have singled out one question per group and provided brief excerpts from the full transcript of the conference proceedings. These quotes are followed by a summary of the main benefits and challenges that were put forward by panel members at the end of each session.

Martin Segger, CURA Program Director
Introductory Remarks

Keynote Speaker, Bob Turner, Curator Emeritus of the RBCM.
“Old Boats Reveal their Secrets Slowly: Empathy, Authenticity and Heritage Sustainability”

Sessions Summary

APRIL 29, 2005
ROYAL BC MUSEUM
NEWCOMBE CONFERENCE HALL

Sessions Facilitator: Kevin Neary (KN)

Session 1: Collections and Connections: building collaborative partnerships on themes of mutual interest

- China and Beyond: The Legacy of a Culture (Vancouver Museum)
Panelists: Kathlyn Liscomb (KL), Pauline Thompson (PT), Justyna Krol (JK)

KN: How did you bring together disparate collections for a coherent exhibit?

“... a lot of it had to do with trying to bring out certain themes and pick the objects that would interact with each other. We wanted to talk about the polarity of the different religious beliefs in China ... We wanted to talk about the roles of women... So, there were little sub-themes that we developed, and part of the choices were based on the spaces that they were going to be exhibited in.” (KL)

“...When I started to put together the presentation for the education co-ordinators at the Vancouver Museum, I started with the desire to cover as much as possible... What I found happening was a process of refocusing because the students would ask certain questions... and that was really interesting because they were questions that were based in the community ...” (JK)

“...we deal with issues of citizenship... culture... contact – no matter what the cultures are – from all over the world, so this seemed like a really nice fit for us because it had that element of impact, transformation, a creation of something new...” (PT)

- “A Woman’s Place”: Art and the Role of Women in the Cultural Formation of Victoria, B.C., 1850s-1920s (BC Heritage Branch)
Panelists: Anne Finlay (AF), Jennifer Iredale (JI), Adrienne Munro (AM)

KN: How did you develop your theme for shared interest? How did that work out?

“The project essentially grew out of my work with the four historic homes ... where there are small collections of work the women in the homes made... my questions, when I first spoke to Karen (Anne Finlay), were actually quite narrow...so Karen ...broadened the context and the questions which, in the end, made it an important exhibit and document...” (JI)

“...what we did was call a series of round tables and meet weekly... a lot of students were involved, coming and going over a four year period...and it was incredibly wonderful as a process...as a collaborative process. Many of our decisions came out of a very strong commitment to round table, and just the commitment of time.” (AF)

“... it was a very organic process and all the students that were involved got to contribute and try and shape the project. One of the areas I was interested in was the multi-cultural history of Victoria, which I felt hadn’t really been addressed very much yet. That is one of the great things that the project coordinators did...they allowed the students to explore the areas they were interested in.” (AM)

- World Tea Party Victoria (World Tea Party Society)
Panelists: Judith Patt (JP), Bryan Mulvihill (BM), Sheila Connelly (SC)

**KN: How did you bring together collections to form a cohesive exhibition?
What was the process you had to go through there?**

“We have to begin to rethink: What is the museum? ... it is a living museum and the community we live in is part of our museum... And somehow, to start to create projects that allow people to feel that they are part of that and that they can participate ... And the museum can help direct that...or the archives can help direct those things but they mustn’t start thinking they are the holders of that information.” (BM)

“...we had 65 private lenders... 78 institutional lenders... 20 demonstrators or lecturers that brought in 1200 people...the attendance at the art gallery was up about 50%...it became a party...and Bryan stressed this idea...and Sheila and I gave a party ...people were coming...attending...started bringing cookies for the tea...It started out as an intellectual activity and ended up with them washing dishes in the kitchen after the tea party” (JP)

“...it was a great experience because collectors of porcelain from Victoria were able to get together and really talk about our interests... and out of that we started a ceramics club in Victoria and tomorrow we are meeting...and it happens to be on the subject of tea...” (SC)

Summary of benefits and challenges:

- Let community do the talking
- Make each “party” to partnership comfortable
- Make it accessible – provide the environment for community cooperation
- Opened all sorts of unimaginable doors
- Value of objects associative not intrinsic
- Donors shared their knowledge (camaraderie and sharing = more knowledge)
- Connect past traditions w/ongoing cultural tradition and production
- Catalogues and other publications provide a legacy
- Time for dialogue is fundamental
- Parallel goals, rather than the same ones, are possible
- Finding funds and having support from Barbara Winters and Martin Segger was crucial from the community’s perspective
- CURA’s are open-ended and different from traditional Social Sciences and Humanities models
- Goes deeper than traditional model – involves community voices
- Limited resources and time to continue were ever present challenges

Session 2: Sites of Significance: documenting community development

- Victoria Streetscapes (Hallmark Society)
Panelists: Martin Segger (MS), Helen Edwards (HE)

KN: What values did you consider when you selected the sites, streetscapes, communities for research in your project?

“Originally, we wanted to document every building in the CRD but, of course, we eventually realized that was totally impractical and we would never get any money to do all that. So...I had [a student] go through our slide and photograph collection to find out what we were missing ... And we found we had virtually nothing in Gonzales and Fairfield.” (HE)

- Modern Movement Architecture in BC (DOCOMOMO.BC)
Panelists: Christopher Thomas (CT), Beth Macdonald (BMac)

KN: How did you get your information? What were the sources?

“It was not easy. The project is changing shape all the time...it is really a long-term project of which Topaz Heights [a post-war housing development in Victoria] is a part. The history of the post-war period hasn't really been written yet. There is a distance between sites that are monuments vs. more vernacular sites, such as Topaz Heights.” (CT)

“CURA provided human ethics authorization...which meant we could now talk with real people! And we found the Housing Enterprises Ltd. These two things gave us more information. Topaz Heights is unique...we learned how the people who lived in these houses interacted with the architecture...” (Bmac)

- Finnish Canadian Community History (Sointula Recreation Society)
Panelists: Ian MacPherson (IM), Tom Roper (TR), Kevin Wilson (KW)

KN: what was the research methodology you employed?

“...we began to ask ourselves the question: ‘how does a small community express its history, record it, preserve it, and present it?’ And someone thought of the idea of a photo project...that is, to put together a photography exhibit out of the holdings of the many families based in the community. I have to tell you that it took something well over a year... I probably should add that in terms of selection, what got included, what didn't get included...it was really a community decision ...that added people as it went...who kept looking at one another saying,

“How do we know what to include?” And we kept saying, “We will know it when we see it.” (TR)

“The Institute for Co-operative Studies is interested in co-operative organizations, such as the co-op in Sointula, in co-operative thought, and a kind of mutualist behaviour – how communities group together. And the assumption is, that it is a kind of ignored dimension... and, partly, that is because of the way the academy tends to divide the world into disciplines, structures ... This was a perfect project for us, largely because of Tom and the people around him– we had an aroused community.” (IM)

“Tom had some great contacts, mostly elders in the community that we were talking to... Whatever information that I got, and other people who did interviews as well (there were a number of people), the people in the community lead us on in a good way. They directed us to who we should talk to next and they were very vocal about that...” (KW)

Summary of benefits and challenges:

- Much deeper level of community involvement than traditional research projects
- Collective memory an exercise of trust for community (not always the case w/academics)
- Involved young people in fostering communication between generations
- Researchers have to really listen to the community
- Legitimized community property and their research skills
- operate organically – let go of control
- value of effective partnership
- University needs to develop rewards for research projects/CURA projects
- Have to have an administrator to facilitate everything – who knows how to make things happen
- assess your project as you go so you don't miss doing more research
- Need to have outcomes at the faculty level
- Time and discussion – need for dialogue and continual reassessment

Session 3: Authorship and Hidden Histories: unearthing collections of cultural value

- Industrial Narratives (Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society)
Panelist: Erica Hernandez (EH), Carol Gibson-Wood observing.

KN: Where did you get your information?

“The Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society has a collection of salmon can labels ... no research had been done on the labels ... We were looking at unpacking the process behind the labels: the printing process, the printing industry, archival sources...back track to where the information had originally come from. We looked at the marketing psychology...the evolution of canning companies...”

isolating it down to the source... a lot of primary resource research and secondary well-known histories of the fishing industry. We looked at it in terms of doing an analysis of what the labels mean..." (EH)

- Liturgical Textiles of St. John the Divine Church, Yale (Fraser Heritage Society and Yale Historical Society)
Panelists: Bev Kennedy (BK), Jennifer Iredale (JI), Irene Bjerky (IJ)

KN: How did you make decisions in relation to the collections ... let's hear about the process ... how did you get there?

"The collection chose us ... everything was in, so decisions were unnecessary ... What made it come alive was the oral history... We used a lot of primary sources in conducting our research ... trips to Anglican Church archives, interviews with six or seven women sitting around a table covered with liturgical textiles, each woman bringing her own expertise and experience to examining the textiles." (BK)

"...we were able to establish age because of hand-stitching and use of materials – primary, archival, material, then oral history research led to snippets of clues regarding to connection to All Hallows Mission School for First Nations girls ... through this we formed a connection with Irene Bjerky. We also conducted interviews with members of the Altar Guild in Vancouver..." (JI)

"I had written a story about my great-grandmother's last Christmas at All Hallows School. She married shortly after this ... I'm involved with the Hope Writers' Guild ... and collaborated with Jennifer Iredale in developing a story for inclusion in the catalogue..." (IB)

- First Nations Basketry (White Rock Museum)
Panelist: Nancy Turner (NT)

KN: What were your sources of information for the project?

"I was not the only person involved in this project; Megan [Kus] of the White Rock Museum was also involved ... the project revolved around a basket collection bequeathed to the White Rock Museum by a resident who had accumulated a collection through auctions ... As a result, many of the baskets were without provenance ... All of the information I had learned over a period of years came together with this project. [First Nations] women's knowledge was part of the research. We photographed Catherine's baskets...shared stories of women from non-native communities. All the baskets were very important..." (NT)

- Inkameep Day School Art Collection (Osoyoos Museum and Osoyoos Indian Band)
Panelists: Andrea Walsh (AW), Brenda Baptiste(BB)

KN: How did you decide what this project was about?

“We started this project through our awareness of a set of school drawings... the whole process started back in the 30s...Anthony Walsh recognized the importance of collecting children’s art... The collection left the school in 1942. In 1943 it was transferred to a non-native community...in 1963 it was transferred to a museum...no work had been done on it...there was no information in the museum...Leslie Plaskett recognized the significance of the collection and approached CURA... The collection wasn’t necessarily entirely unknown...the community from the reserve had already started looking at it...” (AW)

“Chief Clarence Louie realized the importance of the drawings...encouraged other people to correspond with Andrea and they started gathering more of the story. This was one of the few research projects that was so respectful...Andrea worked with us to help us as to how it would impact our community.” (BB)

Summary of benefits and challenges:

- built capacity for display cases and catalogues
- Consensus led research – process oriented
- Community could withhold memories if they were not willing to give it to the project
- value of complex layered methodology
- value of oral histories and knowledge
- talk to a lot of people to get a piece of story
- travelling exhibits / virtual museums provide a legacy
- built confidence in community to publish
- allowed for research that would not have happened
- Now know how to be a full research partner/ it empowered us/ built our own archive/ inspired us to keep working on the arts (Nk’ mip)
- Community makes us think about how theory works – it is being reshaped by the CURA
- partners established relationships
- underestimated time it would take to do the publication – really need institutional support
- challenge of communication exacerbated by distance
- a lot of extra work for community and faculty
- not enough time
- it ended too soon
- short duration of exhibitions

- How do we evaluate it?

APRIL 30, 2005
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
SENATE CHAMBERS

Welcome and announcements by Martin Segger.

Session 4: Private Collections / Public Exhibitions: Supporting Research for Special Collections

- Robert Aller Collection (Port Alberni Community Arts Council)
 Panelists: Martin Segger (MS), Gareth Flostrand (GF), Jean McIntosh (JM)

KN: From the community perspective, what was it like dealing with the university?

“The benefits are really clear ... working with students ... challenges were more along the lines of communication ... several have mentioned the challenges of additional work on top of desks already piled high ... students were willing to come to communities to conduct research.” (JM)

“ I was not involved with this project at the beginning, but through a second group of students, I learned a lot ... they worked very well on their own. North Island College lent us their art room space so work could be spread out ... the Community Arts Foundation provided some funding. Began working on this project on a temporary basis ...challenge of staff changes also ...” (GF)

- Caetani Family Collection (Vernon Museum)
 Panelists: Catherine Harding (CH), Karen Avery (KA), Carla Yarish (CY)

KN: What are the challenges in meeting expectations of donors of significant collections?

“When Sveva [Caetani] was nearing her death, she wanted to leave her collection to a museum. Because the collection contained many large works ... paintings ended up with the Alberta Art Foundation and left Vernon ... the Vernon Museum ended up with the house, possessions, library, a collection of drawings and small paintings. A site visit was an eye-opener about resources for small public museums ... not enough people or space to care for things as they would like ... as a result of CURA, we were able to take care of the drawings which had not been housed in archival conditions ...” (CH)

“...yes, there were challenges, but they were positive. Going through a box of magazines, I found some beautiful drawings ... it was a box about to be thrown away ... one of the challenges is to provide further help to the museum ... as an ongoing project ...” (KA)

“I arrived at the museum on a day when they were having a garage sale to raise money! The museum doesn't have the resources to accession all the objects ... it's a challenge ...” (CY)

- Legh Kilpin Art Collection (Langley Centennial Museum)
Panelists: Barbara Winters (BW), Tusa Shea (TS)

KN: What else transpired as a result of these projects?

“I was impressed with how the Langley Museum has made this collection a community asset. These are the works of a significant Canadian artist, so they had the collection designated Canadian cultural property, bringing with it some funding. ...The leverage of CURA enabled MAP funding for travelling ... in the case of the Langley exhibition. The art collection is also a leverage to build an arts centre ... There was also a painting of Lady Van Horne on loan from New Brunswick. ...We have something of a template now ... each project was organic.” (BW)

“I came to the project at a point when a catalogue was needed. There were challenges in meeting the donor expectations in terms of the writing between the “mythology” of Kilpin and the expectations of the museum. There were challenges posed in writing text that would be engaging to the project... Kilpin was an eclectic artist, who was representative of artists of his time in Canada and Great Britain ... he did a mixture of design and commercial work, teaching, art-making ... simply trying to make a living. This became the focus of the catalogue...” (TS)

Summary of benefits and challenges:

- Documentation of donated collection
- Projects and UVic participation provided validation for community institutions
- Mediation /strengthening organizational bonds
- Positive personal relationships resulted
- 6 exhibitions at the Maltwood
- UVic profile raised in the community
- Student training
- Template for new methodology
- collaboration is solution to many problems
- Mobilize community colleges to get involved
- Have built a pool of expertise
- Connection to UVic is a valuable commodity for community

- Exhibits and catalogues are products that can be used for leverage and profile building (MAP funding)
- Donors happy to have research done
- Donation of additional collections
- Awareness of what collaborations can achieve – multiple products based on partnerships
- 5 year length of CURA allowed for empathy, sustained involvement, greater chances with other funding agencies and corporate donors
- connecting to community but also a chain of learning through students
- communication presents a challenge
- time management – unreasonable timelines
- Networks built through CURA need to be maintained
- Everybody values heritage, but nobody wants to pay for it

Session 5: Community Histories in Photographs: Engaging Communities through photograph collections

- Japanese Canadian Photographers (Japanese Canadian National Museum)
Panelists: Phyllis Senese (PS), Grace Eiko-Thomson (GET), Timothy Savage (TS)

KN: How do you use photographs to connect with different sectors of the community?

“It wasn’t the photographs that began the project, but rather the loss of photographs. When families left their homes during the internment, family albums were packed away and many were never found ... third and fourth generations of families were without access to family albums and histories. I discovered the collection at Cumberland through a book by a Japanese author...”
(GET)

“As a new body of images has been brought together this generated a level of insight for the communities of Cumberland, New Westminster and Vancouver. Now the exhibition has a definite shape ... it can travel to communities in British Columbia and Alberta. Through the publication, we will also have another way of disseminating this knowledge.” (TS)

“This is not a single collection but rather a collection of fragments from diverse collections. When the exhibit tours, it may be possible to locate additional images, information and identifications. When the catalogue is finished, this may assist also.”
(PS)

- Helen McCall, Photographer (Sunshine Coast Museum)
Panelists: Ariane Isler-de Jongh (AIDJ), Bill Gregg (BG), Bee Jackson (BJ)

**KN: Any strengths, weaknesses or challenges involved in your projects?
What were the significant challenges?**

“...it all started with interest in this photographer ... I am a fourth generation photographer but also have expertise in the history of photography. Here was something special ... however, I had no background in British Columbia history or women’s studies ... I collaborated with Lynne Marks of the Department of History and hired a student, Jocelyn Statia who did a two term directed study. I was not able to go to Gibsons to see the collection ... so I had to develop another approach ... I was familiar with the social history side of the collection.”

“What is unique about Helen McCall is that there is still a community memory of her and her work ... McCall worked from the late 20’s to 1992 and amassed a collection of about 1,300 photographs ... the lighthouse keeper in the family. She donated the collection to the Museum where it sat for almost 20 years. I saw the collection ... there was copper piping behind where the collection was stored ... I thought, what if it bursts? Decided that rather than teaching a course, I would do something about the collection instead.” (BG)

“We were able to acquire equipment to complete the project... in the end the Board took ownership of the project... one more thing... this generation of students work very well at the community level... wonderful way to work with research students in the community.” (BJ)

- Joseph Frederick Spalding, Photographer (Fernie Historical Society)
Panelists: Lorne Hammond (LH), Michael Pennock (MP)

KN: Again, how did you use photographs to connect with different sectors of the community?

“The mere existence of the collection and its interaction with the community is significant. The collection was already there when I became involved in 1999 with the Fernie Historical Society. Previously the Society had used the Catholic Rectory but once the building was taken back, it was necessary to become a “virtual” museum. We conducted walking tours, produced calendars ... it was necessary to rethink models for getting things done. We were shameless about funding.” (MP)

“Another larger connection – photography has been historically dominated by the coast, for example, Leonard Frank was a photographer in Vancouver. However, the photographs of Spalding are still in circulation today. The physical body of photographic work of Spalding has been scattered in postcards. The task is to uncover archival sources ... even from e-bay. Creating tools for the communities ... important to let community do what they want to do after that.” (LH)

- Upper St'at'imc History in Photographs (Upper St'at'imc Language, Culture and Education Society)
Panelists: Towagh Behr (TB) (Andrea Walsh – absent)

KN: Again, any strengths, weaknesses or challenges involved in your project?

“No methodology was used in the photo selection. When brought in, I couldn't really understand what the focus of the project was. I arrived in the community to find boxes of about 500 photographs and partially transcribed interviews that had been taken around the community... the lack of methodology, lack of understandable organization, made it possible to start from a different place with the project – to disregard archival categories and numbering systems.

I met with the Elders' Advisory Council and we discussed the background of the community, the histories ... archival taxonomy was left out of the picture. They weren't willing to give up on having 500 photographs displayed. So web-based upload systems were developed for the site and, using a password system, photographs can continually be added to the site.” (TB)

Summary of benefits and challenges:

- Created tools for the community (even if the goals were different)
- Benefits of meeting people – the journey is more important than the destination
- Original methodology had to be redrawn through process (site visit)
- Photographs help people to get involved – people want to tell their stories
- Projects help us to remember and recapture the vibrant past
- We built our institutional capacities –not a lot of money but we did leverage other benefits. We raised the quality of our productions (archival printer -- Fernie)
- issues of trust have been established
- Students work very well in community
- Community taking ownership early on worked very well
- Help from Barbara [Winters] a great benefit!
- A challenge to make the publication saleable to the community – a catalogue in disguise
- How do you give the project back to the community so that they can take ownership of it?
- Communication was sometimes difficult
- Hard to get students to commit to a projected that is not clearly focused
- Time too short

