

Conflict and Disability Imperial War Museum London

Conflict and Disability at Imperial War Museum London (IWM) was atypical of the projects developed as part of **Rethinking Disability Representation (RDR)**. For practical and experimental reasons, **Conflict and Disability** did not seek to re-display or present a new exhibition looking at representation of disability. Rather, the aim was to create four new education sessions for secondary schools which would meet the aims of RDR: to examine and contest negative stereotypes of disabled people, and to take new approaches to using museum collections in relation to disability

Although the four sessions were distinct, they were all founded on engaging young people with issues around disability through working with IWM collections items. Although this is how all IWM education sessions work – direct engagement with collections – the difference in **Conflict and Disability** was to assess or reassess the items used in light of the social model of disability.

The sessions were not aimed at a disabled audience per se, although accessibility was considered in creating the lesson plans and resources (one participating group was from a school for the deaf). The target audiences were Key Stage 3 and 4 groups from any school.

The four sessions are reproduced in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The four sessions of the IWM London education programme, **Conflict and Disability**

Session	Focus	Type	Curriculum focus
Welcome Home	Students explored archive material relating to disabled veterans' experiences returning after the First World War, compared with the view of Wilfred Owen's poem 'Disabled'.	1-2 hour session	Literacy (supports History & Citizenship)
Disability Rights	Students examined issues of disabled peoples' rights – they acted as Disability Discrimination Act inspectors, assessing the museum for disabled access.	Half-day combination session – following activities at IWM, students went to the Houses of Parliament to meet their local MP and discuss the legislative process.	Citizenship
Necessity Breeds Invention	Students examined issues of personal reactions to disfigurement through the story of Jack Toper, a Second World War airman treated for burns by pioneering plastic surgeon Archie McIndoe, and member of the 'Guinea Pig Club' – a social and support group formed by McIndoe's patients.	Half-day combination session – following activities at IWM, students went to the Hunterian Museum to find out more about the development of surgical instruments and medical equipment and how they were used to treat injuries sustained in war.	History, Citizenship
The War on Nerves	Students researched evidence of mental and emotional impact of conflict, using letters and oral history testimony, in order to curate an exhibition about the impact of war on individual soldiers.	Two-day workshop for Gifted and Talented students, with Falklands and Gulf War veteran Allen Parton. NB this was a one-off session, whereas the others were delivered several times.	History, Citizenship

Initiation and Collaboration

The initial concepts for **Conflict and Disability** were drafted in 2006 by the Corporate Education department (coordinating learning across all five branches of the IWM). Dan Phillips and Samantha Heywood drew on known stories of disability in the Museum's collections which seemed rich with potential for further research. Of course, the very nature of RDR was intended to stretch participant organisations in using their material, so it was anticipated that the specifics of the proposal would inevitably change through development. The project was planned to take place at IWM London, with Corporate Education overseeing the work.

IWM London Education Officers Katie Potter and Sarah Ballard led the project. Both project leaders brought several years of school and museum teaching experience to devising the new sessions. They benefited from a shared responsibility for the work, synthesising their ideas, as well as being able to run early ideas past colleagues in the IWM London Education department. Steve Gardam succeeded Dan Phillips as Head of Corporate Education in July 2007 as supervisor of the project leaders, and in particular contributed practical project management advice as the project moved from research to its development phase.

Disability Rights and **Necessity Breeds Invention** were both partnership sessions, with the Parliamentary Education Service and the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons, respectively. Verity Sandles (Parliament) and Jane Hughes (Hunterian) helped to shape these sessions and led the sections delivered at their sites.

The War on Nerves two-day workshop for Gifted and Talented students was developed with Anthony Smith, a teacher at Notre Dame School in Southwark. Disabled Gulf War veteran Allen Parton took part in **The War on Nerves**, adding his personal experience of conflict and impairment.

Consultation

Conflict and Disability was created within the wider consultative context of RDR. Katie, Sarah and Dan participated in the initial residential session with the other programme partners and the RDR Think Tank. The most positive outcome from the residential was to reinforce to Museum staff the absolute necessity of consultation with disabled people, as some of the Think Tank members emphasised how relatively inexperienced the Museums were in using appropriate terminology and understanding issues surrounding disability.

At IWM London, the project leaders sought out independent disability consultants to help frame the distinct sessions, as well as the overall approach of **Conflict and Disability**.

The June Bretherton Consultancy advised on the content and archive materials to be used in the **Welcome Home** teaching session, and provided specific advice on working with visually impaired visitors, both for the session and in the museum's main gallery space. This in turn informed planning for the **Disability Rights** session.

Discussions with Rachel Bagshaw from Graeae (a disabled-led theatre company) fed into the development of the **Disability Rights** session. This led to Nickie Wildin, a disabled workshop-leader, working in partnership with IWM staff to develop and deliver the sessions in October 2007.

Collections

The project leaders built on early collections-research to develop concepts included in the project proposal. For **Disability Rights**, photographs of disabled ex-servicemen had been identified in IWM collections related to the 1944 Disabled Persons (Employment) Act. The session directly related this piece of legislation to the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and to investigate to what extent (and how) the act is implemented in everyday life. Working with Graeae Theatre Company helped make this a very active session, as students used the IWM building itself as a way to test access issues. They then moved to Parliament to cement Citizenship learning by considering the legislative process.

The project leaders worked with the relevant IWM collections departments to prepare posters, photographs and film for use within the sessions:

The Department of Art provided high-resolution digital files of posters, including the YMCA poster, "Don't pity a Disabled Man...give him a job".

The Department of Documents allowed documents to be scanned, including Henry Williams' certificate stating that he "Served with honour and was disabled in the Great War", and pages from the Guinea Pig Club magazine. Students in **The War on Nerves** workshop visited the IWM Reading Room to read letters from shellshock victims at Craiglockhart Hospital.

The Photograph Archive provided high-resolution digital files including photographs from Roehampton Hospital showing the rehabilitation of war veterans.

Olivia Hemingway photographed 14 key artefacts from the IWM London education handling collection for the **Welcome Home** session.

Outside the IWM, the project leaders met with non-disabled experts, including Emily Mayhew (author of "The Reconstruction of Warriors") and Bob Marchant (curator at the Queen Victoria Hospital East Grinstead) for advice and related photographs and objects for the **Necessity Breeds Invention** session.

Although several accounts from Guinea Pig Club members exist in the IWM Sound Archive, Jack Toper, a leading Guinea Pig, was contacted as a result of these meetings and gave his permission for his medical records to be used. Using this alternative source material from Queen Victoria Hospital allowed the story of one Guinea Pig to represent the whole group, and in particular gave access to powerful medical photographs of the progress of Jack Toper's reconstructive surgery.

Clara Thomson at The Weston Park Museum in Sheffield and Pete Evans at the Sheffield Archives provided digital files of photographs from the Painted Fabric Limited Company's archive including First World War veterans at work in the factory.

A focus group of teachers was held on 26th April 2007, featuring seven secondary school teachers and two special needs teachers. The main purpose was to present the selected materials for each of the proposed sessions, and establish its relative pedagogical value for the teachers. General issues around teaching disability issues in schools and links to the National Curriculum were also discussed. In particular, this formative feedback influenced shifting the focus of **Disability Rights** to Literacy, including Wilfred Owen's poem 'Disabled', to increase the appeal of that particular session to a broader range of teachers at KS4.

One recommendation from the teachers' focus group was deliberately not adopted by the project leaders: that the photographs of Jack Toper's body between surgeries were too shocking to be used with schoolchildren. The project leaders felt that the entire purpose of their project was to not bury images of impairment and difference in the footnotes of their sessions, but to treat such images with the same consideration as any other relevant piece of historical source material. In the event, the images of Jack Toper were successfully used with appropriate introduction.

Piloting and Delivering the Sessions

In July 2007 pilot delivery of the three main sessions was scheduled with school groups (excluding **The War on Nerves**, which was presented as a one-off). The project funding allowed for both pilot sessions and the teachers' focus group to be incentivised to ensure participation. Following the piloting the project leaders worked with partners to refine the sessions and finalise the printed resources, and the sessions were in robust form ready for their delivery in the Autumn term 2007.

In June 2007 details of the three **Conflict and Disability** sessions were advertised within the IWM London Education programme online. By the end of July 2007 no bookings had been made. From August 2007 the marketing of the sessions was boosted by increased online visibility (including notice of incentives), using known school contacts, and through raising awareness within the IWML booking staff. These renewed efforts resulted in bookings for all the sessions.

The **Conflict and Disability** sessions had to be delivered during a limited time period to avoid adverse impact on the established IWM London programme: the week beginning 29th October and on the 12th and 13th November. Every session planned was booked and there were no cancellations. **Necessity Breeds Invention** and **Disability Rights** were each delivered three times and **Welcome Home** five times. IWM contractors Spectrum Drama supplied the actors in role – a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse and First World War soldier – for **Welcome Home**.

At the end of every session the students and teachers completed evaluation cards. Small but significant adaptations were made to subsequent sessions based on the evaluation cards and reflective discussions.

Timescale

The project effectively began with the first RDR residential in January 2007 and ran through until 31st May 2008 when the grant expired. The sessions were developed during Spring/Summer 2007 and delivered in Autumn 2007. Winter 2007 into early 2008 saw most active dissemination of learning from the project within the IWM.

Issues Learnt from the Project

For the **Conflict and Disability** project leaders and Corporate Education, RDR has heightened awareness of, and confidence in, addressing issues around disability in a museum setting. Working very hard to raise awareness of the project has also fostered a determination to maintain this and extend the work where possible.

The project leaders have relished the opportunity to lead a body of work from start to finish, with sufficient resources to produce high quality resources based on in-depth consultation with stakeholders. The project leaders have benefited from a number of training courses, as well as the practical experience of project management. However, the work pressure on the project leaders has been intense and this has affirmed the need to budget for additional human resources in future projects.

The impact of the first RDR residential was significant, but the sense of involvement in the RDR programme was minimal until the second residential, where it was noted that similar issues had been faced by several participating organisations, despite working on ostensibly different projects.

The national scope and gravitas of this RCMG-led programme, with the practical impetus provided by additional funding has made RDR a significant part of the IWM learning programme in 2008, and beyond.

Legacy

From August 2007 onwards – with the active encouragement of Corporate Education - the project leaders made an especial effort to raise awareness of the **Conflict and Disability** project, within and without the IWM. Meetings with key IWM staff included Director of Public Services, Head of Strategy and Planning, and the Development department. The project leaders met with the **Their Past Your Future** project team who were developing a DVD resource for all UK schools in 2008 to mark the 90th anniversary of the end of the First World War. Collections items relating to disability were consequently included in the resource plan.

The project leaders also presented aspects of their sessions at the Corporate Education 'Sharing Good Practice' day in December 2007, as well as for colleagues at IWM London. In April and May 2008 the leaders of the projects went to three of the four other IWM branches in order to demonstrate the sessions to fellow IWM educators. This is a key element of the plan to create a legacy for **Conflict and Disability** throughout the Museum. The sessions will need to be adapted for local circumstances, but the ideas and resources have been actively shared. The sessions have been confirmed as part of the IWM London education programme for 2008-09, and materials from the project are already being incorporated into other IWM London sessions.

On 31st January 2007 the awareness event **There Is A Story Behind Every Face** was held at IWM London. Museum senior staff (including Director-General Sir Robert Crawford), **Conflict and Disability** partners, funders and consultants were invited, in addition to students and teachers who took part in the sessions. The project leaders spoke about each session, and placed it in the wider context of RDR. Gulf War veteran Allen Parton was the guest speaker along with pupils from Archbishop Tenison's School. This awareness event inspired messages of thanks from several members of the IWM Senior Management Team, and has indirectly helped to secure small additional funds to advance the legacy of **Conflict and Disability** in 2008.

Several contacts have been made with new organisations with a view to extending the work of the project. At the time of writing a possible scheme is being considered with the charity Changing Faces www.changingfaces.org.uk.