

Engaging Rural and Remote Primary Schools through the Snapshots Project

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Show OHP 1 [title slide]

The *Snapshots of Remote Communities* project is one way the National Museum of Australia engages with its school audiences. It is an offsite or outreach program which began in 2003 and has been running each year since that time. It is a simple yet powerful example I believe of how a national museum can work collaboratively with regional museums and galleries in order to engage rural and remote primary schools.

In this presentation I want to explain what it is, how it works and why it is important.

Show OHP 2 [what is Snapshots?]

Snapshots enables students to explore, document and celebrate their own communities and facilitates their engagement with local, regional and national audiences. It is a photography, storytelling and collecting project designed to bring the experience of collecting stories, documenting history and producing an exhibition, into small primary schools in regional and remote Australian communities. Participating students living in these areas are asked to **get out** into their communities, and capture and present a 'snapshot' of their community in - photographs, written work, oral histories and visual arts. Working together with the National Museum and a partner regional museum or gallery, the students' work is then translated into three exhibitions: one within the local school or community; a shared exhibition at regional level and an exhibition on the National Museum of Australia website.

Show OHP 3 [main aims]

The project has a number of key aims and objectives including:

- exploring and depicting the diversity of Australian cultures and identities through

investigating the history and uniqueness of local communities

- sharing and supporting the voices, photographs and stories of young people through exhibitions, and
- building relationships between schools and local museums and the National Museum of Australia.

In addition Snapshots also sets out to:

- communicate the idea to the public that each community is a vital and unique microcosm of Australian culture
- engage with the diversity of people, ways of life and meanings that exist in remote Australian communities, and
- establish a sharing of skills and resources between the National Museum, the regional partner institutions and schools.

Show OHP 4 [history]

As I mentioned, Snapshots began in 2003. Each year a new remote region in Australia is selected and applications are sought from schools in the region. Now in its eighth year, Snapshots has worked with over 100 schools enabling more than 3,000 students in remote Australia to explore their communities and tell their stories.

And now a question...

If we ignore the Australian Capital Territory, what do you notice about the 'reach' of the project by 2010?

Yes, we have completed our first 'round Australia' anniversary, although we have only scratched the surface of remote and regional Australia.

Each of the Snapshots project partners has key roles to play.

Show OHP 5 [national museum role]

The National Museum of Australia's role is to mentor, learn alongside and finally celebrate with students and teachers throughout the project, providing a national forum for their stories and photographs on the museum's website. It is also to financially support the project through, for

example, the provision of the necessary resources such as cameras and recording equipment.

Together with its partner regional museum or gallery it also provides professional development for teachers, and assistance in the process of generating an exhibition from concept development through to media promotion and launch. Each year the Snapshots project supports the production of up to twelve school exhibitions, and a state or regional exhibition of students' work, although in 2010 we are actually doubling this with Western Australia where we're working simultaneously with two remote regions – Kalgoorlie and Albany. This is our most ambitious year and recently the Snapshots project officer visited both regions to help celebrate some of their exhibitions.

The museum also provides a flexible curriculum based unit of work for teachers, with direct links to the relevant state curriculum, to help guide schools through the process, from introduction to exhibition.

Show OHP 6 [partner institution role]

Partner cultural institutions bring local knowledge, networks, skills and enthusiasm and importantly, put together a regional exhibition. Their participation often helps the project to overcome the tyranny of distance and creates connections with communities that is absolutely vital.

While students are excited by the possibilities of contributing their stories to a national cultural institution, for most the conceptual bridge of imagining this contribution is quite abstract. Canberra is far away and they may not get there in the foreseeable future, let alone in the life of the project. So the link to a museum or gallery in their own region, even if still some distance from home, makes the experience much more concrete. Often the partner museum or gallery is already known to students and frequently they can attend the regional exhibition of their work **more than once**, both with family and school. Equally as significant, it is the regional partner who is often best placed to connect with teachers at the

commencement of the project and be the museum 'face', a crucial role in any successful outreach.

Show OHP 7 [some partner institutions]

Here are some of our regional partners over the past eight years, including the Western Australian museum who we are working with in 2010.

Show OHP 8 [remote school role]

The remote primary schools themselves and their participating students are of course the third and most important critical partner in the Snapshots project.

For students the project provides a platform for them to represent and support young peoples' voices at the National Museum of Australia, and to actively shape knowledge and representations of Australian communities. This is the key... by selecting, discussing, photographing, writing about and finally designing and producing a school or community exhibition on aspects of their community, featuring its local characters, home life, natural features or historical landmarks, the students themselves are making meaning of their world and communicating that meaning to others.

For schools the project also has links across the curriculum including social studies, visual arts, media and technology, and civics and citizenship, making it an attractive and doable proposition in the classroom.

Some schools have incorporated Snapshots into a much broader documenting project while others have used the opportunity to forge ongoing social networks with other schools. Many now have productive ongoing partnerships with local museums, galleries and heritage societies.

Show OHP 9 [schools and their communities]

Snapshots can also work in well with existing school or local community initiatives, making it all the more satisfying and achievable. Here are three brief examples...

- Eungella State School, Queensland, recorded oral histories, photographs, and

digital films as part of a 'Step Back in Time' event

- Kondinin Primary School, Western Australia, displayed their exhibition in conjunction with the town celebrating its Centenary in 2010, and
- Tambellup Primary School, Western Australia, expanded their 2009 oral history project 'Stories of the People of Tambellup'.

Show OHP 10 [outcomes: school exhibition]

The students' school or local community exhibition is the first of the three tangible outcomes for schools.

In the exhibition development process students become curators, exhibition designers, publicity officers, marketing and sponsorship officers and public programs staff.

The exhibitions are thoughtful and inspiring celebrations of the students' work and the communities they come from. They are well attended by families and community members making them a very rewarding and satisfying moment in the project's life.

Let's take a look at some school exhibitions...

Show OHP 11 [Bloomsbury State School]

This exhibition was entitled, 'My Bloomsbury'. It was held in the memorial hall at Bloomsbury so that members of the community could easily come and view it. And I particularly like this enterprising aspect of the exhibition: some of artworks on display were even able to be purchased!

Show OHP 12 [Queenscliffe]

Queenscliff is a small school located on the Bellarine Peninsula which has embraced the *Reggio Emilia* philosophy of teaching over the past two years. This philosophy of student directed learning was an ideal support for the Snapshots project and students' investigations. Queenscliff's exhibition was on display in a local art gallery and the evening opening was a large community event.

Students combined photographs, two and three dimensional visual arts, digital media and objects to showcase their perspective on the Queenscliff community. Approximately 60 people attended the exhibition launch.

Show OHP 13 [Alice Springs]

Here's the National Museum's education blog account of this third example of a schools exhibition launch from an excited National Museum of Australia Snapshots project officer.

"Having travelled to Adelaide River the previous day to enable an early start on Tuesday, we travelled first to the Douglas Daly Research farm and School, which is approximately 4 hours south west of Darwin by road. We spent the morning with the students of the 5/6/7 class who participated in the project and were shown some of the work the students had done towards their exhibition. The Adelaide River School exhibition will be displayed at the Adelaide River Show in July and afterwards will move to the local Railway Heritage Museum.

Kate and I travelled a further two hours out to Douglas Daly School, situated on Douglas Daly Research Station and with an enrolment of five students. Parents and community members were invited to a multimedia presentation where the students explained what they had learned about the community's history, places and agricultural industries before viewing the photos."

Show OHP 14 [outcomes: regional museum exhibition]

The second of the three tangible outcomes for schools is the collaborative, regional exhibition hosted by the partner cultural institution which showcases the Snapshots project. In some cases students contribute to the design of this exhibition.

This combined schools display provides an opportunity for a wider audience to experience and engage with the students' voices.

From the partner institutions point of view, the regional exhibition allows them to interact with

students and schools in their communities in a creative and productive way and often this leads to strong ongoing relationships. For example, in 2007 following the completion of the Snapshots project, Geelong Gallery continued to work with schools through digital storytelling workshops for students and professional development for teachers.

Let's take a quick look at some regional exhibitions...

Show OHP 15 [Artspace Mackay, Queensland]

Show OHP 16 [Geelong Gallery]

Show OHP 17 [Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory]

Show OHP 18 [outcome: snapshots website]

The final tangible outcome is the placement of 40 photographs from each participating school on the National Museum of Australia's Snapshots website. These photographs are chosen by the students themselves and each is also annotated and captioned. In this way each school is contributing to a nationwide remote schools digital repository. One immediate benefit of the website is that students can compare their community life with others involved in the project.

Schools enjoy seeing each other's photographic exhibitions. On a visit to Northern Territory Snapshotters in 2005 the museum's Snapshots project officer witnessed students clustered excitedly around the school computer desks checking out not *their* web exhibition but images from Tasmanian Snapshots schools which were also involved in the project that year.

Show OHP 19 [website image]

Please visit the website to see what they were excited about.

I want to finish the Snapshots project presentation with a couple of reflections and a few student Snapshots photographs.

Show OHP 20 [teacher's reflection]

Michael Cacciola, a teacher from Oakenden State School in Queensland wrote as part of his evaluation of the project:

"I thoroughly enjoyed the program - it was a challenge for me but I learnt a lot and enjoyed it. The students got a lot out of it and really enjoyed things; it reinforced their knowledge of the local community."

Show OHP 21 [student's reflection]

And Chelsea, aged 11, a Year 6 student from Tasmania summed up her personal experience this way:

"We learned that we have so many beautiful things in our community that we didn't know about before...cities forget about the little places and think we just don't matter but this [exhibition] shows we're just as important as them."

Show OHP 22 [Ned and Ida]

This is Ned and Ida having a lunch break from droving in Marra Creek in New South Wales.

Show OHP 23 [Linda, Tannisha...]

Here are Linda, Tannisha, Cheyenne and Ellie waiting for the weekly mail plane in Laramba in the Northern Territory.

And finally...

Show OHP 24 [Baker's Creek]

This photograph was taken by students from Dundula State School in Queensland. They had apparently been standing for hours in nearby Baker's Creek waiting for a train to pass by so that they could take their photograph. Apparently Baker's Creek is often inhabited by crocodiles. Fortunately to this point there have been no deaths caused by the Snapshots project.