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“ Engaging with the public helps me understand questions of change and continuity. ”

Research

Leah’s research draws on archival diaries, correspondence and spiritual meditations, often called ‘life-writing’. This documentation shows the ways in which the individuals revised and reconstituted experience over their life-cycle and the centrality of bodily health as an indicator of emotional wellbeing.

Target Group

Local community groups and primary schools.

Reasons to Engage

Through her research, Leah explores early modern and contemporary acts of recording and evaluating the self through writing. Through engaging, the public thinks critically about the meanings of health, family, the emotions, life-cycle changes and practices of documenting one’s life.

Public Engagement Project

A series of community workshops.

Project Objectives

- Examine practices of writing about the self and interpreting life events
- Reflect on how the act of writing transforms and shapes the ways in which we think of the self

Planning and Process

Leah initially targeted local community groups. Due to poor response and scheduling she shifted her engagement focus towards young audiences.

Leah organised two workshops with local primary school pupils and one as a part of the Cambridge Science Festival.

In each of them she spoke briefly about early modern diary writing before asking participants to make their own diaries.

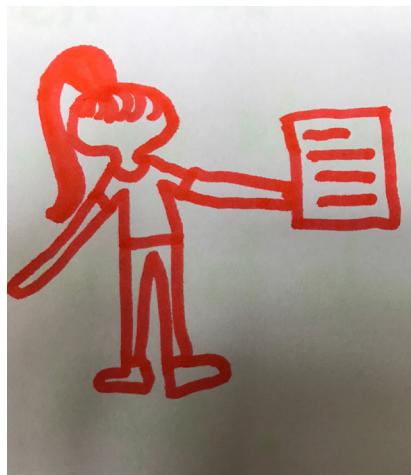
Participants were provoked to reflect on their own lives and how they constructed narratives about them. They also learnt about the early modern culture of writing diaries and the ways of expressing themselves via a written form.

The evaluation showed that younger audiences are more willing to engage in practical exercises and make worth reflections on the act of recording the self.

“ *Sharing of diaries meant that I reflected on the ways in which my own narratives shape the way I perceive my sources.* ”

Key advice

“Be flexible with the structure of your public engagement activities. You cannot predict the range of age or backgrounds of attendees at public workshops - as a result sometimes you might have to throw the script out and improvise! This in many ways improves public engagement practice because it ensures your project is interactive and responsive!”



One of the primary school workshops' feedback cards in which one could write favourite bit or draw a picture.

Outcomes

For Leah

- Learnt how to communicate research to non-academia audiences
- Achieved feedback on contrasting contemporary and early modern conceptions on the life-cycle
- Cemented links with local primary schools for future work
- Managed a series of independent public engagement projects and learnt how to evaluate them

For target group

- Learnt how to think critically about the meanings of health, family, the emotions, life-cycle changes and practices of documenting life
- Continued recording life-cycles to reflect on past actions