



PROGRAM EVALUATION
— EXECUTIVE SUMMARY —

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BEYOND CLASSROOMS KINGSTON: PROGRAM EVALUATION

Executive Summary

Beyond Classrooms Kingston began in 2014 as an initiative of the Kingston Association of Museums, Art Galleries, and Historic Sites (KAM). Drawing on Calgary's award-winning Open Minds concept, Beyond Classrooms Kingston was developed to bring teachers and students into community heritage contexts. The aim of Beyond Classrooms Kingston is to leverage Kingston and area heritage organizations, sites, and professionals to support student inquiry and learning. The Beyond Classrooms Kingston program moves teachers and their classrooms into local museums, art galleries, and community sites for an entire week of learning. The site becomes an extension of the teacher's classroom, where students can enhance their learning skills in critical thinking, literacy, inquiry, and problem solving while focusing on a subject or theme.

Evaluation Focus & Method

In 2016, Beyond Classrooms Kingston received a Grow Grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to continue its work within schools and community contexts. As part of this grant, Beyond Classrooms Kingston began to explore the impact of its programming on students and teachers. To this end, in collaboration with external evaluators, Beyond Classrooms Kingston has systematically evaluated the development, outcomes, and sustainability of their program.

The 2016-17 evaluation of the Beyond Classrooms Kingston program focused on the following three broad categories, each with associated central questions:

1. Development and Growth of Beyond Classrooms Kingston

Central Question: How has Beyond Classrooms Kingston grown and developed over the past three years?

2. Impact of Beyond Classrooms Kingston

Central Questions: What is the current impact of Beyond Classrooms Kingston on program users including students, teachers, and host sites? Does an expanded Beyond Classrooms Kingston program continue to meet the needs of participating students, teachers, and host sites?

3. Sustainability of Beyond Classrooms Kingston

Central Question: What is the realistic, sustainable growth potential for Beyond Classrooms Kingston?

Multiple methods were used to collect evaluation data on the Beyond Classrooms Kingston (BCK) program. These methods included in-depth interviews with 7 program administrators, 7 host site facilitators, and all 14 participating teachers. In addition, 244 out of 335 students who participated in the BCK program during the 2016-17 completed post-program surveys about their experiences.

Key Findings

Development and Growth of Beyond Classrooms Kingston

- The BCK program has engaged in a series of infrastructure development activities to formalize the program and establish its foundation for future development and sustainability. Most notably, since its inception in 2012, BCK has formalized its governance board and has successfully secured external funding via a Grow Grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. This funding has enabled the hiring of a full-time program coordinator who has been a valuable asset in supporting teachers and host site facilitators in planning and implementing week-long site visits. Importantly, being a certified teacher, the BCK Coordinator was able to offer on-site guidance to facilitate and deepen student learning as well as provide participating teachers with professional development opportunities to help operationalize the inquiry-based BCK pedagogical philosophy.
- The program infrastructure has enabled the program to develop in ways that differentiate it from other similar programs throughout Canada. Specifically, the BCK program has established a distinct inquiry-based approach to learning at host sites. Not only does this pedagogical approach align with contemporary educational mandates but it also enables a student-driven learning environment

that leads to rich interdisciplinary learning. The results of this approach include greater student engagement and greater connections to multiple curricular learning expectations across subject areas. In addition, the BCK program maintains a core practice of journaling, which not only supports students' development of literacy skills but also provides a critical opportunity for reflection on learning and enhanced metacognitive engagement. Furthermore, while the BCK program originated with a focus on history, it has over the past three years expanded its community partners to facilitate a greater breadth of experiences for students and teachers.

- The growth and development of the BCK program has encountered three key challenges as expressed by program administrators, host site facilitators, and teachers. First, the current BCK program model maintains a high reliance on a paid program coordinator to organize and facilitate classroom visits to host sites. Without a sustained funding source for the BCK program (i.e., 5-year funding plan) to support a full-time coordinator, the stability of this model is problematic and would require adjustment to ensure program goals are maintained. Second, teachers new to the BCK program appear to require greater support than second year teachers. In particular, some teachers are less comfortable with the inquiry-based pedagogical approach and need additional professional development and planning time to ensure successful site visits. Third, the financial forecast of the BCK program remains a dominant challenge as a steady funding source is not in place nor is there a dedicated fundraising committee.

Impact of Beyond Classrooms Kingston

It is evident from the evaluation data that the BCK program has had a highly positive impact on all three program stakeholder groups – students, teachers, and host site facilitators. In particular, the impacts of the BCK program are summarized in the following three key findings:

1. Learning for All: Engaging All Stakeholders in Inquiry-Based Learning

Students consistently reported that participating in the BCK program facilitated high levels of learning about the Kingston community and Canada more broadly. The focus of students' inquiry questions centered on history, culture, governance, heritage, and the arts, and resulted in meaningful interdisciplinary learning. Journaling was a key strategy that supported many students' learning.

Journaling was specifically linked to increased literacy practices, slowing down learning to appreciate details and enhance critical thinking, and engaging in reflections on learning. From several teachers' perspectives, the inquiry-based approach, coupled with the journaling, appeared to engage students who did not typically engage in traditional classroom settings.

Teachers consistently reported the value of the BCK program on their pedagogical development by providing a first-hand and well-supported experience of inquiry-based teaching and learning. This perspective has given teachers the confidence to continue inquiry-based pedagogy in their own classrooms. Another powerful learning for teachers was the degree of interdisciplinary learning that occurred through inquiry-based BCK site visits. Several teachers recognized that within their one week site visits students were exposed to nearly every subject.

Host Site Facilitators reported several positive gains by participating in the BCK program. First, the BCK program encouraged them to think differently about how they might engage students in the future through their educational programming around inquiry learning principles. Second, many host site facilitators discussed that the program provoked new perspectives on how to arrange and display exhibits to maximize learning, engagement, and use. Third, host site facilitators began to recognize the importance of connecting their site explicitly with Ontario curriculum expectations to increase the relevance of their site for other educational groups and establish their sites as active learning places.

2. Empowering Ownership of Local Culture

Sustained time and interaction at local heritage and cultural sites provoked a greater appreciation for Kingston and its history. Over time and through journaling tasks, students became more reflective of the significance of historical, cultural, and physical spaces in our community. Moreover, throughout their weeks, teachers observed greater student ownership of the local culture, which was further evidenced through students returning to host sites on their own and with their families after their school visit. In addition, some class inquiries transformed into service-learning, in which students contributed meaningfully to the development and enhancement of the community, suggesting that students were empowered to facilitate change within their local community.

3. Building New Educational Partnerships

Through participation in the BCK program, teachers and host site facilitators recognized the value of building new educational partnerships. In particular, several teachers commented on now knowing experts they could contact when teaching historical and cultural topics. In addition, through collaboration with the BCK program Coordinator, host site facilitators became aware of expert guests that could enhance programming offered within their sites.

Sustainability of Beyond Classrooms Kingston

There is a need to respond to key challenges articulated by stakeholders in order to ensure a sustainable future for the BCK program. Accordingly, three key considerations are presented:

- ➡ Key Consideration 1: Examine Coordinator and Teacher Roles within the BCK Program to Maximize Support for Teachers, Sites, and the Program

- ➡ Key Consideration 2: Evaluate Funding Models for the Program

- ➡ Key Consideration 3: Scale of the Program – Explore options for growing the program into new contexts, grade levels, and educational programs