

# **Museum Pedagogy and Early Years Children**

*A critique of research, policy and practice*

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# Introduction

This work offers a critical perspective to museum pedagogy for young children by drawing upon current practices in museums, galleries and heritage sites in the UK and research that is conducted internationally. It provides a critical synthesis of research and practice in the field of museum provision for early years children to argue that this is an underexplored area that would benefit from further theorising and empirical research that places at its centre critical perspectives on children's voices, perspectives and direct experiencing of museums, galleries and heritage. The discussion covers the age spectrum of 0 to 8 to include the early years (0-3), the preschool stage (3-4 years), the foundation year, the first two years in Key Stage 1 (5-7 years) and the first year in Key Stage 2 (8 years) according to the educational system in England. The terms 'early childhood', 'early years' and 'young children' are used interchangeably<sup>1</sup> to refer to the years 0 to 8. The discussion unfolds in two parts.

The first part presents a historical review of museum education to show how we moved from the birth of museum education to creativity and cultural education. It offers a critical perspective to cultural policy initiatives, consultations and reviews to explain how the field of museum education evolved in its current state and status in the UK. The discussion of policies follows a chronological order to place the policymaking within the political context it was created.

The second part traces the status of the museums' educational offer for early years children by drawing upon 32 contemporary case studies that are considered to be exemplars, leading the field of museum education for young children. The discussion is briefly contextualised with references to the international context of

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<sup>1</sup> References to museums also include galleries and heritage sites.

museum practice and research for early years in the contexts of provision for formal education and museum family learning. A literature research review follows to respond to the need to examine what we already know about children's museum experiences along with the need to trace appropriate research approaches to further investigate children's learning in museums (Andre, Durksen and Volman 2017; Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri 2000).

The overall aim of my review is to provide an insight into what is known internationally about young children's museum experiences. In particular, I aim to identify what has been studied in terms of young children's museum experiences, how these experiences have been researched and what these studies can suggest for further developments in the area of museum pedagogy for young children. The literature search of past research studies was performed via databases searches for peer-reviewed papers published over the last three decades. Search criteria were set to include sources that a) were written in English, b) published between 1990 and 2020, c) focused on early childhood experiences in museum, gallery and heritage settings. In a few cases, it was considered appropriate to include material from books to further contextualise the empirical research published in the journals. The search was conducted by using the Open University in the UK search engines that cover 541 database resources including key electronic databases in humanities and arts such as JSTOR, ERIC and EBSCO. The analysis of the reviewed papers identified five strands of research that position children as family members, human becomings, meaning-makers, competent agents and as museum visitors in a relational embodied materiality.

The theoretical rationale of the review is informed by the 'new sociology of childhood' that de-objectified children as fixed sociological categories and

acknowledged their ontological status in 'here and now' rather than as 'adults-in-the-making' (Wyness 2006). It positioned children as active agents who are experts of their own lives in a range of social and cultural contexts, contrary to the dominant paradigm that viewed children as vulnerable and voiceless participants in social life. This paradigm shift affected empirical research in social sciences and education by reshaping all stages of the enquiry when children are involved in research. In line with international legal and ethical developments on children's rights (i.e. The European Convention of Human Rights, the Children's Act 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989) it shifted the research focus on children's experiences positioning children as social actors in the research process. Children have the right to make decisions for their lives and to be included as equal partners in all aspects of social life including research. Elaborated research ethics guidelines<sup>2</sup> were established to inform the researcher's decision making about a series of ethical issues that may arise when children are involved in research and to point out the significance of children's status in the research process. Consideration was given to theories of power to re-examine how power may interplay when research is conducted with children. The transition from viewing children as competent actors had a real impact on research methodologies that strived to be more inclusive acknowledging the children's role in the interpretation of research data and the dissemination of research findings.

Within the field of museum studies, the emergence of the new sociology of childhood coincided with the paradigm of the 'new museology' (Vergo 1997) and the visitor studies shift from positivist quantitative research to qualitative perspectives. Museums were prompted to re-examine their purpose, practices and relationship with

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<sup>2</sup> Indicatively I will mention here the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) and (2018).



their visitors. Several publications such as George Hein's 'Learning in the Museum' (1998) and John Falk and Lynn Dierking's (2011) 'The museum experience' sowed the seeds for research that view visitors as active meaning makers. In the same period, a series of publications in museum studies introduced the importance of learning theories in the museum field to offer insights into the multiple aspects of the museum experience. A strand of museum studies research can be identified that is based on cognitive and/or socio-constructivist theories of learning focused on visitors' meaning-making (Andre *et al.* 2016; Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018). Evaluations on a national scale in the UK (Hooper-Greenhill 2007) and research with school children and youth focused on its majority on the cognitive and social aspects of the museum experience. In particular, within the context of formal education, there is a wealth of case study research<sup>3</sup> that explores the relevance of museums, galleries and heritage for children's curriculum learning. Museum outreach programmes in schools (West 2013), the teacher's role in museum field trips (Kisiel 2014; Kisiel 2006), virtual museum learning experiences (Barneche *et al.* 2015) are some of the key themes in research that examine the learning potential from strengthening the links between museums and schools. Recently a new thread of research moved beyond the paradigm of social constructivism to examine children's meaning-making within exhibition spaces (Yun 2018) and the role of the body and movement in the museum experience (Hackett *et al.* 2018a; Hackett *et al.* 2018b; Hackett *et al.* 2020; MacRea *et al.* 2018; Mulcahy 2019).

The field of research that focused on young children's museum experiences is not significantly developed. Some international studies explored young children's

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<sup>3</sup> A sample of referenced sources is only mentioned in this introduction as indicative of the published material.

experiences in museums, galleries and heritage sites acting as hallmarks in practice and research in early childhood in museums. One of the earliest doctoral thesis on early years childhood and museums explored young children's perceptions about museums as ecological settings offering a holistic view on dynamic transitions between individuals and their environment (Zapri 2007). The thesis was the first one to offer a perspective in the Greek context of family visitation and early years childhood and to approach museum pedagogy from a development holistic perspective. Within the socio-cultural perspective young children's experiences in museums were mainly researched in the context of museum family learning. Young children were viewed as learners interacting with the family members and the setting within the scope of making meaning of the museum's intended communication and narratives (Deorgardi 2019). Empirical doctoral research has also emphasised the role of movement in children's museum experiences when visiting with their families (Hackett 2014a; Kirk 2014) contributing to a new research focus on the role of movement and embodiment in museum visitation (Hackett *et al.* 2020; Hackett *et al.* 2018b; MacRae *et al.* 2018; Yamada-Rice 2018).

The second part of this work presents the identified strands from the review of research papers on early childhood in museums with selected references to research studies.

The discussion is concluded by briefly examining the implications of the review findings on museum pedagogy and young children's positioning in museum practice and research. Current considerations about the future of childhood studies are taken into account to argue about the mutual benefits that a synergy between museum pedagogy and childhood studies would yield.

# 1. Museum Education in the UK

Over the past decade, we notice that the term 'museum education' is replaced in academic publications and museum professional circles with references to 'museum learning' and 'audience engagement' while in policy making and governmental documentation any references to museum learning or education are submerged by 'cultural education'. This profound change is not only a matter of terminology. The field of museum education is changing to reflect governmental priorities in the cultural sector, the low status and lack of theorisation of learning in museums, the absence of museum pedagogy from the curricula of Teacher Education Institutions within the UK and potentially the lack of grounding of museum pedagogy as a distinctive interdisciplinary field. The discussion that follows attempts to illustrate the shift from museum to cultural education by drawing upon the origins of the field in the UK and showing how this evolved in the professional terrain via a series of policy making decisions.

## 1.1. The birth of museum education

The origin of museum education in North America and Europe is contested. Authors such as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1991) claim that it can be traced back to the eighteenth-century conceptualisation of museums as spaces that offer public access to works of art. George E. Hein in his works on the progressive nature of museum education argues that the ideal of democratic museum education is firstly seen in the newly founded United States (Hein 2015; Hein 2012). The Journal of Museum Education, in a virtual issue on the history of museum education with a compilation of articles published in JEM over the period (1973-2014) entitled as 'power play: How

educators articulate their role in the museums' published papers that locate the origins of museum education as a field differently in time and geography. For example, according to George E. Hein, the seeds of museum education are found in John Cotton Dana's innovative approaches to outreach and communities at the Newark Museum in New Jersey while other authors place the origin of museum education in the mid-twentieth century to the shift of the museum from a 'Temple of Art to what the Germans call a Lernort, a place of learning' (Prottas 2019:337). Nora Sternfeld (2018) locates the origins of museum education to the French Revolution and the opening of the Louvre in Paris in 1793 to offer access to the public of what once constituted private collections (cited in Prottas 2019). Nonetheless, there are claims that the Belvedere in Vienna is the originator of museum education. Founded almost a decade earlier to Louvre in 178, it initiated educational approaches for its public by offering its art collections for learning with guides and brief texts to be accessed during the visit (Prottas 2019). One can easily conclude from the aforementioned that there is not a unanimous agreement about the birth of museum education as a concept. Indeed, historically the shift from the private sphere to the public to offer access to collections and to educate the masses could be traced as the turning point where museum education originates. However, questions can be posed about the democratic nature of this turning point and how it evolved in time to shape what is known as museum education.

To further understand the controversy of considering the accessibility of collections to the public as the beginning of the museum education, it is worth looking at the origins of the museum and how education was posed as a form of power within the contexts of nationalism, colonialism and the early roots of the public museum.

The journey begins in the 16th century with the creation of private collections known in the English-speaking world as 'cabinets of curiosity' that are composed of rare objects from the natural world, antiquities and art collected by wealthy upper-class travellers, merchants and rulers. In the 19th century via a series of legislative reforms<sup>4</sup> and with the formation of nation-states, these private collections formed the grounding for the first public museums in Europe via which nations expressed their yearning for a legitimate past with cultural memory<sup>5</sup>. At the initial stages, the newly founded museums were semi-private institutions open for the ruling and professional classes. Soon they became 'fundamental institutions of the modern state' (Bazin 1967:169) that opened to the wider public to educate the masses and to deeper establish the notion of the state what was increasingly evolving into 'a nation-state' (cited in Bennett 1995:76). To illustrate how the opening of the private collections to the public informed the foundation of national museums I will mention here how Sir Hans Sloane's (1660-1753) collections were associated with the foundation of the British Museum. Sloane was a personal physician to the governor Duke of Albermarle at the West Indies fleet at Jamaica who in 1687 spent fifteen months collecting and cataloguing plants, animals and cultural artefacts of native and enslaved populations of Jamaica. When he returned to England, he attempted to bring back his collections and records which later, with income derived from enslaved sugar plantations, he enriched through purchases of ethnological objects from around the world. Sloan's collection consisting of at least 80.000 natural history specimens, 23.000 coins, 50.000 books, 15.000 drawings and watercolours, 50.000 individual prints in addition to artefacts and antiquities were bequeathed to King George II for the nation in return for

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<sup>4</sup> See Minihan (1977), Pearson (1982)

<sup>5</sup> For a comparative history of how the foundation of the museum is grounded in ideological purposes for the formation of nation-states please see Aronsson and Elgenius 2011.

a payment to form the foundation<sup>6</sup> of the British Museum (Frost 2019; Sloan 2015). Thus, the British Museum founded in 1753 and opened its door to the public in 1759 was directly associated with the British colonial past. A new building was erected in the Greek Revival style of architecture that was completed in 1852 with sculptures in its entrance to reflect the "'progress of civilization' as conceived by Victorians at a time when the British confidence and global power through imperial expansion was growing" (The Trustees of the British Museum 2020).

It should be stated here that with the turning of museums from the private to the public realm several changes occurred in an epistemic level that continued to take place until the end of the 19th century. The focus on objects of rarity and of exotic nature that could provoke awe and wonder that was dominant in the cabinets of curiosities shifted to ordinary objects of representational nature. This shift in emphasis was in line with the new principles of scientific rationality and led to museum displays of classifications and taxonomies. The classificatory arrangement of exhibits with representative value was also associated with the belief that 'the principles of intelligibility governing the collections' would be readily available to all in contrast to the 'secretive and cultic knowledge offered by the cabinet of curiosity' (Bennett 1995:41). A dimension of didacticism towards the visitors was becoming apparent. Visitors were meant to be inducted into rational thinking and through the rhetoric of displays and the social performance that the latest invited visitors to perform to improve themselves as citizens.

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<sup>6</sup> Following the foundation of the British museum parts of the collection moved to other national institutions associated with the British museum such as the British Library, the Natural history Museum and the National Gallery (See Sloan 2015).

Public museums were the spaces in which the lower and middle classes could come together. They offered opportunities and resources for the lower social classes to acquire civilised habits via imitation. Public museums were spaces for the moral and cultural regulation of the lower social classes (Bennett 1995:47&73).

Thus, although modern museums were conceived as public museums that were going to make their collections accessible to all members of society, their actual role as public institutions open to everyone is debatable. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1989:63) argues that the birth of the museum as a public institution reshaped the old forms of control into what appeared to be 'a utilitarian instrument for democratic education'. Following the French revolution, the Royal and aristocratic collections were appropriated in the name of the public and the museum transformed from a symbol of power to an instrument of education for the benefit of its citizens.

The museum's contradictory<sup>7</sup> function as an apparatus of the state that exercises forms of control whilst educating the citizens is evident in the way knowledge is produced and consumed within the museum space. The public remains the passive receiver of knowledge while the division between the public and private realm that dominated the earlier conceptions of museums still remains prevalent under the guise of the public museum (Hooper-Greenhill 1992).

Carol Duncan (1995) examines how the newly founded European and North American museums were constructed as 'public art museums' to serve the ideological needs of the nation-states. National galleries and museums were built to resemble architecturally Greek or Roman sacred temples and Renaissance palaces that invited visitors when entering to enact a new kind of civic ritual: they perform a visit in a

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<sup>7</sup> To this well-defined contradiction is added the Foucauldian exploration of the role of the museum as an ideological instrument of the disciplinary society (see Bennett 1995 and Hooper-Greenhill 1988).

ritualistic manner to embrace secular values as ideal citizens. This expectation was in line with the challenge of the religious doctrine and the celebration of rationale values that characterised the post-Enlightenment period. By the late eighteenth century, when rational and verifiable truth has the status of objective knowledge, art museums with their focus on scientific principles (e.g. rationalism, taxonomy, classification) belonged to the realm of secular knowledge and also acted as creators of cultural memory. Museums are 'settings for rituals' (Duncan 1995:10) which we are called to perform for contemplation and learning. We enter museum spaces suspending our everyday social behaviour to enact what is expected to experience liminality beyond the mundane. Her view challenges the dichotomy between the aesthetic and the educational museum to claim that museums either viewed as educational or aesthetic they still serve the same ideological function. They are simultaneous 'producers' and 'products' of ideology acting as symbolic cultural objects as well as social, political, and ideological instruments (Duncan 1995:5). And it is this complexity that examines the ritualistic behaviour in the museum interesting as a form of control:

'To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community. Those who are best prepared to perform its ritual – those who are most able to respond to its various cues- are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial e.t.c.) the museum ritual most fully confirms. It is precisely for this reason that museums and museum practices can become objects of fierce struggle and impassionate debate. What we see and do not see in art museums- and on what terms and by whose authority we do or do not see it is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community and who defines its identity' (Duncan 1995:8-9).



Duncan's critique although focused on the art museum is relevant to any type of museum and gallery that shares the characteristics of the public museum. It poses questions about the visible and invisible function of the museum as a space that invites rituals that we perform to enact and affirm our social identities. Those who perform the rituals are the ones who find their identity represented while the affirmation of identities through the production of dominant narratives and ritualistic practices becomes an exclusionary process. Museums have the power to define and reproduce community identities. In that sense, the public museum no matter how much accessibility it offers to the public remains a static space that reinforces dominant ideologies.

The seeds of education found in the origin of museums as public institutions which operate within a context of power are mainly in service of the dominant ideologies. Questions can be posed about the role that education has played to challenge these narratives to open the museum experience and to affect how museums are defined as institutions. Perhaps the origins of museum education can be traced to its development as a profession that gradually changed from the periphery to the core of the museum practice. The discussion that follows will focus on the development of museum education in the UK as this may be affected by developments in North America and in particular, will attempt to trace the shift from museum education to museum learning.

## **1.2 The turning point in museum education: from provision to integral practice?**

The development of educational provision in museums in Britain is located in the 20th century and has been reported<sup>8</sup> as slow with a gradually increase after the mid of the century. In the early 1900s, the first school officers were appointed. The number of educational services museums was offering increased from fifteen in the 1930s to

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<sup>8</sup> Hooper-Greenhill (1994; 2007).

forty-eight in 1967. In 1983 museums in the UK were counting three hundred sixty-two specialist posts in educational services. By the early 1990s museums were asking questions about the limited educational provision in museums. In 1992 museum education staff was only 1.8 per cent of museum staff in national museums contrary to the Museums Association Annual Report (1992-03) 'Responding to change: museum education at the crossroads' that placed museum education at the heart of the role of the museum (Hopper-Greenhill 2007:6). Anderson's commissioned report to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, first published in 1997 and then in 1999, was the first comprehensive review of the educational provision of museums in the UK that also made recommendations for improvement. The report highlighted the value of museums and galleries as a cultural creative industry with a crucial role to play as 'public learning centres in fostering the creative skills of children and adults, who are the makers and consumers of the present and the future' (Anderson 1999:2). It traced the development of museum education as rudimentary with only one in five museums having an education specialist on their staff. The report proposed targets for the development of museums as national public educational institutions that hold unique social value with their resources and potential through education to enrich people's lives. Education was viewed as integral to the nature of museums:

'Museums are educational institutions in their own right and not because of any services they may provide to other educational institutions. Education is intrinsic to the nature of museums. Their educational mission drives every activity; it is an integral part of the work of all staff and an element in the experience of every museum user. Unless museums make provision for education purposefully and with commitment, they are not truly museums' (Anderson 1999:8-9).

The Labour government came to power in 1997. Anderson's report demonstrated the beginning of a commitment to boost the educational work of museums. Free admission to national museums, national government funding poured directly to regional museums for the first time and new governmental and regional bodies<sup>9</sup> were formed in some cases to replace previous organisations that were deemed to be not strategic enough. Museum professionals witnessing this reform placed high expectations in the new governmental initiatives<sup>10</sup>. The educational provision in museums increased as this was documented in a report produced by the Museums, Libraries and Archives in 2006. The report showed that education posts in England increased to 1,171 in comparison to 755 education officers (in 375 museum services) that Anderson identified in his report in 1997. Perhaps, what is most significant here is the increased percentage (87%) of curatorial staff that contributed to educational activities indirectly suggesting that museum education is seen as more central to the roles and practices of museum professionals, perhaps opening the confined boundaries of education as a separate area for specialists. This may also be evident in Hooper-Greenhill's reflection (1999) on the emerging shift that was noticed in the professional role of museum education. Hooper- Greenhill (1999) comments that by the end of the 20th-century museum education professionals managed to establish their status as professionals within the museum field and to offer educational insights in exhibition design and work that extends the boundaries of the 'educational room'. Museums doubled the number of education posts that existed in the early 80s

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<sup>9</sup> In 2000 the Museums and Galleries Commission was replaced by Resource which later became the Museums, Libraries and Archives. In 1997 the Department for National Heritage was dissolved and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) was founded (See Heal 2007).

<sup>10</sup> However, as time was progressing voices of disapproval were expressed commenting upon the slow process to articulate a national strategy for museums and criticising the government for micromanaging museums imposing a box-ticking instrumental agenda in all museum practices (See Heal 2007).

(Hooper-Greenhill 2004:429) with museum education evolving into a field that was called to address more radical questions about the role of museums as socio-cultural institutions:

'In the last thirty years, museum education professionals have focused on developing appropriate teaching methods for both face-to-face teaching (workshops, talks, drama) and distance learning methods (teacher's packs, loan boxes, and kits), and on establishing a professional profile within the museum organization. Both of these ambitions have largely been achieved, with the result that the educational role of the museum has expanded and is now accepted as covering exhibitions and other aspects of public provision such as events and publications. The arena for educational work is no longer the 'education room', but the whole museum. With this shift to a broader scope for 'museum education, comes a necessity to accept a broader social responsibility. Museum educators, whether they are museum teachers, curators, volunteers, or paid staff, must now acknowledge the cultural world beyond the museum classroom. The educational role of the museum has become part of cultural politics' (Hooper-Greenhill 1999:4).

This may be viewed as an optimistic perspective of the role of museum education if not seen within a pragmatic context. Whereas museum education was expanding its conceptual boundaries and role, the educational function of museums remained fragmentary on a national level. Many museums and galleries were lacking staff that specialised in museum education with education being regarded of lower status to curatorial aspects of museum work (Resource 2001, Hooper-Greenhill 2004).

A similar path in terms of the progression of museum education from educational provision to potentially being an integral aspect of museum practices is also traced in the US museums which in contrast to the UK demonstrated an earlier and longer

tradition in researching museum learning (Hooper-Greenhill and Mousouri 2002). Munley and Roberts (2006) reflect on how the role of the museum educator evolved for over two decades from a position that was focused on the design and delivery of educational programs to education being the driving force of the institution. From the mid-1970s educators were at the forefront to respond to the audience-centred focus of museums. The origins of museum education in the US may be rooted in the American museum movement with thinkers like John Cotton Dana in the early 1900s and Theodore Low in the mid -1900s. The turning point to firmly establish museum education was the American Association of Museums (AAM) report (1984) 'Museums for a New Century Commission Report' and later in 1990 the publication of the 'Statement on Professional Standards for Museum Education' by the AAM's Standing Professional Committee on Education. The latest diverted the attention from specific educational programmes in museums to education being seen as a museum-wide endeavour:

'Museum education strengthens that encounter by building bridges between visitors' experiences and expectations and the experiences and ideas that emanate from a museum's collection. To fulfil the educational mandate of their institutions, museum professionals must work together [...] This statement of standards is intended to encourage museum professionals to strive for excellence as they carry out these important responsibilities. These standards provide reminders of the variety of public service obligations that all members of the museum profession assume, benchmarks against which the educational responsibilities of museums can be measured [...]' (Professional Standards for Museum Educators 1989:11).

This whole-museum approach was later fortified by the AAM policy 'Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums' (1992) and was adopted by granting agencies<sup>11</sup>. Emphasis was placed on the development of programmes of inclusion and public engagement with grants given for that purpose. In return, museums had to justify the grant awards by assessing their interaction with their audiences and evidencing how they made their collections accessible. As a response to the need of accountability for public funds, museums embraced business models and performative targets. Financial standards of success drove the planning of museum programs aiming to attract larger audiences. The pressure was placed on the creation of activities that generate income for the museum and increase the number of audiences. Museum education was losing what it had achieved after the 1970s (Munley and Roberts 2006). As the AAM's Committee on Education was revising the professional standards that were made publicly available in 1990 and considered the changes that museums faced over the following few years commented that 'the museum educator's role has been shifted, revised, reformed, and stretched in unimaginable ways' (AAM 2005:2). To counteract to these changes the revised standards 'Excellence in Practice: Museum Education Principles and Standards' (2002 and revised again in 2005) offered a more complex understanding of the museum's educational dimension stressing the importance of interdepartmental teamwork', the 'use of technologies' and 'the importance of public advocacy' along with the emphasis on 'rigorous planning, implementation, and assessment' (AAM 2005:2). The recommended standards and principles viewed 'museum educators' as 'specialists who help museums fulfil their educational mission' (AAM 2005:6). Museums needed

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<sup>11</sup> The Institute of Museum and Library Services, federal agencies and non-profit foundations such as the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Lila-Wallace Reader's Digest Foundation and the AA, Accreditation commission.

to acknowledge in their practices the diversity of the community and to promote museum education at the core of their mission. Incorporating educational learning theories 'to the types of voluntary, personal, and lifelong learning that occur in museums', setting targets with measurable objectives and adopting strategies to document how targets are met were still placed at the core of policy (AAM 2005:6). Interpretation though was seen as a 'dynamic process of communication between the museum and the audience' and as 'the means by which the museum delivers its content' (AAM 2005:11). Such considerations of museum education and interpretation moved the understanding from audiences and visitors to communities. Museum educators were called to step forward with new strategies to demonstrate value and to engage the public (Munley and Roberts 2006).

Thus, the beginning of the 21st century found museum educators under pressure to meet the demands of the evolving field of museum education. As museums in the US experienced an ongoing transformation 'from being about something to being for somebody' and placed education in the widest sense at the core of their public service (Weil 2002:28) museum professionals were called to embrace in their practices 'the core values of accessibility, relevancy, and inclusiveness, which are also at the heart of museum education' (Henry 2006:229). Museum educators coming from diverse fields and backgrounds needed to develop new skills including project management, marketing and evaluation (Dragotto, Minerva and Nichols 2006; Henry 2006; Schatz 2006). Knowledge of experiential approaches to teaching and learning along with pedagogical skills were also considered to be critical to responding to the evolving complexity of museum education as a profession (Bailey 2006a). It is noticeable though in a qualitative study that Bailey conducted by interviewing museum educators in the US that museum educators valued the

pedagogical knowledge and skills that one could acquire in professional practice rather than via credentials of study in a university museum studies programme of study (Bailey 2006a; Bailey 2006b).

Equally, in the UK, the New Labour government's vision to transform museums as 'centres for social change'<sup>12</sup> (DCMS 2000) marked a shift in museological thinking. Museums strived to rediscover their role and responsibility as social institutions (Janes 2007) as they were called to articulate practices that promote inclusion and foster social equality (Sandell 2002, Sandell 2007). They had to re-examine their relationship with the communities and develop projects and initiatives that encourage participation and engagement with museum collections and practices for community groups who traditionally had been excluded from museums<sup>13</sup>. In the same period (1999-2002) the educational mandate of museums in Britain changed. The government invested £3 million to create initiatives that explored the educational potential of museums and galleries and enriched the learning of school-aged children (5 -16 yrs old). The first phase of the programme consisted of 65 projects that took various forms and were developed in museums all across the country. The second phase of the programme got underway in the autumn of 2002 and was funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) focused on how museums and galleries can support the National Curriculum. This unprecedented financial support on a national level in addition to a range of other funding initiatives<sup>14</sup> offered fertile grounding to change the landscape of

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<sup>12</sup> DCMS (2000) *Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All: Policy Guidance on Social Inclusion for DCMS Funded and Local Authority Museums, Galleries and Archives in England*. London: Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

<sup>13</sup> For a collection of initiatives, projects, and papers that problematise the complex relationship between museums and the societies they serve see Watson 2007. <sup>14</sup> For an extended list, see Resource 2001.



museum education in the UK and to raise awareness of the potential of museum education and the challenges it was facing as a distinctive field.

The evaluations that took place to measure the outcomes of the aforementioned funding initiatives (Stanley et al. 2004, Hooper-Greenhill 2004) suggested that there was a lack of infrastructure in the UK to support the consistent high-quality provision of educational programmes. The professionalisation of museum educators was shown to be uneven with museums that had a long tradition in museum education services demonstrating the skills and knowledge required to develop innovative programmes while in the majority of museums either new educational staff was employed to manage the educational projects or existed staff received training to respond to the new requirements with more confidence. Project management, marketing and customer-orientated skills were a few of the key areas for skills development that were also identified in the workforce development review that was conducted across the sector to inform strategic developments at the regional and national levels (DEMOS 2003). The review stressed the need for demographic statistics to provide a coherent profile of the workforce across all types and sizes of museums, libraries and archives. Little evidence was provided that museums embraced the skills development agenda especially for the 'fuzzier parts of the workforce' referring to volunteers, freelancers and part-time workers (DEMOS 2003:24). It identified a gap between the employers' needs for practical skills and the Higher Education orientation towards academic knowledge, without making any references to the potential contribution that knowledge of learning theories and education could offer to the evolving sector. This is contrary to the awareness that museums, libraries, galleries and archives needed to develop 'specific learning skills' to respond to the new role that governmental cultural policy posed on them as educational institutions of social inclusion:

'the 'learning agenda' changes the role of people working in the sector in a way that can be summarised as a shift from simply providing or presenting information towards teaching, instruction and guidance. Engagement and empathy with users in all respects will be needed. The importance of developing sector-specific learning skills has been highlighted; as one stakeholder said, "museums and libraries aren't schools." Second, the 'access and inclusion agenda' necessitates a new set of skills to be developed, including outreach, collections reinterpretation, marketing and market research' (DEMOS 2003:21).

The lack of educational theory in the professional terrain of museum education was filled with the design of the framework 'Inspiring Learning: a framework for Access and Learning in Museums, Archives and Libraries' (Resource 2003) which in its revised format is still currently valid (Arts Council of England 2020)<sup>14</sup>. The framework undergoes reviews to respond to the needs that emerge from governmental changes in policymaking in the cultural sector and acts as a tool for cultural institutions to assess their learning provision, to plan inspiring learning opportunities and to improve their existed provision providing evidence that proves their effectiveness as institutions of learning and inclusion.

In 2005 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) ran a consultation for six months to celebrate the achievements of the museum sector and to identify ideas and future practices for positive change in the sector. This was the first wide-ranging consultation that received seventy-five responses. The responses showed

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<sup>14</sup> The framework was initially created by Resource in collaboration with the Museums Research Centre at the University of Leicester to be officially launched in 2008 by the Museums, Libraries and Archives. In 2011, with the change of the government in the UK, it was transferred to the Arts Council.

that a long-term national strategy framework needed to be established with the overarching theme 'working in partnership' (DCMS 2005:6). Amongst the set points for consultation, two questions prompted the participants to consider how museums could 'strengthen their commitment to education as a core and strategic priority' and to build a strong and sustained research culture (DCMS 2005:11). The responses indicate that there is a division between education and curatorial work. In particular, the respondents suggested that Heads of Education had to be part of the museum senior management 'to ensure that learning was recognised as central to the purpose of the museum' (DCMS 2005:11). A couple of replies commented on the unhelpful division within the museum workforce between staff whose roles were focused on education and access and those with curatorial focus. Education staff did not feel having the same status as curatorial staff while the recruitment of white middle class and the division in salaries according to the status of professional role set internal barriers in the profession positioning museum educators within the lower end of the continuum (DCMS 2005:15). Education did not appear to be integral to all museum practices and the participants proposed that the MLA's 'Inspiring learning for All' Framework should be adopted by all museums with a few respondents further proposing that a demonstrated commitment to education should be part of the Heritage Lottery Fund award criteria for museum funding.

Indeed, education is either positioned in the heart of debates about inclusion in museums or cultural participation obtained in the years that followed a significant place as a key factor in governmental and non-governmental funding initiatives<sup>15</sup>. Access,

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<sup>15</sup> For example, to name a few here, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation supports developments in museums and galleries that aim to enhance active partnership with the communities, the Wolfson foundation provides funding initiatives to promote public engagement and understanding of collections and the National Lottery Heritage Fund that offers funding schemes to support innovative projects that promote community engagement with heritage and museums.

participation and audience development were and still are some of the keywords that appeared as requirements in funding schemes that aimed to widen audience participation and to deepen engagement with the cultural sector. Further discussion is needed to trace how education is placed in the changing profile of the museum sector as this was shaped by cultural policy initiated by the Coalition government (2010-2015) and more recently by the Conservative Government (2015- current). Empirical research to generate data on the professional profile of museum educators in the UK and the status of museum education and museum studies as university programme degrees would also offer an insight into the current status in the UK that is grounded in reality. A preliminary analysis of job descriptions as these are advertised in national and international professional networks for employment<sup>16</sup> indicate that in a sample of 100 vacancies in museums (advertised over the period 03/09/19 – 30/04/20) around 42 of them would present a job description that involves engagement with the public and development of museum programmes that traditionally would be considered as programmes of museum education since they involve planning, delivery and evaluation of provision for targeted groups of the public. The term 'museum education' was absent from the description of duties and job titles. An exemption constituted the references to 'education' in 3 senior management posts (e.g. 'Head of Education and Engagement'). The term 'learning' appeared in 8 job titles (e.g. 'learning and participation officer', 'learning and development assistant'), 29 job titles included the terms 'development', 'engagement', 'community' with two vacancies searching for an 'assistant curator' to join the 'schools and teachers' team. A preliminary analysis of the main duties and responsibilities suggests that experience in administration, business

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/JobsDesk>, <https://www.jobs.ac.uk/>, <https://gem.org.uk>, <https://workingat.tate.org.uk/>

planning, and project management were highly desirable while the references to knowledge and understanding of the theory that relates to museum studies and pedagogy were limited.

### **1.3. Museum and cultural education**

Museums seem to adjust to the ever-changing political and funding agenda to be able to sustain their work. Over the past two decades, it was noticeable that the agenda gradually moved from museum education to museum learning, creativity and cultural learning. This may be due to the series of policies that affected education, museums and the wider sector of culture and arts but also due to the impact that learning theory had on visitor studies research and museum theory. The latest has been usefully summarised by Hooper-Greenhill (2007) and more recently by Hohenstein and Moussouri (2018) to reflect on the potential effect that learning theories had on museum theory and visitor studies research. The impact of policymaking in the UK on educational developments and approaches in museum education is yet to be discussed.

During the first decade of 2000, the sector's interest in learning was encouraged by the launch of the Department for Education and Skills (DFES 2006) 'Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto' that aimed to foster meaningful learning experiences for children and young people (ages 0 to 19) outside the context of formal education. The manifesto considered children's services, early years settings and schools as key providers of these opportunities with the responsibility to ensure that the designed activities and programmes are helping all children progress across the key stages in formal education and that appropriate expertise and resources are provided as needed. Emphasis was given on schools and early years settings to be

supported in this process via professional development opportunities, guidance and support that was given at the local and regional levels. The Manifesto embraced the principles of the 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' policy that was launched in 2004, emphasizing every child's right to enjoy, achieve, be safe and healthy and make a positive contribution to life. It set out a national framework of programmes that were led on the regional level to enable collaboration between governmental agencies and other organisations and to ensure that each child is fulfilling their potential. Museums, galleries and cultural organisations did not remain unaffected by these changes. National funding initiatives<sup>17</sup> supported the development of programmes such as the Cultural Pathfinders and Cultural Entitlement Programmes in the South East that aimed to develop partnerships between museums and schools to raise educational standards and to support students' engagement in child-led museum learning. The findings of the initiatives informed the development of the framework 'Every Child Matters to Museums - Cracking Open Culture – Museums, Schools and Creativity' (DCMS and DFES 2006) that was widely distributed in schools and museums in the UK to raise awareness of the potential of museum learning and the engagement with culture.

The rationale of the policy was also an extension of an earlier initiative to advocate for the development of a national strategy for creative and cultural education. The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) in 1999 the document 'All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education (1999) to offer guidance on the value of culture and creativity as dynamic forces that can affect children's learning in all curriculum subjects. The document offered definitions for

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<sup>17</sup> i.e. Strategic Commissioning programme, MLA's Renaissance programme for regional museums.

creativity and culture aiming to show how creative and cultural learning are intimately related but not identical. It intended to promote creativity in education and culture as an open process that involves imaginative thinking, is purposeful, original and of value concerning the intended purpose (NACCCE 1999:30). The culture was seen as a product of creativity and a living process that is dynamic, diverse and evolving within the context of multicultural Britain. Cultural learning for children was advocated as a process that permeates all aspects of human life not entirely associated with the Western European tradition of arts. Children and young people were encouraged to critically reflect on values and historical perspectives that shape living culture. They were viewed as active producers of culture who have the power to transform reality. Partnerships between the educational sector and museums, galleries and performing arts organisations could offer a fertile platform to help the initiatives for cultural and creative learning materialise.

Indeed, the case for a cultural offer to children of all ages was embraced by the educational and cultural sector as it is evident in a series of consultations with schools and cultural organisations that took place between 2007 and 2009 (Holden 2008; Culture and Learning Consortium 2009). The consultations suggested that there is a shared perspective that cultural learning has the potential to transform children's lives and that the grounding is now set, at least on a policy level, to proceed with the materialisation of the cultural offer for children. The national curriculum for primary and secondary education was under review to integrate into its structure children's entitlement for cultural learning and several policies were created to advocate for children's right to culture, education and living standards that promote children's educational achievement and safeguard their right to enjoy childhood (see DfCSF 2007; DCMS with BERR 2008; Layard and Dunn 2009). The long-term target was to

firmly embed cultural learning in education and in cultural organisations anticipating that the impact of an orchestrated approach will become evident over the following decade. The professionals however in the cultural and educational sector were not confident to offer programmes with an open-ended approach to cultural learning and were asking for a unanimous definition of cultural learning and a coherent national strategy. Professionals both in education and culture considered that there is a lack of effective structures in place to facilitate collaboration between the educational and cultural sectors that could yield innovative programmes. Teachers requested for professional development to feel empowered to facilitate children's personalised learning and to fully meet the potential of cultural learning directing the attention to the role of the Teacher Education Institutions in this process. Equally professionals in the cultural sector were not particularly forthcoming. They commented that their low status as learning staff in cultural organisations along with the dominant curatorial attitudes and the prevailed narrow perceptions of learning limited the nature and depth of cultural offer. A 'learner-centred ethos' needed to be embedded in the cultural sector. More voices were asking for robust research on the value of cultural learning, collaboration among all involved partners and sharing of good practice to create a sustainable national strategy for cultural learning (Culture and Learning Consortium 2009:25).

The call for a national plan that would unite all agencies for culture and education to promote higher standards of cultural learning remained on the agenda after the 2010 change in government. However, museums and Galleries experienced significant funding cuts. Funding initiatives that promoted culture and creativity ceased, and the organizations that were created to support museums at the local and national levels were either withdrawn or merged with the Arts Council England and the



National Archives. The budget cuts affected both the education posts that were created with the earlier funding initiatives<sup>18</sup> and the overall numbers of full time staff in employment in museums. The Museums Association surveyed to trace the effects of the financial cut: 161 individuals responded representing 140 museum services across the country to show that '45% reduced staff by more than 10% more than 20% have cut by over a quarter' (Newman and Tourle 2011:8). A widening gap was noticed between national and non-national museums with the second lacking finances and infrastructure to continue the education offer while each one of four nations (with the exemption of England) had its own museum or cultural strategies (Anderson 2011).

The Henley Review on Cultural Education commissioned by the Department of Culture, Media and Sports in collaboration with the Department of Education (DCMS and DFE 2012a) was the key document that attempted to (re-)shape cultural education in the UK. It clarified that for the purposes of the review the term cultural education includes museums, galleries, heritage and libraries and made recommendations for future developments. The review was informed by responses from 654 individuals from the field of cultural education without including children and young people in the consultation. It saw a direct association between the study of cultural education and employment of future generations in the creative and cultural industry, the experiencing of art events and places in childhood for its potential to form a long-term habit and advocated the value of cultural education for children to enhance knowledge, the development of critical facilities and skills through participation in art activities:

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the Heritage Lottery Fund supported 80 education posts and 40 new spaces for learning at heritage sites (CLC 2009:21).

'At its best, a sound Cultural Education should allow children to gain knowledge through the learning of facts; understanding through the development of their critical faculties and skills through the opportunity to practise specific art forms. Involvement with cultural activities, whether as an active participant (creating a piece of art or craft, reading a book, making a short film) or actively experiencing an event or place (visiting a heritage site, gallery or museum, seeing how a building works, watching music, dance, or film performance) can be habit-forming for the rest of a young person's life' (DCMS and DFE 2012a:12).

The proposed recommendations that were partially embraced by the government, view cultural education as a synthesis of fact-based knowledge about culture and creativity and the creative practice of art forms. The review proposed that excellence in cultural education should bring knowledge and practice together so that creativity is not becoming an alternative to academic learning and cultural education could potentially become part of the entire curriculum without being degraded into an instrument for the improvement of school's academic performance (DCMS and DFE 2012a). The reference to the potential instrumental role of cultural learning may be a subtle criticism of the previous government's emphasis on creativity and culture as a process to support children's academic progress and achievement in formal education. Such comparison would not be entirely appropriate though since there are fundamental differences in the way cultural education was conceptualised in the national initiatives and programmes of the two governments. The New Labour (1997-2010) viewed or at least attempted to view culture as an open participatory living force as this was demonstrated in the 'All our Futures' and later the 'Every Child matters'

policy while in the documents produced under the Coalition<sup>19</sup> government (2010-2015) culture is viewed via an essentialist national perspective. It focuses on British culture advocating for its uniqueness and international contribution to art, design and poetry. Within this perspective, children should 'grow up with a sense of real pride in their local area' and 'know about our national icons and understand the key points in our history that have shaped our national character and culture' (DCMS and DFE 2013:48). A major investment of £2.7 million followed the government's embrace of the recommendations of Henley's review known as 'the heritage schools programme'. It supported the design of material and programmes that could act as a model for all schools to make use of heritage and local museums so that children understand their local heritage and how it relates to the national story. It may not be clear how children are positioned in this cultural offer since they are seen either as active or passive participants in cultural education without explicit references made to children as coparticipants and creators of the cultural experiences. As stated in Henley's review children are encouraged to engage in individual activities and via repetitive practice to improve their skills and knowledge:

'It is important to note that, when delivered well, Cultural Education should not just be about visiting museums, galleries or heritage sites, or about seeing performances, although all of these remain important parts of the whole package of Cultural Education. Often, Cultural Education activities will be collaborative and will help children to learn how to work together as a team. However, it is essential that children and young people are encouraged to undertake regular solo activities, such as reading books, writing stories, drawing pictures, learning crafts or making music. Over time, they will get better at doing each of these things,

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<sup>19</sup> The Coalition Government is composed of members of both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats with the majority of power lying under the Conservative Party.

as they build up skills and knowledge through repetitive practice. It is important to remember that becoming proficient in these solo activities can have a profound effect on a child's development; they should not be overshadowed by other group or experience-based facets of Cultural Education' (DCMS and DFE 2012a:15).

References are made to the challenges that 'looked after children', and 'children with special educational needs and disabilities' and 'children outside mainstream education' may face to access cultural education without however either in Henley's review or in the government's response to it (DCMS and DFE 2013; DCMS and DFE 2012b) one to be able to trace suggestions on how barriers to inclusion may be addressed. The recommendations included specific pointers on how organisations ensure 'excellence in the delivery of cultural education' (DCMS and DFE 2012a:12) suggesting that a) all interactions should be of high quality especially if children are experiencing an area of culture for the first time, and b) the experiences to which children are introduced should be age-appropriate in line with children's development.

Museums broadly welcomed the proposals of the Henley Review. Concerns were expressed though about the need to centralise this offer through the 'cultural passport' initiative that proposed a list of cultural activities in which children should have participated by the age 7, 11 and 16 and posed questions about the process via which it would be decided what constitutes a cultural topic or subject to be included in children's school curriculum (Heal 2012; Winterbotham 2012). The viability of the 'cultural passport' was trialled through three geographically based Cultural Education Partnerships to be at a later stage forwarded to schools in the format of a checklist of activities (latest update DfE 2019) that children are completing from pre-school years to the final year in Primary School. The activities aim to encourage children to explore the local community and involve parents in children's education. The recommendation

to visit a gallery is included in the Year 3 checklist (children 7-8 years old) with visits to a museum and a castle entered as activities in the checklist of Year 4 classes (8-9 years old). The role that museums and galleries were called to play was not central in this newly formed cultural landscape that posed schools and arts at the heart of cultural education. The financial support was directly allocated to schools and national Bridge Organisations were established to develop criteria for 'educationally sound' cultural activities and guidance for teachers who were now allocated with the responsibility and freedom to build partnerships with local cultural organisations including museums and galleries (DCMS and DFE 2013:57). Overall, ten Bridge Organisations were established to link culture to the nearly 25,000 schools in England and to ensure the delivery of the Arts Council's targets (Cultural Learning Alliance, CLA 2019). The Arts Council England set out a 10-year vision with goals to develop the arts over the long term to nurture talented artists and ultimately to promote England internationally as an artistic centre. A strategic framework of programmes<sup>20</sup> was developed to ensure that children have the opportunity to deepen their experience of arts anticipating that such engagement will contribute to children's well-being and also inspire them to develop their artistic capabilities. For that purpose and perhaps understanding that the ratio between the Bridge Organisations and Schools was extremely low, in 2015 further, a hundred local Cultural Education Partnerships were created without receiving additional core funding.

With the weight shifting from the cultural organisations to schools and the outcome of the two general elections (2015 and 2019) further establishing the Conservative party in power, schools were asking for a range of measures including

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<sup>20</sup> Artsmark was a programme to enable schools to evaluate and strengthen their cultural provision in collaboration with other organisations. Arts Award is a national qualification open to all children and young people aged 7 to 25 who wish to deepen their engagement with arts.

local cultural learning strategies, a national plan and funding to support the focus on arts. These concerns were also included in the two Manifestos that the Cultural Learning Alliance<sup>21</sup> produced (2014 and 2017) asking for measures to strengthen the role of Arts in the school curriculum by allocating cultural learning co-ordinators in every school, ringfencing funding for every primary school and asking the Office for Standards in Education, children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) to integrate arts and cultural provision in its quality assurance mechanisms. Teacher Education Institutions once more were called to integrate cultural education and arts in their curricula so that prospective teachers would be willing and confident to materialise and progress the cultural offer for children. These calls did not affect the cultural provision of Teacher Education. Museum education or cultural education remained a limited (if not absent) subject in the study programmes. Also, the cultural industry was not depicted in the brightest colours. The Warwick Commission report 'Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth' confirmed the educational system's inability to offer a curriculum infused with multi-disciplinarily and creativity and pointed out that the cultural sector was financially disadvantaged given that the direct spend on arts, culture, museums and libraries was only 0.3% of the total public budget (University of Warwick 2015). The report highlighted the issue of inequality in museums provision and pointed out although national museums changed their policy to offer free access to all, the numbers of visits from UK residents from lower social groups dropped, possibly due to the financial cuts on social welfare. Furthermore, museums and

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<sup>21</sup> <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/the-cultural-learning-alliance-what-we-did-in-2014/> (accessed 02/07/20) and <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Cultural-Learning-Alliancemanifesto-asks-May-2017.pdf> (accessed 02/07/20).

galleries faced internal barriers and inequalities since their workforce was decreased concerning gender, ethnicity, and disability.

Contrary to the above, an optimistic view of museums and galleries' cultural provision was offered in the Culture White Paper in 2016, which was the first in the last 50 years. It reinforced the Government's advocacy that over the past years museums and galleries increased their educational provision by making good use of the public and private funding initiatives and set out the government's long-term intentions to continue supporting museums and galleries. What was explicitly emphasised, in comparison to earlier policies initiated by the Conservatives Party, was the intention to reach out to everyone in the community both within the context of formal and informal learning. A coherent strategy with concrete steps to guarantee a solid national and local infrastructure was still pending though. The desire of the educational and cultural sectors for a long-term financially viable strategy in culture remained an unresolved item on the agenda. It was perhaps this gap that the ten-year Strategy 2020-2030 of the Arts Council England (ACE) 'Let's Create' (2020) offers to meet up to a certain level. It celebrates the role of creativity and culture in helping society tackle issues of inequality of wealth, climate emergency and mental ill-health by acting as mediums that help us 'better understand our own lives and those of others, and to occupy a shared space in which we can debate, present alternative views, and discover new ways of expressing our anxieties and ambitions' (ACE 2020:4). The strategy claims that it builds on the success of the previous decade that recognised the role of culture and creativity in supporting local economies and talent and in particular in children and young people, to shift now its focus on individual artists, curators and creative practitioners anticipating that the significance of this investment will become evident on a collective level in the years to come. In an area of economic

austerity with cultural organisations lacking diversity in staff (as this was also illustrated in the Warwick Commission Report 2015), it calls cultural organisations to continue generating income and to diversify their work and workforce.

The shift from organisations and programmes to individuals was justified via consultation or, to use the actual term, 'research' with members of the public including children and young people and staff from the cultural sector (ACE 2020:8-10). The process was the following: the ACE reviewed more than 100 reports of the work of artists and organisations and the way they considered the public to benefit from them, to identify key issues that are of concern to the cultural sector. Socio-economic and geographic disparity, inequality in accessing cultural provision, equation of arts with visual or 'high' arts and lack of diversity across the cultural industry were some of the identified issues. The business models of publicly funded organisations were also proven to be fragile leaving creative practitioners unsupported to pursue innovation and growth in sustained talent development. The public was asked to validate the relevancy of these issues and following confirmation, the ACE offered its strategic vision turning the attention to support individual creative practitioners while, as it states, continuing supporting the country's national development agency for creativity and culture in a time that the UK's relationship with Europe is changing. The strategy also offered definitions of culture and creativity since it was proven that there was confusion about the meaning and relation of these two terms<sup>22</sup>. Creativity is seen as a

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<sup>22</sup> The relationship between culture and creativity was not clear. This was first evident in the Culture White Paper where it was clarified that culture was no longer seen as a list of facts and artworks but as the 'accumulated influence of creativity, the arts, museums, galleries, libraries, archives and heritage upon all our lives' with each community having its own culture that needs to be valued and supported (DCMS 2016:13). This was a step forward to a more open and inclusive view of culture in comparison to the essentialist view of culture expressed in earlier documents (DCMS and DFE 2013). The confusion and lack of clarity were also demonstrated in consultations that the Arts Council England (ACE 2018) conducted to trace young people's and children's views on the value of arts and cultural activities and the barriers they face to access opportunities. Three out of four consultations were targeting youth (18 years old and over) and/or secondary school



'process through which people apply their knowledge, skill and intuition to imagine, conceive, express or make something that wasn't there before' which in the context of the Strategy creativity refers to the "process of making, producing or participating in 'culture'" (ACE 2020:12). The definition of culture may have moved beyond the earlier essentialist views of culture with a national orientation (see DCMS and DFE 2013; DCMS and DFE 2012b) to the use of 'culture' as an umbrella term that refers to:

“all those areas in of activity associated with the artforms and organisations in which Arts Council England invests: collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre and the visual arts. By describing all of this work collectively as 'culture', rather than separately as 'the arts', 'museums' and 'libraries', we aim to be inclusive of the full breadth of activity that we support, as well as to reflect findings from the research we commissioned for this Strategy, which showed that members of the public tend to use the words 'the arts' and 'artists' to refer specifically to classical music, opera, ballet or the fine arts” (ACE 2020:12).

In such instrumental definitions, the theoretical and philosophical grounding that may have informed the strategic vision is not explicit. It is clear though that the commitment to culture and creativity is underpinned by a vision of future economic growth with the cultural sector currently prompted to be more flexible, financially resilient and collaborative to increase income by forging partnerships with commercial creative

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children using mainly quantitative surveys. The consultation conducted by Sound Connections (2017) included 778 children and young people aged 7 to 25 years who completed online surveys with a quantitative and qualitative component. The qualitative aspect of the consultation was more evident in the initiative to include 186 children and young people in roundtable meetings to express their views on arts and culture. The findings suggested that there was confusion around the word 'culture' especially with the younger children reading the term in terms of its ethnic and racial connotations.

industries, charitable and volunteer sectors, the Higher Education and to embrace developments in new technologies that dissolve the boundaries of cultural practices.

One may struggle to fully understand the implications of these suggestions for museums and galleries that are still placed 'at the heart' of the 10-years strategy. Museums are seen as 'centres for knowledge and cultural participation' (ACE 2020:37) that will be assessed to ensure that they are 'fit-for-purpose to meet the needs of their communities' (ACE 2020:22). Some of the set strategic priorities for museums for the forthcoming decade are the expansion of public access to collections, the raise of the museums' potential international profile and activities and the forming of museum partnerships with local education providers to 'deliver joined-up cultural education' programmes of 'high quality culture' to children and young people to realise their creative potential' (ACE 2020:38). The provision of instrumental definitions of culture and creativity also aims to develop a shared language between the Governmental body of the Arts Council England and the cultural sector that will act as a basis for the former's decision making and performance measuring of the second.

## **2. When museum pedagogy meets early childhood**

Early years learning is receiving increasing attention on an international level in Western societies. Museums and galleries as community institutions are called to play a role in developments in early learning and to seek opportunities to contribute fully where possible. They hold unique collections that can stimulate early years learning, offer expertise and support to facilitate object-based learning processes and ideally act as learning spaces for early years education. Organised provision for family and pre-school visits, and, more rarely perhaps, exhibitions that target directly early years children are some of the potential mediums via which museums are trying to cater for and provide experiences for the young visitors.

The museums and galleries' learning potential for young children is illustrated in a vital document that emerged from partnership work between Early Years practitioners and museums and galleries in the South West under the funding scheme of Renaissance South West (2008). It was one of the outcomes of three years of regional financial investment to support museum initiatives on education. It is entitled 'Close encounters with culture-Museums and Galleries as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage' and is still widely distributed today in museums and Teacher Education Institutions. It proposes pointers on museum and gallery settings' potential to offer high levels of involvement with objects, art and the environment, and to contribute to children's development and learning. In line with the Early Years Foundation Stage themes (Early Education 2012), it suggests that museums offer space and freedom to early years to express their uniqueness in the way they relate to objects. Museum objects can act as transition objects that provide a bridge to home experiences while in the context of world culture collections, they can foster

intercultural associations. Museums and galleries with their indoor and outdoor environments can provide stimulating experiences that trigger a sense of awe and wonder, and their object-based activities can facilitate children's active learning and holistic development. Nonetheless, the learning potential of museums and galleries for the early years sector cannot be directly traced in the context of government policy either in education<sup>23</sup> or culture in the UK.

In the UK, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) that sets the 'standards for the learning, development and care' of children from 'birth to 5 years old' positions learning through play at the core of educational provision so that children can learn literacy, mathematics, understand the world, express their thoughts, ideas feelings via arts and design and also be supported to develop physically, personally socially, emotionally and learn to communicate (Department for Education 2017). The framework is obligatory for all schools, and Ofsted rated early years providers including childminders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes<sup>24</sup>. Although in the statutory framework there are no direct references to museums or cultural institutions, one could advocate for their appropriateness as venues to provide opportunities for exploration, play and engagement with materials and art activities in line with the set standards (DFE 2017:8). This approach may be more evident in The Culture White Paper (Department for Culture, Media & Sport 2016) which undertook a culture review to look at how government and statutory bodies can support the cultural sector to

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<sup>23</sup> Even Tickell's (2011) independent report that was commissioned to evaluate the newly revised (2008) Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework did not include any direct references to the role of museums, galleries and the overall cultural sector in early years education. The report set out the rationale for the statutory framework for all early learning providers and potentially gave a steer for positioning arts and cultural provision in the EYFS framework.

<sup>24</sup> Children are assessed via classroom-based observations at two stages (between 2 and 3 and at the end of the school year when they turn 5) in terms of their skills and performance in line with the early years foundation stage statutory framework. See <https://www.gov.uk/early-years-foundation-stage> (last accessed on 26 June 2020).

increase participation to all. It argued that ‘culture should be an essential part of every child’s education, both in and out of school’ (DCMS 2016:21) and emphasised the role that cultural institutions can play to widen participation including young families, children and young people who are socially disadvantaged:

‘The government expects all museums, theatres, galleries, opera houses and other arts organisations in receipt of public money to reach out to everyone regardless of background, education or geography’ (DCMS 2016:23).

‘We want to see increased public participation across all our cultural sectors: the arts, museums and galleries, libraries, archives and heritage. We especially want to see greater participation among communities who currently do not benefit from many cultural opportunities. We are thinking particularly of those with young families, and those who are disadvantaged and socially isolated’ (DCMS 2016:20).

‘We will put in place measures to increase participation in culture, especially among those who are currently excluded from the opportunities that culture has to offer. In particular, we will ensure that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are inspired by and have new meaningful relationships with culture’ (DCMS 2016:8).

The statistical demographics of The Culture White Paper indicate that ‘participation in culture is significantly lower among those from a low socio-economic background’ (DCMS 2016:20) without providing a profile or making any references to young children or families as separate audience groups. Information from other sources may shed some light. The Museum Association in the UK reported that a survey on family visiting (commissioned by the heritage insurance group Ecclesiastical in 2019) showed

that 90% per cent of the parents surveyed said that they had visited at least once a museum while 35% of parents never visited a gallery with their children. From those who visited museums, 39% and galleries (43%) reported having had at least one negative experience identifying the lack of child-friendly activities and the lack of outdoor or play areas as the key factors. The survey showed that there is a perception that heritage organisations and art galleries are not child-friendly, making first heritage attractions and then art galleries as the least popular to visit (News Ecclesiastical 2019). The data indicate that entry tickets and travel expenses prohibit visits to cultural venues. The findings suggest that parents appreciate cheaper or free entry tickets and activities for families as the best incentives to visit the cultural sites (Adams 2019). The economic issue can be easily understood if one takes into account that child poverty in the UK is affecting every aspect of children's lives and that under current governmental policies, child poverty is expected to rise to 40 per cent by 2022 (Lyndon 2019).

The rise of child poverty suggests that the preschool settings' cultural provision is the only means for early years children who live in disadvantaged households to visit museums, galleries and heritage sites. Museums seem to respond to the calling to increase their provision for organised school groups. An independent review of museums in England that was conducted in response to The Culture White Paper claims that there is evidence to suggest that museums and art galleries make efforts to engage children, schools and families and that 'a higher proportion of children than adults visit museums' coming up to '63% in 2016/17' (Mendoza 2017:55). Once more, there are no particular references in the report to young children as a distinctive audience group. At the same time, the emphasis is placed on museums to play a role

in contributing to pedagogical theory and practice for schoolchildren in formal and informal learning processes:

'Delivering cultural education has benefits for schoolchildren as well as helping to make the adult museum audiences of the future. Museums can and do support pedagogy, enhancing the theory and practice of formal learning and the curriculum, as well as engaging children with development – particularly around their social history and place in the world' (Mendoza 2017:10).

The emphasis on the museums' potential to make a significant contribution to the education of early years children is also traced in Shaffer's work (2015; 2012) who attempts to map the development of museum learning programmes for early years in the US since the beginning of the twentieth century. She notices that although children's museums, science centres and pioneer museums such as the Smithsonian offered programmes for pre-schoolers, the field of museum education for young children in the US expanded over the past two decades. A confluence of events affected this, including the development of museum professionalism and the incorporation of educational theory in museum practices. In particular, the interest in early years in museums grew with the emphasis on early childhood developmental research that stressed the importance of play, the museums' ideological turning from the objects to the visitors' understanding and the social discourses on the museums' potential to include diverse audiences. A number of associations<sup>25</sup> were established to promote museum practices for young children and to raise awareness on early

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<sup>25</sup> In 2000 the Early Childhood Art Educators Group was established and drafted a paper to identify appropriate practices for museums. The Association of Children's Museums grew significantly holding forums and putting forward publications to enhance the thinking about the role of museums in shaping learning experiences (Shaffer 2015).

learning in museums and galleries. The increased acknowledgement of the role that museums could play in early years' education created the need for research-informed practice. In 2015 (and earlier in 2012) Shaffer urged museum professionals to 'gather information through research and practice from colleagues in museums as well as from early childhood practitioners and researchers outside of the museum world' (Shaffer 2012:14). Research was seen as a powerful source in shaping museum practice for a group that traditionally was excluded from museums.

In the discussion that follows, I aim to provide an overview of what is known from research about young children's museum experiences by drawing upon international publicised sources. First, I will provide an insight into the educational offer of museums in the UK that strive to lead museum practice in the early years and will contextualise the discussion with references to the international terrain. Second, the discussion will focus on family learning studies of museum experiences since these constitute a significant strand of research on early years experiences in museums. Third, a range of empirical studies will be explored organised in three strands: research studies for children, research that values children's agency in the museum experiences and research that decentres the focus from the child to the network of embodied interactions and relationships.

## **2.1. Tracing the museums' offer for early years children**

A look at museums' websites, resources and publications show that there is an increasing offer of programmes that support pedagogy for early years with some museums striving to act as pioneers in the field. The Museum of London with the



support of the Arts Council England, the Kids in Museums<sup>26</sup> and the Early Years Network designed a toolkit for museum professionals offering case studies of museum provision for early years from across the UK along with resources, articles and ‘top tips for working with young children’<sup>27</sup>. The toolkit is the first recommendation in database sources when using the keywords ‘early years museums’ and is suggested as a starting point to trace excellent practice that is developed in the UK (Hackett, Homles and Macrae 2020). Its case studies cover all spectrum of museum service to offer advice to museums that are starting to provide for early years audiences, want to improve current practice or have already a well-established provision. The toolkit presents 26 examples from museums, heritage sites and galleries out of which 5 are also presented in the Group for Education in Museums 2020 volume on Case studies in Early Years in Museums. The Group aims through its work to champion excellence in museum and heritage learning and in 2020 in collaboration with Engage<sup>28</sup> put forward a call for cases studies of early years programmes and initiatives that could be influential for the sector. Here, I will briefly illustrate the current state of museums’ provision for early years children by reflecting upon the 32 contemporary case studies that are included in both sources (for a summary of all case studies see Table 1, p.?). If museum provision can be grouped in terms of the audiences it aims to reach then one might trace in the 32 reviewed cases studies five types of provision for early years and preschool children: a) interactive programmes that target families and tend to

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<sup>26</sup> Kids in Museums was founded in 2003 to support museums nationwide to be more welcoming for children, families and young people. They offer guidelines, online resources and initiatives aiming to enhance children’s role in museums. As a charity organisation is funded by the Arts Council England, trusts, foundations and governmental bodies.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/toolkits/early-years-toolkit/stage-1> (accessed on 28/06/20, date of website unknown)

<sup>28</sup> Engage’ was established in 1989 as the National Association for Gallery Education to lead advocacy and training for gallery education. It represents gallery educators in the UK and over 20 countries internationally.

involve the adult(s) in the learning activity b) formal programmes for early years settings and pre-school group visits including residencies at the museum, c) provision that is child-led and integral to the museum/gallery space, d) museum programmes for children led by the museum staff and e) programmes for families that are mainly offered for the adults of the family (See Figure 1, p.?). A range of museums is included in the case studies indicating that the provision is growing across the whole sector (i.e. national, independent museums) with museum education staff being responsible for the development of the programmes instead of hiring freelancers with expertise in the early years. In a few case studies, it is mentioned that changes in the museum workforce affected the decisions to improve and expand on current provision. Staff with knowledge and experience in the early years were confident to develop programmes for the young audiences and when external expertise was missing initiatives were designed to welcome partnerships with external stakeholders. As it is indicated in the reviewed studies that expertise is now coming from collaborations with Universities, partnerships with educational settings (schools, libraries) and collaborations with children services, artists and professionals that specialise in areas related to the programmes under development. Focus groups with families and early years practitioners and teachers also offer expertise to develop programmes that respond to the needs of the participants in the family and/or the context of formal learning. The following extract is taken from the case study at the Postal Museum that worked collaboratively with school practitioners and a range of other professionals with a diverse wealth of expertise to develop a literacy learning programme with online resources and to improve the provision for early years in the gallery setting. The programme is offered in the context of formal education aimed to meet the government objectives in early years education and it also consists of programmes of continuous

professional development for teachers (before or after the visit) to enhance their confidence in creative storytelling:

'In September 2016 The Postal Museum held a focus group of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stage 1 (KS1) Literacy Co-ordinators. Their feedback and expertise informed the approach to developing the online learning resource and storytelling sessions. We spent six months co-developing the project, working with clinical psychologists, clinical commissioners who commission services in health settings, artists, a peer ambassador and cultural partners. Through desk research, meetings with external experts, training and steering groups we explored: models of working, sector priorities, referral routes, safeguarding, creative outputs and evaluation structure to provide teachers with a session which ties in with government objectives in Scotland to increase the engagement of early years pupils with science and STEM<sup>29</sup> (Early Years Toolkit<sup>30</sup>).

It is evident in the case studies' rationale that museums aim to improve and/or increase their provision and make it sustainable in the long-term encouraging families to conduct further visits. In a sense, adult family members are seen as a target group on their own. Their enjoyment and participation also affect the child's participation during the programmes and increase the likelihood of repetitive visits and learning outside the museum. Museums also offer guidance to parents to help them scaffold the learning experience of the child and intend to enrich the programmes with opportunities for intergenerational interaction. The majority of programmes for families and children take the form of sensory experiences that involve movement, music,

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<sup>29</sup> (STEM) stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

<sup>30</sup> Early Years toolkit – Museum of London

[https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/application/files/6215/2449/4903/EYT\\_Over\\_the\\_hills\\_and\\_far\\_away.pdf](https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/application/files/6215/2449/4903/EYT_Over_the_hills_and_far_away.pdf) (accessed 05/07/20)

storytelling, craft-making and relate to the museum collections and exhibition themes. The majority of family programmes are facilitated by the museum staff. At the same time, some cases include references to resources that families with children can use during the museum visit. The following two extracts are taken from the Pallant House Gallery in Chichester and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) to illustrate the two approaches accordingly.

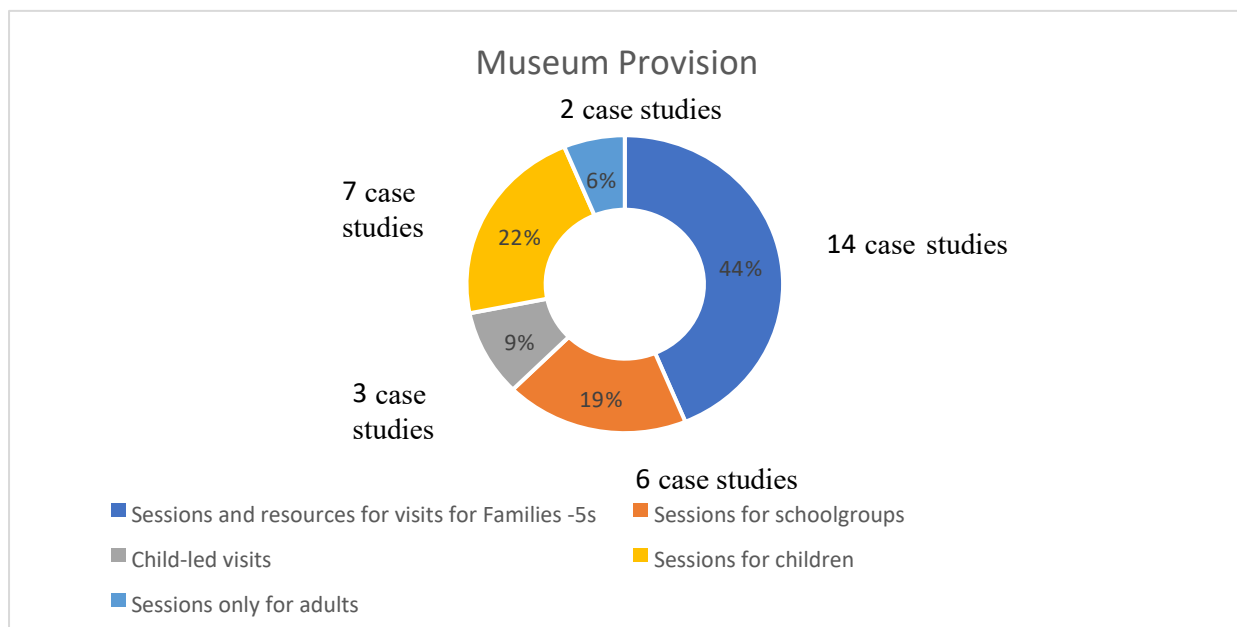
Extract related to the family programmes at the Pallant House Gallery:

'Instead of workshops following different structures each month, workshops now follow a regular format. Sessions always involve story- time, a visit to the Gallery spaces to 'get some ideas', and then a practical activity in the Studio to finish. We envisaged these changes would save administrative time, money in freelance charges and allow us to make better use of our stocks of art materials. Having staff deliver the sessions would also engender familiarity for participants and provide more opportunity for us to interact with this part of our audience' (Bogard 2020:15).

Intergenerational learning and playful interpretation that place family members as active participants is illustrated in the case study at the YSP that built upon a 3 year action research programme that aims to help families discover contemporary sculpture via creative engagement: 'YSP family offer considers the whole family, adults and children, as active participants. All activity is shaped to generate positive intergenerational learning. During the research project, we developed a strong foundation with free gallery resources to pick up and play with, (family activity baskets, talking together cards and drawing together cards) which encouraged families to art think and art play together alongside the sculptures. Playful family interpretation provided by these activities supported greater understanding of the work on display and significantly lengthened family dwell time in the galleries' (Spencer 2020:14).

Within the reviewed cases the museum-led programmes for families (14 studies) and children (7 studies) seem to be the majority of the offered provision in comparison to the museums' organised provision for school groups (6 studies) and the 3 case studies that offer freedom to children to explore the space and the museum objects acknowledging their agency as museum visitors who are leading their own museum visiting experience. Out of the 32 cases, only 2 are offered exclusively for adults: the Orleans House Gallery in London offers mindful practices for new mothers who might experience stress and at Sewerby Hall in East Yorkshire skill based courses<sup>31</sup> to improve wellbeing and quality of life are offered mainly for the adults of families that were referred through Children's Services.

Figure 1. Types of provision for early years and pre-school children



<sup>31</sup> The programmes started in 2016, are now broadened to include work with traveller families, refugees and adults experiencing mental health issues.

It should be noted that an attempt is made so that children and families are not treated as a homogenous group and that families feel included in the museum space. A few museums are developing accessible resources and programmes to achieve inclusion for targeted families who are deemed to be socio-economically disadvantaged including families that have experienced temporary housing, families who have low literacy levels or for whom English is not their first language, ethnic minorities, foster families, and families with children experiencing speech and language difficulties and other special educational needs. For example, at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the education team worked in partnership with Child and Family Centre staff to run taster sessions in the community to build the confidence of families who felt excluded from museums. Offering free of charge workshops and entry to the museum along with financial support to cover travel costs was a direct approach to remove the financial barrier that prohibits families from visiting:

'Research has demonstrated that there is a significant attainment gap at five years old between the most advantaged and least advantaged children in our city. This is especially marked in the field of language and communication, and contributes to increasing social inequality through primary education and beyond... We wanted to make the course as easy to access as possible. [...] Building confidence: by working in partnership with Child & Family Centre staff we were able to build on existing relationships. Even though we ran the taster session in the community, and Family Workers attended all the sessions, some families still did not feel confident to visit the museum. Financial support: entry to the museum, all workshops and materials were provided free of charge. In addition, we refunded families' travel costs as this can have a big impact on weekly budgets. We had

to adapt our existing system of claiming expenses to enable on-the-day payment' (Wallis 2020:18).

In most cases, there is also a noticeable emphasis on the intention of the programmes to ensure that families' practical needs are met and that families feel welcomed. The following extract is taken from the case study reflection at the London Transport Museum:

'Another important factor that led to the development of the sessions was that we wanted to ensure that families feel welcome and that they have a sense of belonging in the museum. Some parents and carers might feel that if their child is running around, being loud or playing that they do not belong in a museum space. The museum's collection is full of buses, trains and other vehicles, which is a very popular topic for children under five, and we wanted to ensure that families with very young children felt welcome. We believe that targeted programming reassures families that they are welcome and considered' (London Transport Museum). Early Years Toolkit<sup>32</sup>

In the 32 exemplar case studies reviewed here, only 3 include programmes that focus on children's experiences and interaction in the museum space without the museum aspiring to teach, lead or facilitate the experience. All three cases take place in museums/galleries with strong links with research and an already established tradition in early years provision. They value and record children's experiences in the museum aiming to enhance the experience from the child's perspective:

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<sup>32</sup> Early Years toolkit – Museum of London  
[https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/application/files/4915/2587/2390/EYT\\_Singing\\_and\\_stories.pdf](https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/application/files/4915/2587/2390/EYT_Singing_and_stories.pdf) (accessed 05/07/20)

a) At the Whitworth Art Gallery (part of the University of Manchester) the early years' Atelier offers a free drop-in space for child-led artistic exploration. The space is inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy that emphasises the value of free play in open natural environments. Children explore materials in the gallery space with sensory art that blurs the boundaries between the indoors and outdoors. Children's interaction with the space and its materials is observed and recorded to inform research and practice.

b) The Great North Museum: Hancock (part of the Newcastle University and Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums) intending to explore how children move and interact in the galleries (including interaction with adults and objects) mounted GoPro cameras on toddlers' helmets to record their experience. The children also became a documentary film crew as part of the programme 'Toddler Takeover'. The programme influenced by the 'kids in museums' national initiative 'Takeover Day'<sup>33</sup> that invites young people to take over jobs that normally are done by adults, offered a free event with timed activities encouraging early years children to explore museum jobs (e.g. transporting objects, gallery patrol, storing objects). The tasks that children were meant to perform were grouped as schematic play themes. The recordings from the GoPro cameras offered a perspective on early years children's natural behaviour in the dedicated space.

c) At Tate Britain, the dedicated team of early years and families developed a child-friendly resource (Swatch) that children can use during the visit to enhance their verbal and visual communication. The resource can be as a viewfinder and comprises

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<sup>33</sup> Kids in museums, Takeover day, 2019, <https://kidsinmuseums.org.uk/what-we-do/takeover-day/> (accessed 06/07/20).



of pieces of materials approximately A6 in size that are similar in design to paint colour or material swatch. It can be fanned out or taken apart and includes pieces with images of everyday objects and places that are viewed in juxtaposition to the Tate space. The resource was developed based on observations of how children navigate and respond to the gallery space during visits.

It is noticeable in the reviewed cases studies that consultancy groups with families and co-participation are not a common practice for the development of programmes. Evident is also the small number of museums that provide child-led programmes and dedicated exhibitions/spaces for early years. An exemption constitutes the 3 cases studies (the Whitworth Art Gallery, the Great North Museum, Tate Britain) that explore and strengthen the children's perspective in the experience by conducting observations of children's interactions with(in) the museum/gallery space. Perhaps, this lack of participation and integration of the participants' perspective in the development of programmes is compensated with the emerging emphasis on the value of reflection and evaluation to improve the current provision. The voices on the potential of evaluation to offer new perspectives on the design of programmes and improvement of the existed ones are multiplying; however, it is noticeable in the publicised material for the case studies that early years children's direct perspectives and voices are not evident. Illustrative comments are provided by the adults regarding to the children's experiences. For example, in the following reflections on 'The Treasures of the Museum' programme at the Museum of London Docklands, adults comment on children's experiences and enjoyment:

“ I think it [the messy play] really changed him. He used to feel really funny about getting dirty but now he’s bit more open to it. We try and do more of that kind of messy thing now.’

– Family project participant, May 2019

Children enjoyed having something to take home with them after the sessions. The first session involved children discovering a special stone, which some of them brought back to the second session as well. We took photographs throughout the project and the adults really enjoyed being able to look back at them. At the end of the project we created a photo album which was left at the Children’s Centre” (in Smith 2020:12).

Table 1. Description of programmes for targeted groups (as these appear at the Early Years Toolkit, 2020)<sup>34</sup>

<b>Museum/Gallery</b>	<b>Type of provision</b>	<b>Targeted Audience</b>
Dulwich Picture Gallery	Painting exploration through singing, movement, role-play and art making activity	Families
Fulham Palace	Explore the historic site with family-friendly themes and activities in line with the Development Matters framework ensuring that adult family members are also learning.	Families with children 2-4 yrs
Hampton Court Palace	Interactive storytelling session (pre and post training sessions for teachers, resources for follow up work in the classroom)	Early years setting (under 5s)

<sup>34</sup> Early Years toolkit, Museum of London <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/toolkits/early-years-toolkit/stage-1> (04/04/20)

Islington Heritage	10 weeks project with creating workshops including illustration, model building, messy play, light installations, music production and spoken word as conduits to help families explore and respond to collections.	Families with one child under five experiencing mental health challenges
Jewish Museum London	Workshops: Object handling, story, object searching in the gallery, craft activity	School groups
London Transport Museum	Singing and story sessions and object handling (under 5) Family Zone for children under 7, potential outreach activities	Families
Manchester Museum	Sensory play and craft activities. The outcomes from the sessions were used to develop a play/story book called 'The peacock who came to the library' and a bag of sensory resources to be used alongside it. This is now available for families to use in the children's library. A weekend event was held in the library for the wider community to engage with the peacock and crane. Activities included South Asian dance performances based on the story of 'The Peacock and the Crane' (Aesop's fables).	Families
Museum of London in the City, the Museum of London Docklands in Canary Wharf	1. Participatory Show 2. Messy Play Storytelling, experimenting with a variety of wet and dry materials, use different tools to engage with the	Families Toddlers, children up to 5

and the Museum of London	<p>messy materials to help develop motor skills and hand to eye coordination</p> <p>3. Self-directed resources (explored bags for 2-5 yrs)</p>	(identified with the Children's Centre families who were not
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Archaeological Archive in Hackney	<p>4. Sensory experiences with materials; Activities/ craft, music, movement; Storytelling; Independent exploration</p> <p>5. Family -friendly interventions (spaces and objects in the galleries offering opportunities for open-ended play and are multi-user and multi-generational.</p>	visiting the museum to participate) Families
National Maritime Museum in Greenwich	Multi-sensory object-based explorations for self-led visits	Families (and for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)
National Museums Scotland	Children in the role of museum engineers fix a broken clock (basic engineering concepts, storytelling)	Families with under-fives and nurseries (3-5 yrs)
Orleans House Gallery	<p>1. Mindful practices,</p> <p>2. Art, music and storytelling provision for under5s</p>	<p>Families (only for adults)</p> <p>Only for children</p>
Pallant House Gallery	Storytelling, visit to gallery spaces and practical activities in the studio, school in residence programme	<p>Families</p> <p>Nursery groups</p>

<p>Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia</p>	<p>Story pot sessions carry the heavy eight- foot square Story Pot carpet into the permanent collection. The children select 3 objects as characters for their story. The stories are improvised as a group with an artist-educator as a facilitator.</p>	<p>Sessions for children</p>
<p>Sewerby Hall</p>	<p>Skills-based courses on healthy eating (children and adults may participate in different activities since the skills – based activities are targeting the adults</p>	<p>Traveller families, refugees, and adults experiencing mental health problems.</p>
<p>Tate Britain (Early Years and Families EY&amp;F team)</p>	<p>1. Development of resource with artists based on observations of how early years children respond to the gallery space. The object-resource consists of pieces of materials that can be fanned out taken apart. On some pieces there are images of everyday objects, a mirror, a hole to act as viewfinder, print surfaces, orange Perspex.</p> <p>2. Artist-led events</p> <p>Families use a range of materials to build, assemble and create new spaces to respond to artwork and the gallery space.</p>	<p>1.Children with speech and language difficulties and their families. In partnership with local children’s centres and services in Westminster and Lambeth City Councils.</p> <p>2.Child-led sessions</p>

Tate Liverpool, and with the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea, Wales	Cultural Residencies: Shared learning experience between the gallery and the school	Nursery school children – sessions led by children’s interests and teachers using Tate’s framework for creative learning
The Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum	<p>1. Workshops with songs, rhymes and stories relating to a museum theme including the use of props</p> <p>2. Free play with our sensory resources and storybooks (0–2yrs)</p> <p>3. Themed craft (3–5yrs)</p>	Families with under-fives, formal nursery workshop, autism-friendly session
The Fitzwilliam Museum; Cambridge University Botanic Garden	<p>1. Cultural Residencies</p> <p>2. Magic sessions</p> <p>Exploring a theme connected with the displays, open-ended play where babies and adults to explore colours, textures, patterns and shapes which are similar to the museum objects; music, singing, rhymes, in art studio to explore materials that would be off limits in the gallery. These might range from clay to paint, from water play to investigating natural materials.</p>	Nursery school children  0-2 yrs, families

<p>The Great North Museum: Hancock is part of Newcastle University and Tyne &amp; Wear Archives &amp; Museums.</p>	<p>1. Makaton signs/symbols in interpretation and activity cards to encourage deeper interaction within exhibitions.</p> <p>2. Schematic play themes to explore museum jobs offered as timed activities to be explored at the family's own pace</p> <p>3. GoPros cameras on a 'gallery patrol' for 15-30 minutes and see how children engage with resources of different formats, from a few minutes up to an hour recording of interaction within the museum space.</p>	<p>Supports the communication needs of very young children and visitors with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Families Early Years Children, home educated family groups</p>
<p>The Herbert Art Gallery &amp; Museum</p>	<p>Themed Exhibitions that are designed around open-ended and sensory play and link with the museum's main exhibitions</p>	<p>Children, SEND children and families</p>
<p>The Holburne Museum</p>	<p>Song, storytelling and creative, sensory activities inspired by the museum collection, exhibitions, grounds and the seasons.</p>	<p>Children accompanied by an adult/families</p>
<p>The Horniman Museum &amp; Gardens</p>	<p>Outdoor play, sensorial exploration of natural materials for the family</p>	<p>Families with under 5s</p>
<p>The Postal Museum</p>	<p>1. Storytelling session including the use of rhyme, drama and song and engagement with sensory props and a big size of the children's book The Jolly Postman, literacy learning programme linking the fictional story of the book to the</p>	<p>School groups and early years teachers</p>

	<p>history of post through hands on engagement with collections,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Dedicated learning space</li> <li>3. Digital learning resource,</li> <li>4. CPD early years teachers to use confidently story telling in the classroom.</li> </ol>	
The Samsung Digital Discovery Centre -The British Museum	Drop in sessions with an under 2s area to explore themes related to the collection using technology (tablets, video, 3D models)	Families with under-fives
The Whitworth Part of the University of Manchester	The Early Years Atelier inspired by the philosophy of Reggio Emilia (child-led) Family events	Early Years Children
Yorkshire Sculpture Park	Activities and resources for playful family interpretation of the art, outdoor and indoor immersive storytelling for under 5s (child-led) and sensory session for families with new born babies.	Families (with under 5s)

A distinctive type of museum programme is the residencies offered by museums to nurseries and pre-school settings. The residencies operate on the basis that they provide continuity of educational experiences that build on children's interests and active engagement with the museum/gallery objects and spaces. Three of these programmes are included as exemplar case studies in the Museum of London Early Years Toolkit: a) the Fitzwilliam Museum and Cambridge University Botanic Garden offered a residency to nine children (aged 3 to 4 from a nursery in central Cambridge,



b) the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea (Wales) and Tate Liverpool offered cultural residencies to early years school groups (aged 4 to 5) which were researched by DeWitt, King, Wright and Measures (2018) for their benefits to participating children. The research, influenced by the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development that emphasises the role of interaction as one of the principal drivers in children's development, was conducted with the participation of two reception classes at the National Waterfront Museum and the participation of 12 children (3-4yrs old) in Tate Liverpool. The residencies were completed over a period of five weeks. The daily visits were structured to combine elements of experiences that children were familiar with from the nursery/school settings such as storytelling, singing, craft making, free play in home corners with activities and experiences that relate to the gallery/museum settings and objects (e.g. having lunch at the café, exploring geometrical shapes in paintings). During the residencies, children were free to pursue and extend their interests while engaging with the museum's interpretative narratives and objects through interactive sessions and activities. Interviews with the museum educators and teachers (and some supplementary documentation) were analysed against the areas of development of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework to suggest that children's imagination, personal, social and linguistic development benefited from the enriched learning environment. Engagement with real objects extended the scope of communication, and nearly every aspect of the experience offered opportunities for social interaction contributing to children's development. Transitional objects such as learning journals enabled the participants to make transitions between the settings. At the same time, the extended nature of communication between the museum and nursery practitioners allowed them to deepen the educational offer. DeWitt *et al.* (2018) conclude that the

increased child/adult ratio, the striking balance between familiarity and novelty in the designed educational activities, the extended length and the rich nature of the experience are some of the key critical factors that contribute to the beneficial outcomes of the residencies. The findings of what makes residencies in museums a powerful learning experience corroborate with findings from a similar enquiry in New Zealand that will be discussed below.

Overall, the exploration of museums' provision for early years, as illustrated in the selected case studies cannot offer conclusive outcomes. It suggests though that there are distinctive types of museum programmes and provisions for children either in a family or organised school context and indicates that the offer of programmes that view children as autonomous museum visitors or are child-led are limited and probably dependent on collaborations with Higher Education Institutions. Further research is needed to explore the parameters that shape the museum provision in the UK including an investigation of the staff's professional profiles and how knowledge of learning theories and expertise in early childhood shaped the cases that are considered to be an exemplar. It would be interesting to locate these findings within the wider field of museum education in the UK that experienced a decline in terms of the status and value of museum learning in the museum and the wider educational terrain.

## **2.2. A brief international perspective**

To contextualise the discussion on the status of early childhood in museums in the UK I will briefly provide here some insights into the demographics of published research in early childhood and museums as this is illustrated in Andre *et al* (2017) review and some reflections on the status of early childhood in museums in New Zealand, a

country that has received worldwide attention for its innovative approaches in early childhood curriculum.

### 2.2.1. *The perspective from New Zealand*

Reflections on the beneficial role of museum learning for preschool children in the context of formal education can be also traced in one of the two worldwide known cases of museums that accommodate nursery settings in their premises taking the idea of residencies a step further: The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa that houses a full day, mixed age (3 months to 5 years) nursery and the Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center<sup>35</sup> (SEEC) with three sites located in the National Museum of Natural History and the National Museum of American History<sup>36</sup>.

The early childhood curriculum in New Zealand encourages commitment to implementing bicultural practices. The museum of Te Papa Tongarewa is in a unique position to offer daily access to collections of a living culture and to embrace values relevant for bicultural practice since it houses in its premises a nursery. The museum staff, based on a practitioner inquiry methodology, explored if interaction with a range of cultural taonga (treasures) deepens children's understanding of the bicultural heritage of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Teachers who had an interest in te ao Maori and the implementation of bicultural practice were interviewed to articulate examples of how whanaungatanga (relationships) are conceptualised by teachers. The findings along with the documentation of children's learning identified three main themes that

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<sup>35</sup> The Smithsonian Early Enrichment Centre in Washington DC.

<https://www.si.edu/seec/about>

(accessed 01/07/20)

<sup>36</sup> Although references can be found on the educational programmes for early childhood for families and relevant funding initiatives at the National Museum of Natural History and the National Museum of American History (see Hindley and Edwards 2017), research studies and publications that focus on how the nursery settings operate in the three sites cannot be found.

underpin the early years' practices in the museum that could be of value to other museums and early years settings and foster the collaboration between the two:

a) Via frequent visits to the museums' exhibition spaces and interaction with the artefacts that foster connections between the past, the present and the future, children increased their "familiarity and 'comfortableness' with the physical environment" demonstrating a sense of ownership of the museum space (Clarkin-Phillips, Paki, Armstrong and Crowe 2012:11). Having a sense of belonging in the museum space and engaging in routines and practices that allow them to conceptualise the Maori knowledge in a contemporary context they made connections with artefacts, the landscape and the culture. The museum is seen as 'a place within the community'. Thus, the notion of relationships that is central in the national curriculum for early years and also permeates the museum practices and the Maori culture offered a shared purpose and meaning to be explored between the museum and the nursery; b) There was a continuity of practices and learning between the kindergarten and the museum. By embedding language and rituals in everyday practice in the nursery, children's understanding of the cultural traditions and awareness of the place was enriched. Gradually teachers and children took responsibility to host visits for other centres sharing their knowledge and familiarity with the museum with the visiting groups and c) The practices at the kindergarten created opportunities to extend the reciprocal relationships between children, teachers and the museum spaces. The use of 'boundary objects' was one of these practices that facilitated the learning processes and the connection between the familiar and the strange. They strengthened the relationship between the kindergarten and the museum since they offered a tangible impetus to contextualise children's experiences. The kindergarten also provided

opportunities for the children to make authentic connections with the living culture involving the parents in community events and significant traditional ceremonies.

The aforementioned example might be an exemption in the overall picture of provision in early years in museums in New Zealand, perhaps due to the fact that is one of the few museums that receive governmental rather than regional funding. Terreni (2013) argues that early years children are not fully recognised as cultural citizens and are under-presented when it comes to educational provision for organised early years school groups in art museums. Although arts education is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum Te Whariki, art museums are not directly identified as spaces to visit and to experience learning. Thus, although in 2013 there were 19 well-established art museums in urban centres and 95% of children under 5 years were identified by the Ministry of Education to attend an early years programme, the art museums' educational provision for organised visits was limited (Terreni 2013). Contrary to the international voices<sup>37</sup> articulated at that time to ensure access to groups that traditionally have not participated in museum visits and are considered to be underrepresented, the children's agency as cultural participants in museums was not acknowledged. Early years children's experiences in art museums depended on teachers' choices to organise self-guided visits. Some of the larger museums in the main cities of New Zealand, influenced by the international trends in art museums, increased their services to offer family participation. Nonetheless, according to Terreni (2013) such approaches do not compensate for the role that art museums could be playing to strengthen links between formal education and museums.

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<sup>37</sup> I.e. Sandell 1998

### 2.2.2. *International demographics of research in early childhood in museums*

Andre *et al* (2017:47) reviewed research that was conducted over the last decade on children's learning experiences in museums by focusing mainly on three types of interactivity: 'child-adults/peers; child – technology and child-environment'. The focus on interactivity was based on the belief that interactivity 'is increasingly seen as essential in children's learning experiences in a museum context and the view of learning 'as embedded in the interactive process between children and knowledgeable ones, and media at hand' (Andre *et al* 2017:48). The review focused on 44 research papers that were published in English and referred to empirical research that was conducted in different types of museums including science centres, art galleries, natural history museums and children's museums. Perhaps, the focus on interactivity can be also explained if one takes into account that the majority of the research that Andre *et al.* examined took place in science (36%) and natural history museums (29%) in which interactive hands-on activities tend to prevail as communication modes in exhibition spaces, with research in art museums/galleries (21%) and children museums (14%) covering a smaller percentage of the reviewed sources.

The review attempted to illustrate quantitatively the field of empirical studies on children's museum learning by offering a perspective on the demographics of the research studies. Out of 44 studies, more than half were conducted in the US (59.09%) and the rest in Australian museums (13.63%), in the UK (9.09%), in European countries (9.09%), 6.81% in Asia and 2.27% in Canada (Andre *et al* 2017:53). Overall, the reviewed studies focused on children who were older than six years with the majority of studies that focused on children under 9 years old taking place in the US and Australia. This finding suggests that research in the early years in museums is underdeveloped. It is also worth noting that two-thirds of the research was conducted

within the context of organised school visits to museums with the remaining, mainly focusing on family visits. The review showed that the most common type of activities in all types of museums are hands-on activities including interaction with technological media in which the child is directly engaged having control of the activity or/and receiving guidance from an experienced other. Overall, the analysis of the literature showed that research over the past decade focused mainly on the interaction between adults and children while it was noticeable that the focus on peer-to-peer interaction and children's exploratory behaviour during museum visits was limited.

### **2.3. Museum family learning**

Families are positioned as particular communities of practice in audience visitor studies research, offering an understanding of the complexities of family learning in the context of museum learning. Falk and Dierking (2000) in their definition of what constitutes a family emphasise that all members are not necessarily biologically related and that members of a family self-define themselves as such. Perhaps what makes families distinctive as a visitor group is that usually family learning involves an intergenerational group of learners that interact with each other and the museum in any possible format ranging from interaction in a free-choice movement to participation in organised activities and interpretative mediums. The emphasis on intergenerational interaction is widely acknowledged in the literature (Bell, Lewenstein, Shouse, Feder 2009; Meade, 2009; Sterry & Beaumont, 2005; Wolf & Wood, 2012) or implicit in the museum practices<sup>38</sup>. Definitions of family learning as intergenerational are also in line

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<sup>38</sup> The museums' practices and provision for families also reflect the museums' understanding of what constitutes a family. This is evident in the way families constitute a special section in museums' websites and marketing material, in the idea of what constitutes a family ticket and the nature of the activities offered (e.g. workshops, trails, storytelling, handling sessions).

with the family studies research in museums that focuses on patterns in interaction<sup>39</sup>. Indicatively, I will mention here two of these researches. The first study (Knutson and Crowley 2010) illustrates a strand of research that describes family interaction as verbal communication and focuses on more didactic approaches to learning since the families' verbal communication is viewed in the context of the museum's intended message. The second study (Alston 2018) still exemplifies the approach of family learning as an intergenerational process but could be located in the more recent strand of the socio-cultural perspective since learning in this context is viewed as a scaffolded process and not as subject knowledge.

Knutson and Crowley (2010) aimed to explore how family learning takes place in art museums by looking at family conversations in art museums and how these are mediated by the provision of materials (visual representations of original artwork), hands-on activities and experiences in specially designed rooms for families with children. The study consisting of 50 pairs (a parent and a child 8-11 years old) complemented earlier research that focused on the structure and patterns of interaction positioning the parent in the role of the experienced other and also focused on the content of the interaction in terms of the subject knowledge that relates to the collections. The research analysis proposed that art museums or any type of museums that use interactive discovery rooms as a provision for families should consider how the museum mediates the disciplinary knowledge that parents may be lacking and not be able to integrate into the discussion without the museum's mediation. The thematic analysis of the interaction showed four categories of talk that may overlap. A) '*Personal connections*' both in the form of prior knowledge and in conversations of the families'

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<sup>39</sup> see McManus 1987; Dierking 1987; Dierking 1989



everyday learning experience are frequent in the interaction and may reinforce group identities. B) Families describe visual aspects of the artwork '*criticising*' what is immediately observed without considering how and why the work was created. C) When the choices of the artist are taken into account along with consideration of aspects of the artwork that relate to techniques and the artists' motivations and decision making regarding the work, then the verbal interaction is identified as '*creative talk*'. D) The final theme of the analysis was the broader '*context*' of the art as this is placed in the context of art history (Knutson and Crowley 2010:13). The research analysis suggested that most of the talk in the art gallery was based on personal connections and criticism while all families attempted at least once to consider the artist and the wider context within which the artwork is placed and valued. Interpretive information and material that were offered in the specially designed rooms for families at the very beginning of the visit were used by the families and helped to compare and interpret the artwork in the gallery (Knutson and Crowley 2010).

Similar findings in terms of the role that museum interpretation and information can play in family learning are also traced in more recent ethnographic research conducted by Alston (2018) which also emphasises the role of social interaction in the meaning-making process. The empirical research drawing upon the paradigm of socio-constructivism seeks to explore how meaning is constructed in the dialogue between the family and the museum. It looks critically at how self-guided family visitors learn in museums spaces with free-choice learning and suggests that information in museum interpretation can help equip the families to create conditions for learning by offering entry points to access objects and to scaffold the family interactions. Interpretive labels with contextual information and prompting questions to facilitate engagement with the objects, interaction with museum staff, learning through observation and imitation and

object-handling are some of the mediums via which museums facilitate access to the collections. Alston (2018) argues that the provision of contextual knowledge about the objects serves to scaffold the learning interaction between the family members and to optimise the engagement with interactive objects and activities. Perhaps, the research to be firmly positioned within the realm of socio-constructivism could have viewed the individuals' identities and interactions as evolving and shaped by the community of practice to which individuals belong to. Thus, the focus could be placed on the family as a dynamic system within which there are opportunities to explore new roles and to obtain new understandings and form identities.

Ellenbogen, Luke and Dierking (2004) identify family learning research that focuses on interactions within the museum space as descriptive since it does not take into account the network of social relationships within which family interactions take place. They propose that the focus on family research in museums should reflect a more holistic understanding of the family as an educational institution with a larger social context and learning infrastructure. They pose questions about the focus of family learning research and the way it is conducted to argue that studies are needed that move beyond the immediate context of the museum visit to understand how identity shapes interaction and is affected by the museum visit. This suggestion reflects the socio-cultural shift in theoretical perspectives about what constitutes family learning that was noticed in visitor studies research in the mid-1990s and was later influenced by Wegner's (1998) theory of communities of practice. For example, research conducted on family agendas for museum visits, located on the premise that social interaction and language play a role in creating and sustaining shared understandings, placed the findings within a certain socio-cultural context. It viewed family agendas for museum visiting as a dynamic process that is influenced by a range

of factors and at the same time influences museum visits (Moussouri 1997, Gioftsali 2005). Equally in Rowe and Kisiel's research study (2012:65) family interactions at aquarium touch tanks were seen as examples of mediated action viewing 'learning as something that is distributed among agents, tools, and contexts' to explore '*how engagement is mediated by the language and interactional routines*' used by the interpretative materials and the visitors themselves. The research focused on the shared set of values, vocabulary and understandings that constitute families a community. It prompted researchers to examine the participation in museum visits within the broader context of the families' social relationships, experiences and memories. Emphasis was placed on how meaning is constructed within a long-term context of participation in museum programmes, while museums were viewed as one of the many institutions within the more extensive learning infrastructure.

#### **2.4. Research for young children's museum experiences**

Over the past two decades, a shift is noticed from research that focuses on children's museum experiences placing children as objects and 'human becomings' to studies that acknowledge children as active subjects and meaning makers. In particular, within the theoretical frames of constructivism and/or socio-constructivism the focus is placed on the role and nature of social interaction in the museum experience and the opportunities that are given to children to have a voice and choice regarding the structure and content of the museum experience. Flexible museum experiences with adults reconsidering their role from educators to facilitators that design more participatory experiences seem to be a stepping stone in further developments.

##### *2.4.1. Children as 'human becomings'*

Children's museums may have been the first museums designed with children and young children as audiences. Museums strive to increase their audiences and consider early childhood audiences in the design of programmes and interpretation of collections. The inclusion of young children in the museums' audiences is viewed as a target to ensure 'lifelong learning partnerships' (Piscitelli, Weier and Everett 2012:160). It is believed that satisfactorily museum visitation in the early years will prepare young children to become 'cultural citizens with museum literacy and museum-visiting habits' (Wong and Piscitelli 2019:430). This is a view that seems to permeate early to most recent research in early childhood in museums. As an example of earlier research, I will mention here Kindler and Darras (1997) who interviewed 120 four and five-year-old children from upper-middle-class families in urban centres in Canada and France to investigate children's references to what constitutes a museum. Children's responses were categorised according to function/purpose, the place/environment, a number of physical descriptors and behaviours that relate to museum visits as these are seen from an adult's perspective. Some of the children's responses were considered to be 'misconceptions' and 'very limited in scope' pointing out the necessity for museum educators and teachers to ensure that young children develop the attitudes and beliefs required for children's continuous learning and enjoyment in museums (Kindler and Darras 1997:138). Early years children as viewed as 'future museum audiences' who will appreciate 'the role of museums as institutions of both leisure and learning' (Kindler and Darras 1997:141). Similar references to the belief that early experiences in museums will influence future museum visits are often found in more recent early childhood research in museums explaining how such views affected the shift in museum education from didactic to child-centred approaches that prioritise learning through play:

'Recently, initiatives have been undertaken to make the pedagogical approaches of museums more childcentered through play and social interaction. This is important because early experiences in museums influence future visits to museums in both childhood and later life' (Aerila *et al.* 2016:145).

'Changing conceptualizations of children and the value and significance of consulting with children have been reflected in the changing approaches [...] This has been particularly evident in efforts to shift from the traditional view of a museum as a place for educating children to a more child-centered view of the power of children learning through play and interaction [...] Aligned with this shift is the realization that children's early experiences in a museum are influential in determining future visits, both during childhood and later life (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Kelly, Savage, Griffin, & Tonkin, 2004)' cited in Dockett, Main and Kelly (2011:15).

Given that museums potentially are multi-sensory environments with tangible resources and real objects one can easily assume that museums and exhibitions can offer a range of opportunities for young children and to function as learning sites beyond the formal school system. There is a wealth of literature that points out how museum learning can encompass a diversity of approaches to promote social interaction, collaboration and playful hands-on experimentation to cater for the needs of their young audiences that visit museums either in a family or a preschool context.

Early research that focuses on young children's experiences of museums suggests that young children remember their museum visits with a range of factors contributing to a strong recall of their experiences. The emotional and affective context of the visit, active involvement and links with children's lives are some of the features that shape children's memories (Wolins, Jensen and Ulzheimer 1992; Tuckey 1992; Kindler and

Darras 1997; Piscitelli and Weler 2002). Wolins *et al.* (1992) study located within the realm of developmental psychology focused on museums as a 'real-world event' to study children's memories rather than to exclusively research how children experience the museum. Eight to nine years old school children were asked to recall an event that occurred in a museum field trip. A number of variables affected children's memories, including the opportunities for personal involvement during the visit and further engagement with activities related to the museum either via follow up classroom-based work or museum visits. In this earlier research children may not be positioned as active agents in the research process while the recalling of experience is not an indication either of learning or the quality of the experience, however, they still provide a considerable indication of what children may value in the museum experience. Overall, it should be stated here that although visitor studies research was emerging as a field in the 80s and 90s, research that aimed to investigate how early years experienced museums was limited. This is perhaps due to the belief that it is difficult to generate data with early years children. One of the milestone international studies that aimed to address this remarkable lack of research and to give voice to young children's experiences was undertaken by Piscitelli and Anderson (2000; 2002; Anderson, Piscitelli and Everett 2008).

#### *2.4.2. Children as meaning makers*

The research took place in Brisbane, Australia over a period of three years in collaboration with the Queensland University, the Queensland Art Gallery, the Queensland Museum, the Queensland Science centre and the Global Arts Link in Australia. The team developed a set of questions aiming to evaluate young children's understanding of museum environments and exhibits, to identify the impact of

repetitive museum visits, to identify the factors that affect informal museum-based learning, to implement new programmes and to explain how young children become enculturated into museums via the family and school context. Based on a socio-constructivist perspective, the research viewed children's experiences as mediated through social contexts and perceived learning both as a process and an outcome. Thus, children's experiences were viewed in a context of interaction with each other, the environment, the exhibits and the focus on learning was extended beyond the context of cognitive learning to acknowledge its social dimension. The participants were volunteers from a range of socio-economic groups, including children aged 4 to 8 years. Four studies were undertaken, each one with its own focus, methods and numbers of participants, to meet the ambitious set aims. Within the context of the first qualitative study that focused on children's learning in museums, children's verbal and non-verbal interactions were audio and videotaped to analyse along with interview data. The numbers of children participating in the research varied accordingly to the aim of the study. For example, in the second study that researched the quality and frequency of museum visits four classes of 30 children participated in a survey (n=120) whose responses were compared with a control group of 120 children who had visited the museums but did not engage in the newly implemented programmes. The last two studies focused on the museums and the curriculum's strategic approaches to enhance children's learning and community links. Children (43 males and 34 females) participated in a 'Child Focused Survey' that comprised of a drawing activity, a semi-structured interview with children and a guided questionnaire with a series of Likert scales questions to provide an insight into young children's perspectives of museum environments. The findings showed that children regarded museums 'as places that were happy, exciting, and provided opportunities to learn and gain many ideas'

(Piscitelli and Anderson 2000:7). They rated highly exhibits and displays that provided context and links to children's current or past experiences and were impressed by exhibits that were large in size. The research findings, contrary to what one would expect from earlier research<sup>40</sup>, suggested that the interactivity of the exhibits is not a determinant factor in what children value. In line with the view of constructivism that places significance on learners' prior knowledge, children rated positively exhibits they could connect to and were familiar with. This finding posed the challenge for museum educators not to simply rely on the contextual information that is embedded in museum labels but to actively explore children's worlds, experiences and understandings to develop an interpretation that has relevance for the early years' audience (Piscitelli and Anderson 2002). Accessible interpretation and flexible interaction with the children that listen to their voices, their past experiences and allows them to construct knowledge are some of the research's suggested implications for museum practitioners.

In particular, a smaller-scale study that constituted part of the aforementioned research and was conducted with small groups of children aged 4 to 6 years highlighted the need for museum educators to offer flexible museum experiences that allow children to gain more control of the content and structure of the experience (Anderson *et al.* 2008). The children took place in the context of organised museum tours for school groups. The interactions with museum educators showed that children have their own agendas that may compete with the agendas of the museum educators. For example, children may be interested in the subject matter depicted in the painting

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<sup>40</sup> Wolins, Jensen and Ulzheimer 1992; Tuckey 1992; Knapp 2000. The suggestion that hands-on experiences are memorable is also confirmed by Pace and Tesi (2004) who interviewed eight adults between the ages of twenty- five and thirty-one to recall their school field trip experiences from kindergarten to the twelfth grade. It was found that participation in hands-on activities during field trips made the trips enjoyable and memorable.



and are interested in exploring the content further while the museum educator refocuses the discussion to the artistic dimension of the painting aiming to enhance the child's appreciation of art. In the study that took place in a natural history museum, children were preoccupied with questions that focused on what was real, fabricated, stuffed or formerly alive and were curious if they will encounter dinosaurs during the visit. In contrast, the museum educators' agenda was more focused on providing a general orientation to the museum space and introducing children to the exhibits as preparation for future museum visits. The analysed conversations showed that adults control the conversation to orient it to the predetermined content of the tour. Tension in the agendas also emerges in terms of the available time for the visit. Children appreciate the time to explore freely while in the context of organised tours, museum educators have to keep up with the schedule of the pre-plan visit. Listening to young children and negotiating the museum curriculum seem to be the suggested way forward.

Ampartzaki, Kypriotaki, Voreadou, Dardioti and Stathi (2013) present an example of a synergy between a natural history museum and a university department of preschool education to highlight the value of integrating educational theory into museum practice to develop programmes for the early year. The museum education team was introduced to three learning principles in science education – 'conceptual understanding, procedural knowledge and investigative expertise' – and to learning theories that advocate the role of the learner in the teaching process to critically analyse the existed provision and to further develop programmes that moved beyond the presentation of facts and conceptual knowledge (Ampartzaki *et al.* 2013:9). The new programmes were implemented and reflected upon within the framework of participatory action research allowing the educators to oscillate between theory and

practice. The programmes were developed in stages with phase one showing, along with the principles of the constructivist learning theory, the importance of co-constructing knowledge through learning interactions between children, peers, educators and members of the community. In phase two of the programme development children were offered the opportunity to ask their own questions about the topics in discussion and to embark on an investigation in collaboration with the adults. The educators felt the need to understand the nature of interaction with the learners within the frame of co-construction before moving to fully embracing working collaboratively with children to negotiate the learning targets and process (Ampartzaki *et al.* 2013:11). The programmes (six one-hour representative sessions) were analysed through a coding procedure. The codes reflected the aspects of the museum's programmes that were affected over the course of the research and focused on children's actions and responses, the role of all adults (teachers, parents/carers/museum educators), learning targets and the use of resources. The findings suggest that the frequency and quality of children's interaction improved to reflect an increase in children's talk (describing, asking questions, recalling information). Accordingly, the museum educators' role shifted from a didactic to a more participatory role that facilitated children's individual and peer work and involved teachers and /or carers in the programmes. The research constitutes an example of the value of integrating theory into practice to empower museum educators to develop as a community of practice that makes informed choices and realises the significance of interrogating its situated knowledge as a community. By opening up to critical reflection, collaboration with other community groups and becoming a learning community themselves, evident changes were made in practice. Museum tours may still be the main organised educational provision for early years group visits. There was a shift though from the

emphasis on the subject knowledge to the process of learning. Peer work was now encouraged and the status of children in the programme gradually changed from passive to a more participatory one. Children were given choice in terms of their group work, could voice their questions about the museum objects and the discussed topics while they were encouraged by museum educators to articulate longer responses that described situations, phenomena and objects.

This flexible approach that locates children's experiencing at the centre of the museum visit offering free choice and opportunities for the children to become active creators of meaning making may be illustrated in a case study research conducted with preschoolers in a historic house in Finland (Aerila, Rönkkö and Grönman 2016). The research was conducted with 14 preschool children (10 male, 4 female) ages 6-7 years who visited a historic house museum. First, the children visited to explore the house museum freely without supervision. This was followed by a guided tour and storytelling that was presented to children as a treasure hunt for a postcard. A story that was associated with the family who lived at the house was read to the children who were then asked to create their own ending to the story. In collaboration with sixth-grader children, the pre-schoolers provided their own endings to the story by choosing first an inspiring place in the museum to tell their story. They accompanied their stories with drawings they conducted. They also designed craft products that had relevancy for the children and the visit to the museum. They completed the whole process over the following two days at school by presenting their stories, crafts and reflecting upon the whole experience. The research aimed to evaluate the use of follow-up stories and craft products as an integral part of the museum experience. The findings indicate that children included in their stories details that were visible at the museum environment and were connected to the stories they heard at the museum. The activities helped

children form a personal bond with the museum artefacts bringing their experiences of the historic house into the craft products. The study suggests that arts-based activities support children's learning and participation in museum experiences and also point out that children are interested in artefacts they view when these are associated with the stories they hear at museum tours. They value the feeling of not being hurried, the freedom to make their own choices and to create in less structured activities (Aerila *et al.* 2016).

Young children may be naturally inclined to explore museums and galleries with their innate curiosity and sense of wonder while the museums' intention is to provide organised tours and structured activities to act counterproductively to the museums' intention to enhance children's learning experiences in museums. Sotto (1994), when discussing the role of motivation techniques in classroom-based learning, reversed the focus of the question of *what strategies teachers can employ to motivate children* to consider *which are the current teaching practices in the classroom that demotivate children* from learning and exploring. Accordingly, rather than thinking of approaches that will enhance children's engagement in museums, museum educators may have to reconsider the activities that children are expected to participate in and the imposed structures and learning agendas that make children feel disempowered and uninterested in learning. For example, Piscitelli and Weier (2002) based on literature research and recorded observations of 4.000 young (0-8 years-old) children's experiences in an interactive art exhibition in Australia identify conditions and features that encourage young children to have high quality experiences in art museums. A supportive social atmosphere that encourages young children to use their minds, senses and bodies along with a welcoming physical environment that presents exhibits in an open-ended way and encourages playful involvement are some of the key factors

to encourage young children's participation before starting to consider further ways for engagement that give children choice and control of their experiences. The authors make an extensive list of suggestions that museum educators could take into account when developing programmes to elaborate on the supportive role of the adult in museum-led tours, the importance of collaboration with parents and teachers and the opportunities given to children to make their own meaning and personal connections with the art. Allowing children the freedom of exploration by giving them the leading role when visiting with their peers and families is also one of the suggested approaches (Piscitelli and Weier 2002) to encourage children to be spontaneous in their responses and open to interpretations.

The need for freedom in exploration is also evident in earlier research. Weier (2004) explored a number of art museum programs that encouraged children to act as guides for their parents/carers and peers during family and school visits. Part of the programmes that were reviewed was a research conducted by Jeffers (1999) with the participation of 19 children (aged 5 to 13) who were asked to act as tour guides for groups of pre and in-service schoolteachers. Although most of the children had limited experiences of visits to art museums, Jeffers (1999) comments that the children welcomed the task with enthusiasm. Preschool children aged 4 to 5 were asked to explain what they thought and felt about the art they viewed rather than having to act from an informed stance with knowledge about the context of the artwork. The same approach also applied for the children aged 6 to 13 with the main exception that they were first asked to describe the role of the guide before embarking on the tour. Both researchers (Jeffers 1999 and later Weier 2004) rely on the comments of schoolteachers who reflect on behalf of the children, to comment that children felt empowered taking control of the visit, making decisions about where to go and what

to focus on. The role of the adults equally in the context of the actual child-led tour and the research is significant. They evaluate the experience and play a crucial role in shaping the verbal interaction of the tour. This is also evident in similar studies (Durant 1996; Macgregor 2001; Piscitelli, Everett and Weier 2003) reviewed by Weier (2004) which analyse the interaction during the child-led museum tours to conclude that children demonstrated competency of acting as guides making connections between their own lives and the artwork and/or to provide factual information that they learnt via previous museum visits and preparatory work. They all emphasise the role of the adult in the process (who can be a teacher, a museum educator, a visitor or a parent depending on the context of the organised tour) to scaffold the interaction by drawing children's attention to particular details of the art and its context, introducing children to the language of visual arts and providing prompts to assist children to form hypotheses and make personal connections with the artwork. Adults are directed to listen carefully and to give children the space and time needed to share their experiences and lead the tour (Weier 2004; Piscitelli *et al* 2003; Piscitelli and Weier 2002).

## **2.5. Young children's perspectives and agency**

The literature review, in the context of my study, suggests that there is an emerging strand of research that aims to understand how children experience museums by drawing upon young children's perspectives and agency. Grounded in the 'new paradigm of the sociology of childhood' it views children as social actors who are worthy of study 'in their own right' rather than as 'human becomings' who are preparing for adulthood (James 2009:34; James and Prout 1997). These research studies will

be discussed here by taking into account the research aims, approaches and what the findings propose about young children's museum experiences.

Hackett (2014) conducted a qualitative research study that by focusing on four young children aged 24-26 months who visited with their family a museum in North England over the course of a year. The research, aiming to focus on young children's meaning-making of the museum as a place of significance, viewed children's walking and running in the museum space in the context of young people's communicative practices. The study builds on the Vygotskian concept that 'gestures, mark-making, and the creation and appropriation of objects are all significant aspects of meaning-making' perceived movement in the museum space as part of children's multimodal communication (Hackett 2014:7). As childhood studies literature has suggested the communicative practices of young children are associated with the development of children's identity and the negotiation of social relationships since they are coconstructed through their peer relationships (see Eyres 2016). Thus, Hackett (2014:11) claims that 'the experiencing and creating of place through walking is not only a physical activity but a communicative activity'. Walking, running, gestures and sensorial experiencing are communicative practices that make the museum a place. Children, when walking and running in the museum space they make meaning. They create their own lines of movement that constitute the museum for them. Accordingly, they are oblivious of museum spaces they have not walked in and experienced. In my view, the study not only acknowledges young children's walking as a communicative place making viewing children as actors in their own right but also values the experiencing of the museum space per se beyond the context of the specific interaction with the museum space and its communicative modes.

Wong and Piscitelli (2019) conducted one of the few studies on young children's learning experiences in the context of Asian museums. Their exploratory study involved two groups of ten kindergarten children (aged four to six) who over a period of six months visited three times the same museum in Hong Kong. The research findings focusing on young children's perceptions of museums contribute to the international discourse about young children's museum visiting experiences and participation in museum programmes. The first visit involved children in a museum tour led by the museum staff - this is considered to be standard practice for organised school visits for early years. A child-led element was integrated into the second visit while the third visit following the collaboration of the museum and the school adopted a 'child-docent-teacher-centred approach' (Wong and Piscitelli 2019:422). Children were interviewed a month following the last museum visit to reflect on their experiences. From the data analysis three categories emerged: a) museums are viewed as 'spaces for objects': children notice the museum environment and its features making specific references to exhibits demonstrating an understanding that museum objects are not ordinary objects, b) 'museums are venues for interaction' with objects and adults while multiple visits to the same museum increase children's confidence when interacting with exhibits and people at the museum and c) 'museums are places that accommodate people with different interests and needs' with children holding the perspective that adults and children may have different agendas for museum visitation and that museum tours are meant to be organised for adults who can learn and recall information (Wong and Piscitelli 2019:424-427). The research showed once more, corroborating with previous findings on museums and young children, that choice and individual investigation to wander around and explore spaces and objects of interest are valued by children who also recognise that visiting the



museum in a family context will give them more freedom for exploration. Children having been given the space to express their voices and views, state that they see organised school visits as activities associated with learning with adults acting as learners and guides (Wong and Piscitelli 2019). These findings echo earlier visitor study research with adults that stresses the importance of free choice in museum visits as a factor that contributes to higher levels of motivation and ownership of the learning process (Falk and Dierking 2000; Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1995) and strongly suggest that there is a disparity between children and adults' agendas.

Within the realm of early years research that viewed young children as competent social actors, we can also trace the Dockett, Main and Kelly's (2011) consultation of young children to influence the design of a designated area for young children aged 0-5 at the Australian Museum. The researchers are aware of the limitations of the status of children in their project, given that an authentic consultative process would involve real decision making and actual contribution to influence practice. They state that children's status was participatory in the sense that it offered some involvement in decision making and that the whole project was conceptualised and initiated by adults (Dockett, Main and Kelly 2011:15). A number of issues are also addressed by the researchers regarding compromises on the extent to which children's competence was acknowledged in the research process in the name of child protection. The intention though, at the core of the research, remains to promote children's agency in the research project. Forty children participated in the research in the context of visiting the museum with an adult, an adult and a sibling or the whole family. Data was generated via participatory observations while children were engaged in activities, children's drawings -role play-construct representations of their preferred museum experiences, photo and video tours of their preferred spaces, experiences and

activities along with the completion of journals following participation in one of the data generation activities. The data generation was facilitated by the adults, including the researchers. Via grounded theory analysis, a range of themes emerged that were interconnected providing an insight into the aspects of the museum experience that young children value. Children 'use imagination, creativity, and pretence' when engaging and interpreting museum objects (Dockett, Main and Kelly 2011:23). They notice the importance of the real objects and observe them in terms of the scale, size and context in which they are presented. The social context of the museum visit is also important for young children who commented on the importance of involving friends and visiting the museum with family members. The social context of the family seems to offer opportunities to make personal connections with their own lives and experiences which is an integral aspect of children's meaning-making of the museum objects and interpretative narratives. They notice the museum's physical space in terms of its affordances and 'read' the museum space for the explicit or implicit messages it conveys and filter their perception of exhibits with a sense of humour. The research shows that young children actively and holistically engage in museum experiences reading the physical space with its objects, connecting imaginatively with the artefacts, making meaning of the museum objects and narratives and appreciating the experiences for their dimension and potential as social events.

## **2.6 The spatial and material turn**

A recent strand is noticed in the field of early years childhood in museums that expands the way young children have been conceptualised and researched in museums. It directs our attention to the embodied dimension of the museum experience offering a holistic perspective in research and museum practice. In most cases, influenced by

Murris's (2016) notion of the 'post-human' child that pays attention to how meaning emerges from diffuse relationships between human and non-human encounters, children, objects and space are viewed in an entangled relationship. The research studies (along with the recently published cases of international museum practice<sup>41</sup> that could be placed within the material strand) contribute to the conceptualisation of the museum experience as an open, fluid and continuously evolving process that values young children's experiences without examining them for their learning potential. A few of these peer-reviewed researches will be discussed here to illustrate the strand's potential to help us move beyond the rhetoric of traditional educational discourses on children's engagement in museum learning.

First, I will refer to Carr *et al.*'s. (2018) research that changed the status of children from recipients of the museum provision to co-authors of the museum experience and proposed the museum visit as a 'forum of enquiry and critique' (Carr *et al.* 2018:558). The authors in collaboration with the teachers and the children researched museum visits from two culturally different early years education sites in New Zealand in which children were positioned as co-authors of their experience. The first case study was conducted with a kindergarten visit by four-year olds to the Museum Te Papa Tongarewa and the second with a Maori transition group of four- and five-years olds visiting Te Manawa, a regional museum. The museum pedagogy was influenced by the principles of the bicultural national early childhood curriculum in New Zealand that embrace children's empowerment to learn and grow and encourage children to expand their confidence via engagement in a wide range of enriching experiences. The research findings from both case studies suggested that the museum visit was described as 'a forum' which was co-authored by the children, the

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<sup>41</sup> See Hackett et al. 2020

educators and the museum artefacts. The authors clarify that it was the museum visit as this was shaped in interaction with objects and not the museum exhibition or the museum per se that acted as one of the three authors. This may be due to the particularity of the case studies which are weaving the principles of the curriculum with the Maori indigenous views of artefacts to create a museum pedagogy of co-authorship. Influenced by the curriculum's advocacy for 'reciprocal relationships between places and things' and the Maori indigenous wisdom that views material objects as animated entities with an 'energy flow' that spirals outward in relation to the wider network of relationships and entities of the world, they encouraged interactions that honoured these principles. All parties involved weaved stories from the past with opportunities for re-storying and the sharing of different perspectives in a reciprocal relationship.

Hackett *et al.* (2018a) in an edited collection on young children's museum geographies offers a range of questions to museum professionals that emerge when children's experiences are grounded in the experiencing body rather than in the cognitive perspective that views children as learners. For example, how a relational view of children's experiencing that acknowledges the geographical notions of entanglement and place-making would influence museums to consider the improvisatory and serendipitous nature of the museum experience when designing spaces and experiences for young children? These questions also emerge within the context of commissioned work to develop a framework for the analysis of museum spaces (Hackett *et al.* 2018b). The framework consisted of 4 spatial categories<sup>42</sup> as these emerged from spatial theory, childhood studies research and the early years foundation stage and collaborative work with museum staff, and offered questions to

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<sup>42</sup> Abstract, physical, social and embodied.

facilitate observations in museum settings. Over a six-month period, museum staff used the framework to record their walk-in observations in their museum spaces including snippets of overheard conversations, informal conversations with museum staff any documentation related to the museum spaces and their intended use. The learning staff then visited each other's sites and nine other museums nationally to enrich their observations. The collaborative analysis offered insights and questions about the way children's experiences are conceptualised in museums: a) It seems that there is an interlinked relationship between children's movement and the physicality of the space affecting children's embodied encounters and as a result the families' experience of space. For example, observations showed that children may take the lead by running around spaces and doing repetitive movements and actions directly influencing the families' interaction and movement in the museum space. b) Children and families dwell in spaces that offer contemplation and inter-generational interactions demonstrating that the material design of the spaces becomes entangled with the embodied and social experiencing of the museum space. c) Imagined or physical tactile experiences have a direct impact on children's experiences bringing an element of unpredictability in the museum experience. Overall, the research suggests that the current design of museum spaces reflects the contrast between didactic and experiential experiences that traditionally underpins models of museum pedagogy with museums prioritising spaces for immersive and activity-led experiences for children and families. The research perspective anticipated to help museum professionals view museums as spaces where 'children and objects come together, they design and make one another' (Hackett *et al.* (2018b:500).

To counteract with adults' perceptions of what constitutes a child-friendly museum or more specifically child-centred exhibition spaces, empirical research is

conducted in line with the sociological stance in childhood studies that advocates the value of research with children (Freaser *et al.* 2004). Two empirical studies are conducted with children 4 to 12 age years old to trace children's meaning making of place by using participatory research methods (Kalessopoulou 2019; Kalessopoulou 2017). Children's responses clearly indicate that meanings of place are rich in including experience-based attributes and physical features of the place. Based on the Mosaic Approach (Clarke 2004), an approach that aimed to empower early years children's status in the research process and to explore young children's perceptions of space in a nursery setting, Kalessopoulou (2017) used a variety of methods to generate data during family museum visits. Some of the data techniques included photo elicitation, photography by children, observations, interviews with staff and the completion of questionnaires with parents. The visual data generated entirely by the children (in the duration of the museum visit) suggest that interactive elements in exhibitions are popular with children with preschoolers preferring exhibits with opportunities for pretend play. Children documented spaces and objects that encouraged fully body movements as well as objects of a large size – a theme that also emerged in Piscitelli and Anderson's milestone research (2000; 2002; 2008) in young children's perceptions of museum experiences. Multimodality, spaces that imitate real-life environments and aesthetic elements of the experience were a few of the themes that emerge from the analysis of the visual data that could inform exhibition design processes that traditionally have excluded young children from any consultation or participatory processes.

## Concluding remarks

Young children as visitors in museums, galleries and heritage sites is an underexplored area in visitor and childhood studies research although museums provision for early years and preschool children is gaining considerable momentum in current museum practices in the UK. The review of cultural and educational policy in the UK also indicates that young children's presence is understated, if not completely absent, either in past or current governmental policy; while the commissioned studies that show the potential and the relevance of museums for early years education are extremely limited.

The analysis of 32 contemporary case studies that are promoted as exemplars in a toolkit produced by the Museum of London and a special volume compiled by The Group of Education in Museums suggests that there are potentially five types of museum provision and programmes. Interactive programmes designed for families offer opportunities for intergenerational learning and constitute the most popular type of provision for the age group (14 case studies). Museums and galleries also provide activities and programmes that are led by adults targeting directly children's engagement with the artefacts (7 case studies) and organised provision for early year settings and preschool groups that visit the museum to use it as an educational resource (6 case studies). The provision that is integral to museum spaces and offers children choice, freedom and initiative in their activities and engagement in the museum space comprises a small number of the discussed case studies (3 case studies). It was interesting to notice that 2 museums offer programmes for families that mainly target the adult(s) from the family groups acknowledging them as independent adult learners and not within the context of intergenerational interaction. Sensory

experiences that involve movement, tactile exploration, storytelling, music and craft-making are the main activities included in the case studies' descriptions. It should be noted that an attempt is made in very few museums to progress from perceptions and provision that considers families and children as a homogeneous group with universal characteristics, acknowledging the diverse needs and backgrounds. Some of this provision may still be seen within the realm of the medical model of inclusion especially when it is offered in the format of provision for the disadvantaged other. It is encouraging to see that other provisions and measures are more inclusive aiming to remove the institutional barriers by covering the financial cost of the museum visit and increasing accessibility to collections for children who are considered to have special education needs. Further measures to acknowledge the financial aspect of museum visits and to promote museums as a child and family-friendly spaces may be a relevant measure in response to demographics research that acknowledged these aspects as the two main factors affecting family visitation. Organised museum visits with preschool and early years settings may be the only opportunities for young children to visit museums and galleries given that recent demographics showed that currently, 30% of children in the UK live in poverty.

The exploration of case studies in the UK and international research papers about early childhood in museums indicates that there is a new type of museum programme for organised school groups. Termed as museum or cultural residencies offer opportunities for children to extend activities and aspects of their learning that they are familiar with in their early years/preschool settings to the museum and to take advantage of the particularities of what museum pedagogy can offer. The analysis of research data in case studies in England and in museums in New Zealand confirms that museums as enriched environments with artefacts, experiential activities and



open interpretive narratives can contribute to learning and development in accordance with the areas and key principles of national curriculums for the early years. The extended length of the residencies, the increased ratio between adult/child and the deep collaboration of all educators involved in the process are some of the key parameters for the meaningful learning potential of the residencies, particularly within the context of the residencies in the UK that were designed and led by adults. In the residencies in New Zealand, children were positioned as co-participants in the museum pedagogy (and also research process) in line with the curriculum and the indigenous values of reciprocity and empowerment.

In the reviewed museum practices, outlined in the forms of provision and programs, children appear to be recipients without being clarified in the descriptions of the case studies if programmes were developed in collaboration with children. The reviewed programmes in their majority are led by the museum staff. An exemption is 3 case studies in museums/galleries which all with a long-established tradition in early years provision, collaborated with Higher Education Institutions to design and research museum experiences from a child's perspective. Their initiatives acknowledged children as autonomous museum visitors who explore and freely interact within the museum environment. Any resources and developments designed from a child's perspective are integral to the museum space (and not a temporary add-on). Such developments may indicate the importance of theoretical knowledge and expertise in early years learning and childhood studies to shape a more imaginative and participatory museum pedagogy that values and recognises children as having uniquely different experiences beyond the binary of the independent adults and the dependent child that seems to permeate the focus of museum programmes and research for families. Further investigation of the museum professional profiles and

the role that learning theories played in the design of the exemplar programmes may also shed some light on the importance of theory and university study for future developments in museum education.

A preliminary analysis of job descriptions in the museum professional arena suggests that knowledge and theory of museum pedagogy and museum studies are not among the desirable attributes for the museum professional's profile. References to learning and educational aspects of the museum work are getting replaced by descriptions of duties and responsibilities that are orientated towards business administration. These findings may be in line with the most recent developments on the national policy level (ACE 2020; The Culture White Paper 2016) that call museums and the wider cultural sector to embed in their work instrumental definitions and approaches to culture, to further, orientate towards private sources of funding and to be prepared that museum programmes supported with national funding will be outcome-based measured and monitored centrally. The museums' orientation towards performative and instrumental views of culture may not come as a surprise if one takes into account the developments on the policy level over the past two decades and the struggle of museum educators to establish education as an integral aspect of museum work.

Museum education rooted in the birth of the public museum managed to expand and to institute itself as a profession by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century anticipating becoming vital to museums' practices and role. On a more pragmatic level though museum professionals were always facing a lower status in comparison to curatorial work and museum education was not firmly embedded in all museum practices. The New Labour government's vision to transform museums as institutions for social justice, supported with a series of unprecedented funding initiatives, changed the

educational mandate of museums in Britain and marked a theoretical shift in museological thinking bridging the gap between what is considered to be exclusively curatorial and educational work. It raised awareness of the potential of museum learning and both the cultural and the educational sectors were supported to develop educational initiatives for children. However, evaluations that were conducted at that time showed that on the actual ground, education was not integral to all aspects of museum work; while the museum education workforce needed further training and support in learning theories and pedagogy. A 'learner centred ethos' needed to be embedded in the cultural sector. Teacher Education Institutions were called to include cultural and museum learning in their curricula empowering the educators to work creatively supporting open-ended approaches to cultural learning. Voices from the educational and cultural sectors were asking for a coherent national plan and appropriate infrastructure to support sustainable further developments.

A change of government brought significant funding cuts that reduced museum education posts and changed the way cultural education was conceptualised. Cultural education was viewed as fact-based knowledge associated with essentialist national perspectives. Such views affected the rationale of funding initiatives for cultural organisations and formal education and also children's positioning in cultural programmes either as active or passive participants. Children were treated as a distinctive group on the basis of their age following predetermined developmental phases. Initiatives, including the cultural passport for children, were trialled to indicate the appropriate cultural activities children should perform according to their age. Museums witnessed the funding sources being allocated directly to schools with teachers being responsible for the cultivation of children's artistic talent. Museum

education submerged by cultural education losing in governmental policymaking and university curricula its distinctive character as museum pedagogy.

The two general elections (2015 and 2019) firmly established The Conservative party in power to continue implementing its policies on cultural education. Schools having increased responsibility to deliver the cultural offer with its strengthened orientation in Arts were asking once more for a national plan with appropriate infrastructure and education practitioners who have the knowledge and skills to implement the cultural offer. These voices echo earlier callings for a national strategy with appropriate infrastructure making one wonder if for the past two decades there has been actual progress in cultural policy for museums and schools. Teacher Education Institutions being heavily marketized, financially dependent on student numbers and under pressure to meet the curriculum subject-based requirements of Ofsted, embraced 'art' as a subject leaving out cultural learning and specifically museum pedagogy as areas of study in their curricula.

The discrepancy between theory and practice is also evident in the review of research papers in the field of early childhood and museums. An earlier international review in children's museum learning (Andre *et al.* 2017) showed that the majority of studies focus on children older than 6 years with most studies in early childhood in museums localised in the US and Australia, and is associated with the work of specific academics. This earlier review also showed that research tends to focus on children's interaction with adults and that research on peer-to-peer interaction and children's exploratory behaviour in museums is limited. These review outcomes are in line with the analysis of the 32 contemporary cases in the UK that highlights the emphasis that museums give to family programmes and adult-led activities in comparison to the number of case studies that acknowledge children's right to freely interact within the

environment and aim to understand the museum experiences from the young child's perspective. It is as if the museum field has been isolated from developments in early childhood studies and research that draw upon children's rights and ontological perspectives that view children as competent social actors with 'uniquely different lived experiences' (Hultgren and Johansson 2019:378). This is also evident in the strands of research that were identified in the analysis of international peer-reviewed papers written in English.

In the context of 'museum family learning' research children are positioned as members of the family who are mainly learning via scaffolded interaction with adults. Family learning although conceptualised as intergenerational, it positions young children as dependent learners who need to be guided in their meaning-making process. The museum is valued for its educational dimension which is present in the museum's organised activities, the interpretive mediums and the museum environment per se. The socio-cultural and constructivist perspectives that dominated museum visitor studies research (the 1990s- onwards) also influenced museum family studies research by opening the focus of meaning-making as a process that may not relate to the museum's intended messages. The focus shifted on how meaning-making is constructed and how the museum can facilitate the interaction. Wegner's (1998) theory of communities of practice influenced researchers to view family interaction as a dynamic system and potentially research it in the context of identity formation. It opened the research possibilities to view the museum as only one of the institutions within the wider context of families' learning experiences.

The socio-cultural perspective also influenced research studies that focus exclusively on young children's museum experiences. It influenced research to frame children as 'meaning makers' who have a choice and voice in their experiencing and

to provide insights into what young children value in the museum experiences and how they construct their own meaning based on their interests, prior experiences and own agendas. The research highlighted, especially when it comes to organised school visits, that there may be a tension between the museums' structured and content orientated programmes and the children's need for free choice and exploration of space in their own time and pace. As active meaning-makers young children may reconstruct the museum narratives and produce their own interpretations in their experiencing. The research findings suggest that adults need to reconsider their guiding role and museums to reconsider the appropriateness of programmes that put barriers to children's innate curiosity for natural exploration and learning. Undoubtedly, the socio-cultural view marked a shift from earlier research that conceptualised children as 'human becomings' viewing young children as future museum audiences. Studies located in this strand traced children's views and memories of museum visits with the perspective to cater for children's needs and to enhance the learning potential of their museum visits. The research designs created by adults are based on more positivist research approaches and methods that do not encourage children's engagement in an open process of data generation and analysis.

Two further stands of research studies were identified in the reviewed literature: research studies that aim to understand how children experience museums by drawing upon children's agency and research studies that view children's experiences within a network of embodied interactions.

The first one is grounded in the paradigm of the 'new sociology of childhood' views young children as social beings who have rights as citizens and to participate in social life. Children should be included in decision making and have the voice and power to shape aspects of their living and to fully exercise their rights to education and

culture. The reviewed empirical researches are qualitative including children as active participants in the research methodology acknowledging also children's right to a participatory museum pedagogy. Children are positioned as active and capable agents who reflect directly on their own experiences via creative and child-friendly methods. Research findings showed there may be a tension between children's and adults' agendas with children asking for more exploratory and flexible experiences bringing to the fore the social and physical dimensions of the museum experience. It is interesting to notice that in the reviewed studies a critical perspective that problematises what constitutes the child's voice and how participation is defined to be absent.

The final strand, and more recent one, termed here as the 'spatial and material turn' focuses on the embodied nature of the children's museum experiences that could potentially have wider implications in the fields of museum pedagogy and childhood studies. It contributes to the conceptualization of the museum experience as an open and fluid process that unfolds in embodied interaction with the whole network that constitutes the museum environment. The research studies influenced by the notion of the 'post-human' child, de-framed the child from its centredness to examine the museum experience as a more holistic phenomenon. Children, human and non-human environments are all viewed in an entangled relationship. The focus shifts from the learning potential of the museum visit and the pre-occupation with agency and voice to the exploration of museums as a lived experience.

Current debates on the future of childhood studies as an academic field that crosses humanities, social sciences and arts, view the focus on materiality as 'crucial to any justification for interdisciplinary projects' and value its potential to enrich our understanding of the complexity of the world as 'co-produced by all humans across the lifespan' (Stryker *et al.* 2019:301-302). The socio-material sensibility infused in

recent empirical studies with children in museums could contribute to the childhood studies consideration to rejuvenate itself as a theoretical and interdisciplinary field by turning its attention to materiality in children's interactions with the world. Materiality is seen as a vital force to help childhood studies reframe its focus on issues typically categorised as part only of 'children's worlds' and move beyond binary notions that view children as either *acting* or *being acted upon*. It offers the grounding for research to move to an expanded view of co-production and generative relationships in line with the ontological turn in childhood studies that challenges 'the centrality of the human' and shifts the focus to the human and non-human forces that constitute the world as we experience it (Spyrou 2019:316). Research on the materiality of children's experiences in museums offers insights into the physicality of the museum experience that could be informative for all visitor groups without necessarily having to fragment the study of the experience into visitor groups according to the age and synthesis of the group.

The absence of references to the wider social and political context of children's lives is noticeable in the reviewed research studies. Children's experiences are researched in situ without taking into account neither the participants' demographic and home environment backgrounds nor the wider picture of children's lives in the UK especially at a time children's well-being is at stake<sup>43</sup>. In the majority of the reviewed research studies, children and families are considered a homogeneous group while there is a demographic diversity of family profiles with statistically significant differences in their standards of living. For example, the Child Poverty Group (2020)

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<sup>43</sup> The Children's Society (2019), based on a survey conducted with Year 10 children (aged 14 and 15) showed that a quarter of a million children are unhappy, with children living in poverty to be significantly more likely to experience depression and lower well-being by the age of 14 (The Children's Society 2019:18). There were 4.2 million children living in poverty in 2018-19 which is 30 per cent of children's population nationally.



reported that 44 per cent of children living in lone-parent families are experiencing poverty with 46 per cent of children of Black and minority ethnic groups growing up in poverty in comparison to 26 per cent of children in White British families. Children's museum experiences are explored in an apolitical context. This may be appropriate in the context of each research's epistemological stance, theoretical framework and research methodology. However, the researcher's choice of what to include or to exclude from the research study are not neutral. As Spyrou (2019) points out in his reflection on the ontological turn of childhood studies, researchers through their choices delineate the world and enact particular ontologies of childhood. Even within a relativist stance that postulates the existence of multiple subjective realities, these realities are enacted through our social practices and decision making on how to research them.

It is also noticeable that although the case studies of museum pedagogy for young children could potentially contribute to the body of knowledge and research in early childhood education any explicit links between the two are missing. Sociological, psychological and political perspectives affecting children's lives are not evident in the literature reviews and analysis of the studies while the research foci remain rigidly orientated within the context of the museum visit and experience. Of course, decisions regarding the research topics and questions depend on a range of factors including methodological, theoretical and pragmatic frameworks. It makes an impression though that although museum pedagogy is aligned with the early years' educational theory and could potentially contribute to current developments in early childhood research these two fields are not explicitly cooperating. A synergy between childhood and museum pedagogy may also contribute to the museums' ongoing requisite to radically

re-imagine their identity as democratic institutions and to become open to critique and research.

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