

THE MUSEUM AS PLAYGROUND: APPROACHING THE MUSEUM WITH A PLAYFUL ATTITUDE

Danielle Carter

FREELANCE MUSEUM EDUCATOR AND RESEARCHER

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

daniellencrtr@gmail.com

Museums vary their approaches to accommodate the diverse needs and wishes of visitors. This research focuses on educational practices concerning young children in museums. The discourse analysis reveals the tendency of museums to conflate pedagogical terms and a limited sense of play to employ these educational theories. The design of specific programmes, exhibitions and spaces for young visitors segregates them from the rest of the museum, positioning the rest of the museum as not playful and not engaging.

KEYWORDS: museum education, early childhood education, object-based learning, Reggio Emilia, preschool education, arts education.

I INTRODUCTION

Science centres and children's museums have a reputation in the museum world. They are notorious for their high-energy, noisy visitors' interacting with exhibits as opposed to many "traditional" museums' quiet and discrete visitors engaged with authentic objects². As museums have adapted over time, "museums increasingly divided the children from the grown-ups in their educational programming strategies and exhibitionary strategies"³.

As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, one of the premier scholars on museum education, states: "The creative re-imagining and reworking of the identity of the museum is one characteristic of the post-museum"⁴. In other words, the contemporary museum is characterized most by its indefinability, its presence in numerous fields and its various roles within these fields. Although the evolution of museums has made defining museums and their roles notoriously difficult⁵,

1 Emlyn H. Koster, "In Search of Relevance: Science Centres as Innovators in the Evolution of Museums", in: *Daedalus*, 1999, 128 (3), p. 282.

2 Kiersten F. Latham, "Numinous Experiences with Museum Objects", in: *Visitor Studies*, 16 (1), pp. 3–20.

3 Steven Conn, "Where Have All the Grown-Ups Gone?", in: Steven

Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 139.

4 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007, p. 1.

5 Eugene Dillenburger, "What, If Anything, Is a Museum?", in: *Exhibitionist*, 2011, pp. 8–13; Victor Ginsburgh and François Mairesse, "Defining a Museum: Suggestions for an Alternative Approach", in: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 16, 1997, pp. 15–33.

museums have highlighted their educational roles over the past few decades as their most important function⁶. This is especially evident not only in the sheer number of books and articles dedicated to the subject of museum education⁷, but also simply in museums' missions; one would be hard-pressed to find a museum whose stated mission did not mention education or learning as the institution's primary goal. Although museums represent a variety of educational approaches, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill argues that museums have played an active role in educational trends for centuries; however, museums' practical application of these educational trends often differs⁸.

Museums tend to create programming for specialized groups, focusing on smaller segments and providing services for these groups rather than serving the entirety of their visiting (or potential) population. This is also true for museums' main focus: education. Despite the fact that museums herald education as their main attraction and value, educational efforts are heavily focused on school-aged children⁹. Furthermore, museum education created for schoolchildren varies; approaches include "experience-based, creative, intellectual and socially interactive strategies"¹⁰ as well as free-choice learning and the more traditional behaviorist model of learning.¹¹ Furthermore, the

practical application of each of these theories results in even more diversity. Variations exist in educational approaches from one museum to another and perhaps even among the variety of programs, exhibitions or spaces available within a single museum.

As an increasing number of museums around the world create programming, spaces or exhibitions to incorporate young children, what theories do museums consider when designing educational approaches for young children? How are these theories understood, contextualized and applied within these museums? How are the practical applications of these theories linked to pedagogical concepts? Finally, is play the only and/or the best way to engage pre-primary school children in learning at the museum? These interrelated research questions result in a critical look at museums' theory, design and practice in terms of young children's learning.

To answer these questions, the ensuing research delimits relevant concepts and includes a critical discourse analysis of literature discussing museums' design of educational practices for young children with a focus on the use of literature and understanding of pedagogical terms as well as a case study to test the link between theory and practice as discussed in the literature.

II THEORY

Literature that discusses the incorporation of young children and their learning in museums reflects how museums view and interact with young children. Primary terms include: learning, education, museum, play and young children. Because of museums' nuanced attitudes towards the terms "education" and "learning", these concepts were defined in relation to one another¹². Defining "museums" reveals both how museums view themselves and their roles as

6 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 2-3.

7 John Falk and Lynn Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2000; George E. Hein, "Museum Education", in: *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Ed. Sharon MacDonald, Oxford, U. K.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 340-352; Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museum and Gallery Education*, Leicester, U. K.: Leicester University Press, 1992; Eadem, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, pp. 2-3; Eadem, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*.

8 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museum and Gallery Education*.

9 Sue Dockett, Sarah Main, and Lynda Kelly, "Consulting with Children: Experiences from a Museum", in: *Visitor Studies*, 14 (1), 2011, p. 15.

10 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, p. 46.

11 *A Companion to Museum Studies*, pp. 320-321.

12 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, p. 3.

institutions, especially how they “position themselves as key sites for learning”¹³. Play is an essential element of early childhood educational theory¹⁴ and policy¹⁵. Finally, it was necessary to define the focus group of “young children” to examine how museums approach these children differently. Pedagogical terms, such as inquiry-based learning or constructivism, were left undefined so I could examine how museums’ conceptualizations of these theories could manifest organically; these terms will be explored in the literature review.

DEFINITIONS

LEARNING AND EDUCATION. Due to the exploratory nature of my research, it was helpful to maintain a broader outlook on both these terms rather than to prescribe distinct definitions. There is, however, an important distinction between the terms *learning* and *education*; *learning* focuses on the process of acquiring knowledge that occurs within an individual, whereas *education* focuses on the method by which knowledge is transferred from expert or institution to student or learner¹⁶. Although museums have recently embraced visitors’ unique learning experiences¹⁷, museums must still design environments in which learning takes place, arguably perpetuating the museum’s role as an educational institution.

MUSEUMS. Historically speaking, museums have been – and continue to be – organized around objects. As John Cotton Dana, an important initiator

of the paradigm shift in the museum field, professes, “the objects seem to do their work if they are safely kept, and <...> museums seem to serve their purpose if they safely keep the objects”¹⁸. Museums, however, also pride themselves on their inherently democratic foundations and history. Among the first established museums is the Louvre (although the “first” museum is quite debated), which was transformed from a royal palace to a public art museum shortly after the French Revolution¹⁹. Thus, museums, although organized around material culture, also serve the public. The focus on education potentially dates back to Aristotle’s *mouseion*²⁰, and was reinforced in the identities of museums in part by the increased presence of *Wunderkammers* (cabinets of curiosity) in the early Renaissance²¹. Not only does accessibility imply visitors’ physical access to collections, but their personal, emotional, financial, developmental, and intellectual access as well.

PLAY. Since play is currently a popular avenue for children’s learning in the museum, it was best to come to a better understanding of this term and its various uses throughout the literature. For the purposes of this article, the term is largely rooted in the work of Johan Huizinga, the Dutch cultural historian and theorist who argues that play is third in humans’ primal functions, following cognition and making²². Huizinga characterizes play as voluntary, separate and distinct from reality, an intrinsically satisfying temporal

13 *Ibid.*

14 Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder, “The Semiotic or Symbolic Function”, in: *The Psychology of the Child*, trans. by Helen Weaver, 2000, pp. 52–91; Lev S. Vygotsky, “Play and Its Role in the Mental Development of the Child”, in: *Soviet Psychology*, 5 (3), 1967, pp. 6–18.

15 Skolverket, *Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98*, Stockholm: National Agency for Education, 2010.

16 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, p. 3.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

18 John Cotton Dana, “The Gloom of the Museum”, in: *The New Museum: Selected Writings by John Cotton Dana*, Ed. William A. Peniston, Washington, D. C.: The Newark Museum and the American Association of Museums, p. 44.

19 Carol Duncan, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship”, in: *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, Ed. Susan M. Pearce, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 279.

20 Jeffrey Abt, “The Origins of the Public Museum”, in: *A Companion to Museum Studies*, p. 116.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

22 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1949, p. ix.

activity, ordered, immersive and engaging, and sometimes quite serious²³. Thus, play is applicable in many situations. It is explored in relation to many different fields and topics such as the connection between play and creativity²⁴, but it is especially popular in theories about children's cognitive development and learning²⁵. Play is not only for children and it does not necessarily need to occur in places intended for play, such as playgrounds. Although Huizinga outlines several abstract qualities of play, it can be hard to understand how play can be practically applied and how it connects with other theories and concepts in practice.

YOUNG CHILDREN. My primary concern was how museums design educational tools for children that have not yet entered compulsory school. This age range varies from country to country depending on public policy. In Sweden, the location of the case study, children aged one to five years are eligible to attend preschool²⁶. Due to the global perspective of this paper – and the international scope of the literature – it was helpful to consider a wider range of ages (to eight years of age) depending on the country's schooling system. Most important for this research is the distinction between educational approaches in preschools and formal schools, which hinges upon educational theory and developmental psychology. Educational theories concerning learning in children prior to formal schooling, as well as museum educational practices aimed at young children tend to differ from those aimed at children of school age. Preschools are more often seen as places for play, “while school is traditionally seen as a place of learning and not of

play”²⁷. Thus, the term is also limited by the educational approach, which is typically based upon the developmental theories that are applied to them in (pre-) school and museum contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three museums – the Australian Museum in Sydney, Australia, the Natural History Museum of Crete, Greece, and the Ipswich Art Gallery in Queensland, Australia – anchor the discussion in the literature review. After reviewing the literature, it was found that these museums' approaches to incorporating young learners were representative of a few trends worldwide, especially the adoption of play, the segregation of space in the museum, and the conflation of play and learning for this target group. This will be demonstrated with supporting examples from other regions that incorporate similar theories into their designs of spaces, programs and exhibitions for young children.

Language affects practice and practice affects language; the two are inseparable. More importantly, discourse has influence on practice because discourse is inherently linked to *conceptualization*²⁸. The words used by authors and institutions reveal more than can be read from the surface. The purpose of critical discourse analysis is to reveal the greater implications of the terms, and the conceptualizations tied to them, used within a particular field²⁹.

In particular, the critical discourse analysis examines three anchor texts³⁰ that demonstrate broader

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 7–12.

24 Sandra W. Russ, “Play and Creativity: Developmental Issues”, in: *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 2003, 47 (3), pp. 291–303.

25 Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–91; Sandra W. Russ, *op. cit.*, pp. 291–303.

26 Skolverket, *Facts and Figures 2012: Pre-school Activities, Schools and Adult Education in Sweden*, Stockholm: National Agency for Education, 2013, p. 10.

27 Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson and Maj Asplund Carlsson, “The Playing Learning Child: Towards a Pedagogy of Early Childhood”, in: *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 2008, 52 (6), p. 623.

28 Norman Fairclough, Jane Mulderring, and Ruth Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, in: *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, Ed. Teun A. van Dijk, London: SAGE Publications Limited, 2011, p. 358.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Maria Ampartzaki et al., “Communities of Practice and Participatory Action Research: The Formation of a Synergy for the

museological trends³¹ within the framework of contemporary pedagogical concepts. This critical discourse analysis seeks to understand how language is used; in this case, the conceptualizations attached to pedagogical terms and the way that these terms affected museums' practices and vice versa. The literature is considered to be representative³² of museum practices in the real world; thus, discursive patterns throughout the literature are revelatory of museum practices.

A research problem that requires or initiates critical discourse analysis may include "a mismatch between reality and the view people have of this reality that functions ideologically"³³. This research seeks to disclose the gap between contemporary educational theories and how they are understood and implemented in museum contexts.

MUSEUM PRACTICES: THREE APPROACHES

The Australian Museum redeveloped its space for young children from 2006 to 2007, focusing on children from one to five years of age³⁴. The original space, *Kids' Island*, was designed in 1999 "to reflect the roles and purpose of the museum, within the context of a

play-based learning environment."³⁵ To improve the space during the redesign, the museum sought to incorporate the input of "its most important stakeholders"; children between one and five.³⁶

The museum's main goal was to consider the literal voices of children in the redesign of the space rather than solely relying upon (adult) researchers' observations or upon educational theories³⁷. Focalizing on the children's responses is theoretical in and of itself; the museum had to assume that children are "active participants in a range of social and cultural contexts, experts on their own lives, and competent to share their views and opinions"³⁸ to consider children's suggestions.

The redesign itself was instigated by parents' stated dissatisfaction who noted the lack of change in the children's educational space over the years³⁹. Citing Lansdown (2005), the researchers importantly recognized that their approach to redesigning the space was not one that was child-initiated, but rather what Lansdown would call a "participatory process"⁴⁰, in which children are encouraged to participate in activities that are initiated by adults. Thus, the Australian Museum's main concern was to create a space for play within the museum that was designed according to the wishes of the children involved in the study, using the children's voices as a guide for pedagogical practice.

Museums that wish to consider young children and their education or learning often work with early childhood education experts. This is demonstrated by the collaboration between the Natural History Museum of Crete and the Department of Preschool Education at the University of Crete. The collaborators sought to create a new program for young children "focused on investigative procedures that included

Development of Museum Programmes for Early Childhood", in: *Educational Action Research*, 21 (1), pp. 4–27; Sue Dockett, Sarah Main, and Lynda Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 15; Barbara Piscitelli and Louisa Penfold, "Child-Centered Practice in Museums: Experiential Learning through Creative Play at the Ipswich Art Gallery", in: *Curator*, 2015, 58 (3), pp. 263–280.

31 Tara Zollinger Henderson and David J. Atencio, "Integration of Play, Learning, and Experience: What Museums Afford Young Visitors", in: *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 2007, 35, pp. 245–251; Janet Spybrook and Sharryn Larsen Walker, "Creating Inclusive, Literacy-Embedded Play Centers in a Children's Museum: Connecting Theory to Practice", in: *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 2012, 33 (4), pp. 382–391.

32 Fairclough, Mulderrington and Wodak, *op. cit.*, identify "three broad domains of social life that may be discursively constituted: *representations* of the world, *social relations* between people, and people's social and personal *identities*" (p. 370).

33 Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2002, p. 77.

34 Sue Dockett, Sarah Main, and Lynda Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

searching for evidence, observation and the recording of results and findings”⁴¹. Although the term “inquiry-based learning” is not explicitly used in this article, the program characteristics reflect those commonly described in inquiry-based learning⁴². Due to its co-operation with the Department of Preschool Education, the Natural History Museum of Crete focused on pedagogical theories as a guide.

Similar to the Natural History Museum of Crete, the Ipswich Art Gallery researched early childhood education theory to inform its design of *Light Play*, an exhibition geared towards young children⁴³. Based on some essential early childhood education theoreticians, the Ipswich Art Gallery established basic principles upon which all of its child-centered activities are founded⁴⁴. These principles include: the importance of “creative play” in learning; the multimodal, multi-sensory way in which children explore (exhibition) space; and the value of encouraging children to express their own ideas, beliefs and opinions⁴⁵.

The exhibition in question, *Light Play*, shown in 2013, intended to stimulate learning about light “through collaborative play, experimentation and discovery-based learning”⁴⁶.

PLAY IN MUSEUM PRACTICES

Each of the three examples described above approaches the incorporation of early childhood education along the same themes: the Australian Museum created a play-based space with the clear input of children, the Natural History Museum of Crete designed

a program with an emphasis on children’s investigative learning, and the Ipswich Art Gallery relied upon its early childhood education framework to create an exhibition based upon experience, discovery and inquiry in the learning process.

Each of these museums considers pedagogical concepts and employs play as a means of implementing these educational concepts. Thus, there is an assumption among these museums that play is effective in stimulating learning in young visitors. More specifically, museums in the literature understand play as *indistinct from* the learning process. Museums’ use of the term *play* is revelatory of their understanding of what play is and how it functions in relation to young children’s learning experiences.

The popularity of play in museums’ approach to young children is evident in an overview of scholarly literature on the topic of early childhood education in museums⁴⁷. Throughout my research, play was a common theme among journal articles discussing how to incorporate children’s learning in the museum. A visual representation of the popularity of play in museums’ approach to young children can be seen below in the word cloud created from ten articles focusing on early childhood education in museums [Ill. 1].

41 Maria Ampartzaki et al., *op. cit.*, p. 10.

42 Tara Zollinger Henderson and David J. Atencio, *op. cit.*, pp. 245–251; Janet Spybrook and Sharryn Larsen Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 382–391.

43 Barbara Piscitelli and Louisa Penfold, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

44 The Ipswich Art Gallery holds many exhibitions and spaces dedicated exclusively to children under the age of eight. *Ibid.*, pp. 263–265.

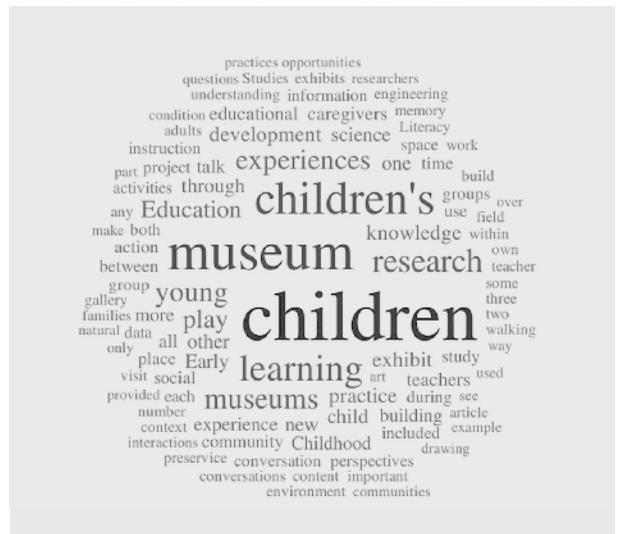
45 *Ibid.*, p. 264.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 265.

47 Maria Ampartzaki et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 4–27; Nora Benjamin, Catherine A. Haden, and Erin Wilkerson, “Enhancing Building, Conversations, and Learning through Caregiver-Child Interactions in a Children’s Museum”, in: *Developmental Psychology*, 2010, 46 (2), pp. 502–515; Sue Dockett, Sarah Main, and Lynda Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 15; Abigail Hackett, “Zigging and Zooming All Over the Place: Young Children’s Meaning Making and Movement in the Museum”, in: *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 2014, 14 (1), pp. 5–27; Tara Zollinger Henderson and David J. Atencio, *op. cit.*, pp. 245–251; Melinda J. Milligan and April Brayfield, “Museums and Childhood: Negotiating Organisational Lessons”, in: *Childhood*, 2004, 11 (3), pp. 275–301; Barbara Piscitelli, “Young Children’s Interactive Experiences in Museums: Engaged, Embodied, and Empowered Learners”, in: *Curator*, 2004, 44 (3), pp. 224–229; Barbara Piscitelli and David Anderson, “Young Children’s Perspectives of Museum Settings and Experiences”, in: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 2004, 19 (3), pp. 269–282; Barbara Piscitelli and Louisa Penfold, *op. cit.*, pp. 263–280; Janet Spybrook and Sharryn Larsen Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 382–391.

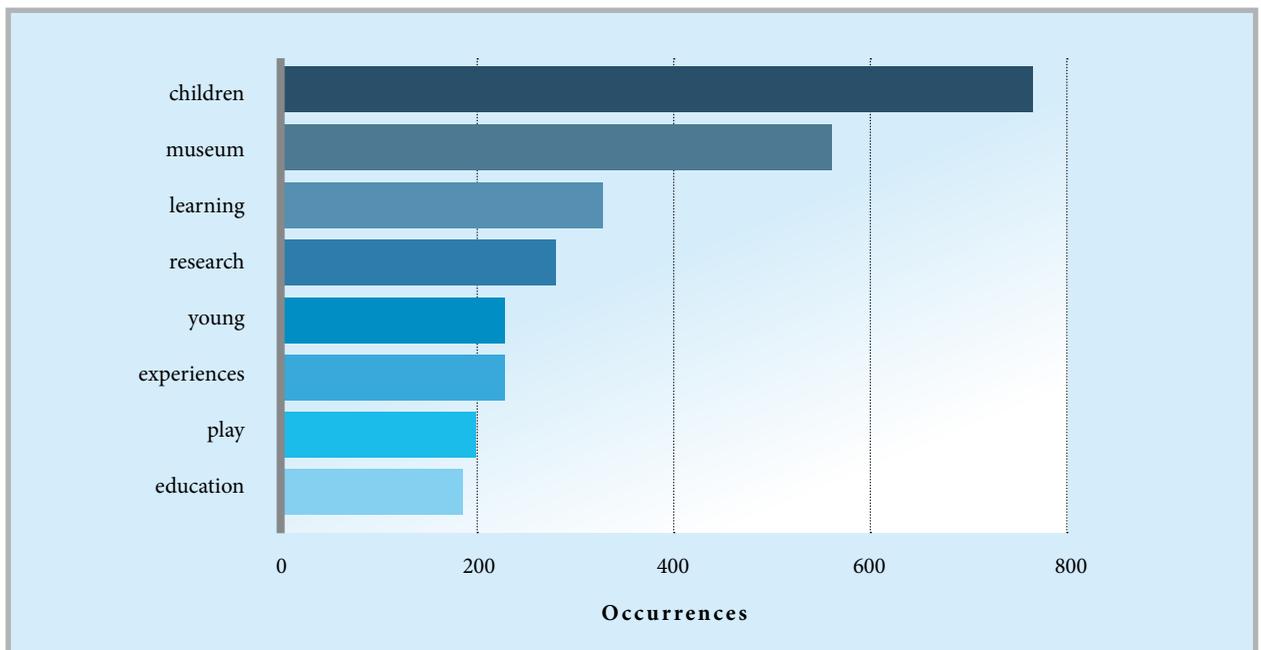
1. Word cloud of terms used in early childhood education museum literature

Žodžių, vartojamų muziejinėje literatūroje apie ankstyvos vaikystės edukaciją, debesis



2. Graph of most-used terms in early childhood education museum literature

Lentelė, iliustruojanti terminų vartojimo dažnumą muziejinėje literatūroje apie ankstyvosios vaikystės edukaciją



These articles were chosen specifically because they discuss a program, pace, or exhibition developed particularly for young children. “Play” is one of the most commonly used words in these articles, among all the obvious choices such as “children”, “museum” and “learning”. This is also demonstrated in the bar graph [Ill. 2]; “play” places seventh with 197 occurrences, eleven more occurrences than “education” [Ill. 2].

Through discussion of the exhibition development at the Ipswich Art Gallery, Piscitelli & Penfold claim that “the experiential model utilizes children’s play as the catalyst for inquiry”⁴⁸. Here, Piscitelli & Penfold intertwine three concepts: experiential learning, learning through play and inquiry-based learning.

48 Barbara Piscitelli and Louisa Penfold, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

Each term represents a highly complex set of concepts, theories and implications. Conflation of terms such as these, however, is not uncommon among articles considering early childhood education in museums. Below, play, and the conceptualizations with which it is associated throughout the literature will be discussed. Exploring these three issues among the literature reveals the conceptualizations that museums hold about play and children's learning process.

As previously mentioned, Piscitelli & Penfold claim that "the experiential model utilizes children's play as the catalyst for inquiry"⁴⁹. The reviewed articles that utilize the term "inquiry-based" fail to provide a clear definition thereof, although they do detail some presumed qualities of the theory.

Spybrook & Walker claim that "the intersection of [inquiry-based learning and play] can help all children deeply engage in the act of learning"⁵⁰, but they do not provide support for this. They do, however, list the following characteristics of "environments [that] support inquiry-based learning": "exploration, observation, discovery, and experimentation <...> creativity and imagination"⁵¹. Similarly, Koster assumes that interactive, hands-on activities such as "observing, sorting, experimenting, trial and error, discovery"⁵² favored in many science museums supports inquiry-based learning. Each of these articles uses experimentation and discovery in their characterizations of inquiry-based learning.

Henderson and Atencio base their paper on the term "play-based inquiry"⁵³. Their paper considers museums as inquiry-based spaces in which children's experiential learning is encouraged to unfold⁵⁴. As such, they provide the best context for inquiry-based learning and play's role therein. Henderson and

Atencio root their discussion of play-based inquiry in theories of "informal learning (Cross, 2006), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), discovery learning (Bruner, 1960), or self-directed learning (Deci and Ryan, 1982)", in which play is a "fundamental mediator of children's learning as they engage in their activity"⁵⁵. Furthermore, Henderson and Atencio claim play is "essential for assuring that children will become deeply engaged" because "children gain understanding and interest" through play⁵⁶.

Museums are concerned with children's engagement and interest in museums and their exhibitions. These institutions embed play to entice young visitors to participate in exhibits or programs, meanwhile justifying the incorporation of these play spaces with vaguely connected and frequently conflated educational terms such as discovery-based, inquiry-based, and experiential learning.

In contrast to many of their peers, Puchner et al. draw a clear distinction between engagement and play (while also pointing out that museums often make assumptions about children's learning in the museum environment): "one assumption held by museums, which is that learning occurs while children *engage* (emphasis added) in exhibits"⁵⁷. Rather than grouping engagement, play and learning together, Puchner et al. list play as one of "many other possible outcomes of exhibit interaction"⁵⁸, positioning play as *distinct from* learning, whereas many other institutions and articles tend to assume their integral relation.

INTERMEDIARY CONCLUSIONS

From the literature, it is evident that museums deem play as "essential for working with preschool age

49 *Ibid.*

50 Janet Spybrook and Sharryn Larsen Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

51 *Ibid.*

52 Emlyn H. Koster, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

53 Tara Zollinger Henderson and David J. Atencio, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Ibid.*, p. 246.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

57 Laurel Puchner, Robyn Rapoport, and Suzanne Gaskins, "Learning in Children's Museums: Is it Really Happening?" in: *Curator*, 2001, 44 (3), p. 240.

58 *Ibid.*

children”⁵⁹; however, it is unclear what play means in the museum context as no distinct definition is provided. The ways in which the literature discusses play, however, touch upon the three contexts of museum learning: inquiry-based learning theory prioritizes “prior knowledge, interests, and beliefs” and “choice and control”, which are major factors of the personal context provided by Falk and Dierking⁶⁰. Many of the child-centered practices implemented by museums use play as a way to encourage interaction and collaboration in the construction of knowledge, as outlined within the sociocultural context⁶¹. Finally, much of the literature also focuses on specific spaces, exhibitions and programs for young children, physically separated from the rest of the museum. This, of course, fits within the physical context described by Falk and Dierking⁶².

This implies that museums’ understanding of play is inherently a physical one. Although Caillois includes physical, “vertigo” play in one of his four categories of play⁶³, there are many other possibilities and potential applications of play. In his study Patte, for example, encouraged teachers to implement “playful pedagogies” in their respective classrooms⁶⁴. Rather than creating a restricted time or space for play, the teachers integrated playful approaches into their curricula.

With an interest in improving literacy through museum-based play centres, the teachers involved in Spybrook and Walker’s study submitted “a description of literacy experiences that should occur during

the play”⁶⁵, demonstrating that play in the museum context is instrumental for “content-based learning”⁶⁶ rather than intrinsically satisfying as one would expect from a typical flow or play experience⁶⁷.

By nature, as Huizinga states, play is not meant to have a specific outcome, result or product⁶⁸; “play is unproductive”⁶⁹. One *may* learn through play⁷⁰, but that is not its primary goal. Drawing from the literature concerning early childhood in museums, one would never suspect that learning and play could be anything but intertwined; Kalliala, again: “[R]esearchers often emphasize learning through play so strongly that play is primarily examined from the perspective of a child’s development and learning”⁷¹.

Thus, despite museums’ adoption of several educational theories in their design of child-centered approaches, it is still unclear how these configure practically and effectively to produce engaging learning environments for young children in the museum.

III PRACTICE

METHODOLOGY

The following quote from Wilson’s writing on arts education helped to structure the methodology of this paper: “I like to think of research as *re-search*, to search again, to take a closer second look. Research implies searching for evidence about the ways things were in the past, how they are presently, and even about how they might be in the future”⁷².

59 Janet Spybrook and Sharryn Larsen Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

60 John Falk and Lynn Dierking, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

61 *Ibid.*

62 *Ibid.*

63 Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, New York: The Free Press, 1961, p. 36.

64 Michael M. Patte, “Implementing a Playful Pedagogy in a Standards-Driven Curriculum: Rationale for Action Research in Teacher Education”, in: *Play: A Polyphony of Research, Theories, and Issues*, Eds. Lynn E. Cohen and Sandra Waite-Stupiansky, Lanham, M.D.: University Press of America, Inc., 2011, p. 67.

65 Janet Spybrook and Sharryn Larsen Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 388.

67 Johan Huizinga, “Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon”, in: *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955, p. 9.

68 *Ibid.*

69 Marjata Kalliala, *Play Culture in a Changing World*, Berkshire, England: Open University Press, 2006, p. 19.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

71 *Ibid.*

72 Brent Wilson, “The Second Search: Metaphor, Dimensions of

In other words, existing literature on museums' approaches to young children was examined to dissect how each educational concept is understood, described, contextualized, and implemented by museums. After gathering this information, a case study was designed to test the tenuous link between theory and practice concerning young children's learning in museums. In this case, museums' use of play – especially without much use of the play theory – and their conflation of the term *play* with learning concepts was of the utmost concern.

The research conducted throughout the study period was qualitative, utilizing several methods outlined by Stokrocki, such as writing first impressions, making a map of the space, creating a sociogram, photographing, creating profiles of the participants, conducting ethnographic interviews and, most importantly, conducting an external analysis⁷³. Qualitative methods were best fit to observe emergent themes. As opposed to quantitative methods, in which variables can be controlled, qualitative research emphasizes “the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation”⁷⁴, allowing one to understand the phenomenological nature of children's learning process in the museum.

To test the concepts used throughout the literature, the preschool class visited four museums⁷⁵ and the children's discussions and artworks surrounding these visits were analyzed as data. The choice of museum always stemmed from the children's interests, and the

museum objects and exhibitions of interest were a result of the children's interests and inquiry⁷⁶. Although data was also collected and analyzed from circle time discussions and play time, a sample of artworks was chosen for the purpose of this article⁷⁷.

The participants included eight four- to five-year-olds in the eldest age group at an international bilingual school near central Stockholm, and their main teacher, Miss Natali. As Swedish law states, preschools are required by law to support development of both Swedish and the child's mother tongue⁷⁸. Throughout the case study period, attempts were made to nurture development of children's native languages, but the children primarily spoke English in the classroom. At times, some of the children would speak in Swedish (Adam and Ursula), Polish (Aleksy and Adriana), or Russian (Mirjam) with Miss Natali during circle time discussions. If necessary, Miss Natali translated these comments into English for me or Miss Natali would help the children to learn the English equivalents to help develop their English.

Meaning, and Research Topics in Art Education”, in: *Research Methods and Methodologies for Art Education*, Eds. Sharon D. La Pierre and Enid Zimmerman, Reston, VA: National Art Education Association, 1997, p. 1.

73 Mary Stokrocki, “Qualitative Forms of Research Methods”, in: *Research Methods and Methodologies for Art Education*, pp. 39–48.

74 John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, Thousand Oaks, C. A.: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014.

75 Stockholm Transport Museum (Spårvägsmuséet); The Swedish National Museum of Science and Technology (Tekniska); The Swedish Museum of Natural History (Naturhistoriska riksmuseet); The Vasa Museum.

76 Lackney notes that this safety-first approach “unintentionally limit[s] the creative behavior of children in our society” (Jeffrey A. Lackney, “Learning Environments in Children's Museums: Aesthetics, Environmental Preference and Creativity”, presented at: May 2000 meeting: Association of Youth Museums and the Institute for Civil Society, Baltimore, MD, 2000, p. 1). Furthermore, the spaces of play studied scholarly are nearly always ones created by adults for children, rather than spaces of play chosen by the children (*Ibid.*, p. 2).

77 Furthermore, although both verbal and artistic modes of expression are valid (Susan Wright, “Graphic-Narrative Play: Young Children's Authoring Through Drawing and Telling”, in: *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 2007, 8, p. 2), drawing tends to be a much more independent activity for children. The children often mimicked one another during circle time – and they sometimes copied elements from one another's drawings as well – , but “their styles and their approaches to drawing [were] completely different” (Christine Marme' Thompson, “Action, Autobiography and Aesthetics in Young Children's Self-Initiated Drawings”, in: *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 1999, 18 (2), p. 157).

78 Skolverket, *Facts and Figures 2012: Pre-School Activities, Schools and Adult Education in Sweden*, p. 13.

The data collection for this research largely relied upon participant observation, in which the researcher is the primary data collection tool⁷⁹, and documentation of children's artworks. Despite the numerous potential downsides⁸⁰ of participant observation⁸¹, this position was deemed as most effective in this specific instance due to the unique nature of the preschool and case study settings.

The primary setting for the case study was, of course, the preschool and the children's classroom therein. The choice of preschool is essential for the case study: it adopted the Reggio Emilia pedagogy in 2008 in response to Sweden's implementation of a national curriculum for its preschools (Joanna Asplund, personal communication, 02 February 2015)⁸². The headmaster chose to adopt Reggio Emilia both because she considers it to be "the most popular pedagogy in Sweden" (Joanna Asplund, personal communication, 2 February 2015), but also because it embodies many of the values outlined in the Swedish national curriculum, commonly known as the Lpfö 98.

The Swedish national curriculum overlaps with patterns among the literature, especially: the promotion of

the child as a competent learner and thinker capable of making decisions; the personal context of each child in her development, abilities and interests; and the importance of play. Interestingly enough, the Swedish government gives a much more comprehensive justification for play's role in learning – its stimulation of the imagination and the encouragement of symbolic thinking⁸³ – than the literature. This also means that play in the national curriculum is not instrumental for content-based learning.

For this article, data was derived from the children's artworks. Children's drawings may serve not only as a window into understanding children's development⁸⁴ but may also reflect children's "understanding of self and culture"⁸⁵. Art-making allows children to share their preoccupations in life⁸⁶. In this study, the children's artworks were understood as expressions of their interests and engagement with certain topics. Other forms of expression that help to provide a more complete picture of children's conceptualizations and interests include "graphic depiction, stemming from imagery and visual-spatial-motor-memory; bodily-kinesthetic communication through 'enaction' and expressive gesture" as well as "story creation, expressive vocalization and the use of sound effects to accompany the artwork"; or non-verbal and verbal expression, respectively⁸⁷. Despite the focus on art-making, children's verbal expressions were also considered and collected throughout the case study.

As with any research, several limitations exist for the pursuant research, specifically: the fluidity of the

79 Mary Stokrocki, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

80 Yin cautions that the "participant" aspect of the role may interfere with data collection, especially in that other tasks might interfere with the data collection or that the researcher might become biased throughout the study period (Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2003, p. 94). The preschool, however, was supportive in my efforts to record conversations and artworks throughout the study period, especially due to its adoption of the Reggio Emilia pedagogy, which advocates for teachers to act as researchers (Anette Emilson and Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, "Documentation and communication in Swedish preschools", in: *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, 2014, 34 (2), p. 175). Documentation is one of the pillars of the Reggio Emilia practice as a means of "documenting children's individual development across time" (Richard Johnson, "Colonialism and Cargo Cults in Early Childhood Education: Does Reggio Emilia Really Exist?", in: *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 1999, 1 (1), pp. 72–73).

81 Robert K. Yin, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–96.

82 Skolverket, *Facts and Figures 2012: Pre-School Activities, Schools and Adult Education in Sweden*, p. 10.

83 Skolverket, *Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98*, pp. 8–9.

84 As Cherney et al. state, children's artworks are used in many different studies and areas of research, including "cognitive, personality and diagnostic assessment" (Isabelle D. Cherney et al., "Children's Drawings: A Mirror to Their Minds", in: *Educational Psychology*, 2006, 26 (1), p. 128).

85 Isabelle D. Cherney, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

86 Julia Kellman, "Harvey Shows the Way: Narrative in Children's Art", in: *Art Education*, 1995, 48 (2), p. 19.

87 Susan Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

Reggio Emilia approach⁸⁸, issues with case studies as research methods, the complexity of the learning process as a subject of research, and the time and space limitations for the research.

The Reggio Emilia approach, and the Lpfö 98 law, requires that the concerns for each individual child should be central to each preschool, meaning that energy and resources are distributed unevenly, according to where they are needed most⁸⁹. This often means that consistent scientific research is not possible. This also relates to Yin's concerns about the role of researchers as participant observers, who are more likely to form biases in relation to their research or to get distracted from their research with other daily tasks required of participation⁹⁰.

Case studies are often criticized, especially because they often are not seen as objectively generalizable⁹¹. Yin's retort for this criticism, however, is that case studies "are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes"⁹². Thus, case studies serve certain purposes, such as providing support for further theoretical inquiry.

Finally, although several qualitative methods were employed, only the most relevant data was included due to time and word restrictions. This, however, leaves much room for further research, for which suggestions are made in the conclusion.

CASE STUDY

The purpose of conducting this case study was to test the assumption that this physical version of play is the only – or at least the best – way to engage pre-primary

children in learning in the museum. Dockett, Main, and Kelly root their paper in the idea that children have the most positive of museum experiences when they are able to "exert choice and control"⁹³ through play, but the case study seeks to test this: is play, as viewed by the literature reviewed, the best and/or only way to engage pre-primary school children in learning experiences at the museum?

FINDINGS

Drawings typically do not resemble their real-world counterparts perfectly. This is especially true for young children, whose motor skills are still developing. Children begin drawing "scribble-like traces, and then later, circle-like forms, crosses and other basic shapes"⁹⁴. For both children and adults, however, "representation requires the invention of forms that are structurally or dynamically equivalent to the object"⁹⁵; in other words, drawings stand in for what they are intended to represent. Rather than interpreting the children's artworks myself, the researcher relied upon the children's descriptions of their drawings because these verbal expressions "reflect how children understand and what they emphasize"⁹⁶, whereas the researcher may have interpreted the artworks differently.

The most dynamic example among the children's drawings was their adoption of the rocket from the Swedish National Museum of Science and Technology. The children adopted these rockets into their personal contexts by incorporating them into drawings that include their prior interests; these conceptualizations were affected by social context, which is displayed by

88 The Reggio Emilia approach is essential for this research because it aligns well with Swedish preschool policy and it is the approach adopted by the preschool case study. Furthermore, although play is included in the Reggio Emilia curriculum, it is not the primary means by which the learning process occurs.

89 Skolverket, *Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98*, p. 8.

90 Robert K. Yin, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–96.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

92 *Ibid.*

93 Sue Dockett, Sarah Main, and Lynda Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

94 Nina Scott Frisch, "Drawing in Preschools: A Didactic Experience", in: *JADE*, 2006, 25 (1), pp. 74.

95 Claire Golomb, "Representational Conceptions in Two- and Three-Dimensional Media: A Developmental Perspective", in: *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 2007, 1 (1), pp. 32–33.

96 Nina Scott Frisch, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

3. Ursula's drawing, after a visit to the Swedish National Museum of Science and Technology, 19 March 2015

Ursulos piešinys po apsilankymo Švedijos nacionaliniame mokslo ir technologijos muziejuje, 2015 m. kovo 19 d.



4. Rocket representations over time

Raketų vaizdavimo kaita bėgant laikui

	tall	pointed	fins	fire	window(s)	door
Yenifer 19-03	y	y	y	n	n	n
Yenifer 14-04	y	y	n	y	y	n
Yenifer 23-04	y	y	n	y	n	n
Yenifer 04-05	y	y	n	n	y	n
Yenifer 05-05	y	y	y	n	y	n
Ursula 19-03	n	y	y	n	y	y
Ursula 14-04	n	y	y	n	y	n
Ursula 23-04	n	y	y	y	n	n
Ursula 05-05	y	y	y	y	y	n
Mirjam 14-04	n	n	n	y	y	y
Mirjam 23-04	n	y	n	n	n	y
Mirjam 04-05	n	y	n	y	y	y
Mirjam 05-05	y	y	y	y	y	y

the alteration of the rockets' features over time [Ill. 4]; and the rockets were re-contextualized in various drawings throughout the study period.

After the visit to the Swedish National Museum of Science and Technology, Ursula drew a rocket [Ill. 3], which is derived from a rocket seen at the museum. She also included a "rainbow house" and stars, neither of which was seen at the museum. She stated:

Ursula: "The stars go around our planet. The rocket is gonna [sic] try to fly to the space. The rainbow house is gonna [sic] open tomorrow when the rocket is gone."

Ursula incorporated rainbows and stars in several of her drawings throughout the study period. The fact that she included a rocket seemingly based on the museum object seen at the Swedish National Museum of Science and Technology shows that she assimilated this concept into her personal prior knowledge and preferences.

Children are capable of exerting more "choice and control" in their drawings⁹⁷. Falk and Dierking state, "prior knowledge, interests, and beliefs play a tremendous role in all learning"⁹⁸. Hein emphasizes the role

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Date of Drawing	Adam	Adriana	Aleksy	Anish	Mireia	Mirjam	Ursula	Yenifer	Total
19-03 Post Stockholm Transport Museum Drawings	1						1	1	3
14-04 Milky Way Drawings	1					1	1	1	4
23-04 Mars Paintings	1		1		1	1	1	1	6
04-05 Picture Book Drawings		1			1	1		1	4
05-05 Rocket Drawings		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Total	3	2	2	1	3	4	4	5	

8. Depiction of rockets over time

Raketų vaizdavimo dažnumas skirtingu laiku

Yenifer: “A rocket going to space, around Moon taking pictures.”

Yenifer’s second rocket depiction is in the class’ Milky Way drawings [Ill. 6]. In this drawing, the rocket points to the stars again, but she has drawn a very colorful Milky Way galaxy next to the rocket, and fire is bursting from the bottom of the rocket. The third rocket is represented in the class’ Mars paintings [Ill. 7]. Again, the rocket points straight up to the stars with fire underneath the rocket. Mars and several aliens float next to the rocket. She said of the drawing:

Yenifer: “These are aliens on Mars. And the rocket is going to Mars. And mountain [sic] in Mars. And some stars, and the Sun. Nothing else.”

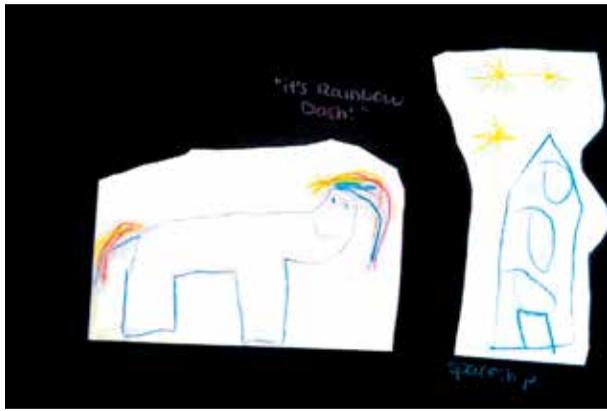
The last two representations of rockets in Yenifer’s drawings are both more complex. In the class’ storybook project, Yenifer depicts a rocket twice, on two different pages in her storybook [Ill. 9–10]. On the first page of her book, Yenifer draws the rocket

pointing to the stars again, with Rainbow Dash standing close by [Ill. 9]. On the fourth page of her book, however, Yenifer depicts the rocket much differently than before. Although she always *described* the rocket in transit, this drawing conveys motion in the rocket’s curved position [Ill. 10].

Yenifer’s depiction of rockets is simply one example among many; several other children depicted rockets in different settings as well, and many of them also used different motifs throughout their drawings, such as satellites, My Little Pony characters, or rainbows.

To understand the significance of adapting museum object-related concepts into different contexts, it is helpful to consult Jack Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning, by which one makes “a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action”¹⁰². By employing concepts in different con-

¹⁰² Jack Mezirow, “How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning,” in: *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, Ed. Jack Mezirow, San Francisco, C. A.: Jossey-Base Publishers, 1990, p. 1.



9. Yenifer's storybook, page one, 4-7 May 2015

Yenifer piešinių knyga, 1 p., 2015 m. gegužės 4-7 d.



10. Yenifer's storybook, page four, 4-7 May 2015

Yenifer piešinių knyga, 4 p., 2015 m. gegužės 4-7 d.

texts, the children revise their frameworks of meaning to accommodate new or revised interpretations of these concepts. In Yenifer's rocket drawings, for example, she was likely influenced by the museum object that she saw: a tall and static rocket [Ill. 6]. Soon, though, she revised her expectation of what a rocket *could* or *had* to be and set her rocket in motion by adding fire for take-off [Ill. 7, 9-10].

The preschoolers' ability to apply new contexts and meanings to museum-related concepts reveals that their framework of knowledge has become more nuanced.

IV CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the literature review and discourse analysis, it became evident that much of the literature, and the museum practices it represents, tend to conflate pedagogical theories and attempt to implement these theories through physical play.

The case study sought to implement museum field trips with young children, encompassing many of the educational theoretical aspects that museums wish to incorporate in their approaches without the practice of museums' limited view of play. Throughout the case study findings, children carried concepts related to museum objects back with them into the classroom and incorporated these concepts into their drawings.

Play is not necessary for children to learn from their museum experiences; furthermore, authentic objects are essential in young children's museum experiences. The incorporation of play, or at least the way that museums within the literature have employed the term, is not *necessary* for young children's learning within the museum. This does not mean that it is not a possible avenue for early learners' education within the museum, but it is not the *only* avenue.

The first museum trip for the class was somewhat distressing for the children. However, as they continued going to museums, their enthusiasm increased, and their abilities to lead within the museum space also improved. From the literature, it is easy to see that museums are concerned with creating a democratic space in which children's voices are considered just as much as those of adults. Museums expect to instigate children's inquiry-based, investigative and constructivist learning through these segregated spaces. Creating an environment in which young children are completely separated from the rest of the museum is a quick fix rather than a long-term solution, which would involve a more integrated approach.

Finally, children are interested in authentic objects and are aware that these objects and exhibitions are

distinct from the things they see in daily life. Rather than decreasing the number of objects on display in favour of interactive exhibitions, a different *attitude* towards objects and towards young children in the museum as a whole might be more beneficial to both the museum and the children. Kalliala's description of play is especially pertinent here: "play is not so much activities of a certain kind but is, rather, an attitude"¹⁰³.

If the museum poses specific spaces, exhibitions and programs as settings for play experiences, they position the rest of the museum as spaces that invoke boredom, lethargy, and lack of control. However, if play is an *attitude* rather than a space, then museums do not need segmented, segregated spaces for children's play. Instead, museum employees, teachers and parents can encourage playful thinking within the museum for *all* visitors rather than just for children.

The focus on physicality of learning and play throughout the literature implies that museums understand playful learning as one that engages the body. Inspecting the qualities of play outlined by Huizinga, however, reveals that endless possibilities for playful approaches within the museum exist, including ones that incorporate museum objects or other museum visitors (of any age)¹⁰⁴. The fact that museums focus on inquiry-based learning and play for young learners implies that the museum's approach to adult visitors is the opposite: an experience based on answers and seriousness. Thus, a playful approach to museums opens two avenues: an approach for young children that does not segregate them from the rest of the museum and does not rely on physical play, and a more playful approach for older adults as well.

Received 31 05 2016

¹⁰³ Marjata Kalliala, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁴ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*.

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MUZIEJUS KAIP ŽAIDIMO AIKŠTELĖ: PAŽVELGTI Į MUZIEJŲ ŽAISMINGAI

Danielle Carter

SANTRAUKA

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: muziejinė edukacija, ankstyvosios vaikystės edukacija, objektais pagrįstas mokymasis, Emilijos Redžo provincija, ikimokyklinė edukacija, meno edukacija.

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kaip muziejai siekia patenkinti ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikų edukacijos poreikius.

Literatūroje atskleidžiamas muziejuose vyraujantis požiūris: žaidimas nuolat naudojamas kaip būdas įtraukti vaikus, pedagoginės teorijos yra suplakamos, o žaidimas yra sumaišomas su mokymusi. Daugelis muziejų ne tik painioja skirtingas edukacines teorijas, bet ir mano, kad žaidimas neišvengiamai palengvina mokymąsi.

Remiantis atskiro atvejo analize, bandoma išsiaiškinti, ar tikrai žaidimas yra būtina vaikų mokymosi muziejuje dalis. Kaip rašoma literatūroje, izoliuotos žaidimų erdvės, programos ir parodos atskiria vaikus nuo autentiškų muziejaus objektų, tad atvejo tyrime autentiški objektai buvo integruoti į jaunųjų ugdytinių muziejaus maršrutus. Vaikų sukurti meno kūriniai ir aptarimai, kurie vyko prieš ir po kiekvieno vizito į muziejų bei jo metu, buvo naudojami kaip duomenys siekiant atskleisti vaikų mokymosi patirtį.

Dinamiškiausias pavyzdys – raketos suvokimas ir adaptavimas Švedijos nacionaliniame mokslo ir technologijų muziejuje. Vaikai panaudojo raketą savo meno kūrinuose, jiems darė įtaką kitų vaikų darbai, taip pat jie įtraukė raketą į savo asmeninius kontekstus. Tai atskleidžia, kaip dinamiškai vaikai užsiima su autentiškais objektais ir mokosi iš jų. Akivaizdu, kad žaidimas nėra privaloma vaikų mokymosi proceso muziejuose dalis, jie kur kas labiau, nei, kaip atrodo, įsivaizduoja dauguma muziejų, domisi ir užsiima su autentiškais objektais.