How do families with under fives experience museums?

Research report for Humber Museum Partnership, May 2017

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Introduction

Following on from our previous collaboration with Humber Museums Partnership (HMP), which looked at analysing spaces in other museums and visitor attractions from the point of view of young children, the focus of this research was how families experience the museums of the Humber Partnership. HMP were particularly interested in thinking across a range of their sites, and also in understanding how experiences of museums changed over time for young children, from a first encounter to a point at which a building might be familiar, and particular kinds of meanings and practices become attached to being in that place. Thus, the research design focusses on three small groups of families, each making a series of return visits to one museum in the Humber Partnership. The recruitment of the families, and the way in which the visits were timed and organised, differed for each site, as outlined below. Overall, HMP were keen firstly to understand the specificity of how one museum could become a meaningful place for young children and their families, and the practical implications of this for museum learning and programming. Secondly, HMP hoped the research would offer some broader generalisations, or directions for thinking and working, in terms of young children visiting any or all museum sites regionally. No matter what kind of museum, in what kind of context – what are the possibilities for children being in these spaces, and how can museum staff maximise these possibilities?

The aims of the study were

1. To understand how families with under fives use HMP spaces, identifying favourite exhibits and spaces and ways in which the children make meaning in these spaces.
2. To identify how interactions, movements and traditions emerge for families in these favourite exhibits and spaces over time.
3. To inform how Humber museums in particular, and museum sector more generally, can cater better for this audience, with a particular focus on how museums can

identify and celebrate the strengths of their spaces, objects and provision for family audiences.

The research addressed two research questions:

1. How do under 5s and their families use and experience the museum spaces in HMP?
2. How do museums identify their strengths for family audiences with young children under five years?

Methodology

We used a mixture of observations and participatory methods for working with young children and their grown ups in three Humber museums sites: North Lincolnshire Museum, Streetlife Museum of Transport, and Sewerby Hall. In total 7 families in Scunthorpe, 10 in Hull and 4 in Sewerby each made a series of four visits to their local site.

North Lincolnshire Museum

At North Lincolnshire Museum, small group of families who had never visited the museum before were recruited through a partnership with the Local Authority Family Learning service and a local community centre. Families came as a group to the museum on a minibus once a week for a total of four visits. Each visit lasted 90 minutes, beginning in Dudley's Den (dedicated under-fives space), before exploring the rest of the museum. Each visit concluding with a drink and a snack before the families travelled home on the minibus. Fieldnotes were written for each visit, and still images and video footage collected on the latter three visits. Children were offered the ipad to film the visit themselves, but there was little interest in doing this. We also visited the families in their community some months later to present certificates and a copy of the interim findings of the research.

Streetlife Museum, Hull

At Streetlife Museum in Hull, a core group of families were recruited who were attending the Transport Tots stay and play sessions that are held on a weekly basis at the Museum. Data was collected both through participant observation of the Transport Tots sessions, themselves, as well as of families taking their children to visit the gallery during and after the Transport Tots sessions. The Transport Tots sessions ran from 10 – 11.30 and Gallery visits after the sessions were between 30 minutes to an hour in length. Field notes were written for each visit, and still images footage collected throughout the visits. Children were offered the ipad to film the visit themselves, and a few children took some pictures of toys during the play sessions, which they showed to carers, and other children. They were also offered the ipad to look at photos from previous weeks, but did not show much interest in this. In total 10 families participated in the visits to the Gallery, although there were many more families who participated in the drop-in Transport Tots sessions, who have not been included in the data set as they were not regular attenders.

Sewerby Hall, East Riding

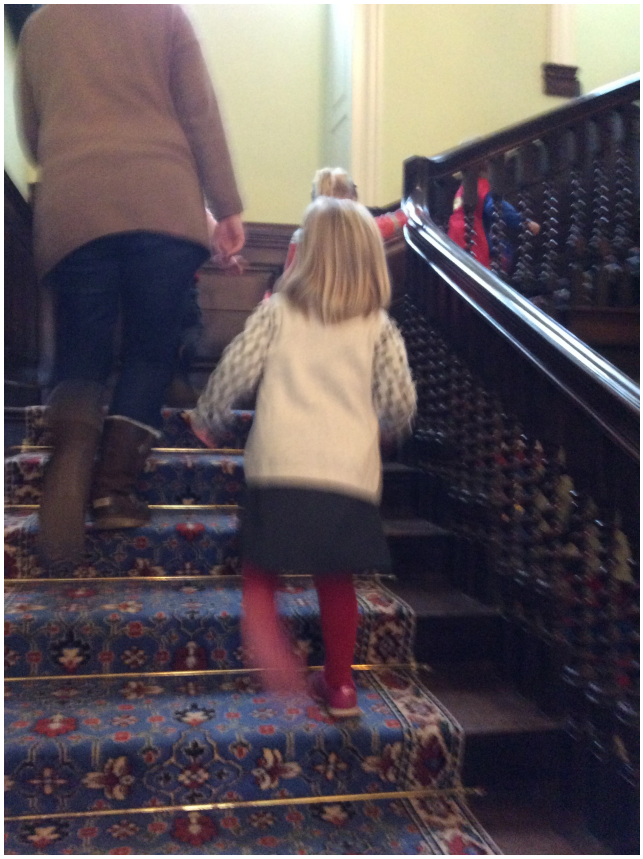
At Sewerby Hall, a restored early Georgian house with collections, four families were recruited from a local nursery. One of the families had visited the museum, but the rest were only familiar with the grounds. We arranged for families to visit for two hours, over four visits in total. At the first session, families, researcher and museum practitioner met as a group before the families then explored the museum together. After this first visit, families would drop in when they could, some staying for the full two hours, some leaving earlier. During these visits, each family tended to explore the museum independently, but there would be moments when they would come together and the children would play together. Field notes were written after each visit, and still photographs together with a small number of videos were collected. On the third visit the children were invited to use disposable cameras to photograph whatever they wanted. A total of 20 photographs were taken by two of the children. On the final visit these photographs were used as a prompt for an audio recorded discussion with the parents.

The dataset overall from the Humber Museums study is as follows:

	North Lincolnshire Museum	**Steetlife Museum of Transport**	**Sewerby Hall**
Fieldnotes, written observations	4 sets of fieldnotes from AH 4 sets of reflections from Ros (learning officer)	5 sets of fieldnotes from CM (the first 4 include observations of families visiting the gallery, as well as the Streetlife sessions)	4 sets of field notes from LP 4 sets of reflections from Lucy (learning officer) One audio recorded conversation with parents
Still images	56 still images	107 still images	412 still images by researcher 20 still images by children
Video	16 videos		3 videos

The diversity of the families recruited and the ways in which they engaged with our research highlights the danger of considering under fives and their families as a homogenous group. Just as each of the three museum sites were unique, the groups of families at each site had different kinds of relationships with each other, with the local

area and with the museum itself.



Analysis

Once data had been gathered from all three sites, our analysis focussed on working across the data from the different sites, identifying emerging themes and moments of resonance. We did this through a series of collaborative meetings in which the three researchers shared their data and discussed potential themes. Following this, the researchers met with HMP staff in Hull, for a collaborative meeting in which we engaged as a group with the data and the emerging themes. Much of the content of the following report, particularly the 'implications and questions for practice' and the final discussion section, has emerged directly from this collaborative meeting. The following sections offer a series of themes that emerged and worked across the three HMP sites involved in the research. In each section, we offer examples from the data set, insights from the research literature, and questions arising for museum practice, which were developed during the collaborative meeting with HMP staff.

Thing-nesss: the power of objects

Thing-ness is "an efficacy of objects in excess of the human meanings, designs or purposes they express or serve."
Bennett, 2010, p.20

Children's interactions with objects featured in the data across the three sites, in various and often unexpected ways. Objects in museums are often closely connected with facts about the significance of that object, in a practice Dudley (2010) critiques as an "object-information package" (p.3). For children in particular, objects are often made available for playing with or handling with an explicit learning message embedded into them (MacRae et al, forthcoming). However, frequently in this study, the ways in which children were drawn to particular objects exceeded or side-stepped the learning messages, or thematic relevance, that was intended to be embedded into them.

Whilst Sandra Dudley (2014) has written about the "complex materiality" of museum objects, we witnessed the complexity of the ways in which objects engaged and moved children (and adults) both in terms of objects from the museum collection, handling

objects, and unexpected objects which were 'unintended' to be the centre of the action. Certain objects seemed to exert a certain power or pull over particular children, or over the whole group. For example, at the Streetlife museum, one child was drawn to the toy cars, and particularly to arranging them in patterns and lines. The wood chippings, provided at North Lincolnshire Museum as part of an archaeological dig area, also seemed to drive experience in unexpected ways; children and adults couldn't help playing with them, running them through their fingers. Lots of data from our study describes how participants used them, touched them, experimented with them, in ways that are rarely related to learning about archaeology. La just wanted to sit amongst them – and this brought her complete contentment.

> *La is very happy sitting in the archaeological dig for a really long time. She picks up the wood chippings, the magnifying glasses and the brushes in turn and places them down again. I sit near her and scrunch wood chippings in my hands - she looks at them intently. La brushes them all off my hand, first with her brush and then with her fingers, and then waits, as if to prompt me to put some more onto my hands. We do this a couple of times.*
> *L is so content to sit in the dig. I say to her mum does she like things like sand pits and water, she says she does.*
> *Occasionally, L makes extended eyes gaze at something outside the dig pit - first looking at owls in glass cases, then at the dinosaur tent. At these moments, her mum notices her gaze and asks her if she wants to get out of the dig, to go look at something else, but La shakes her head firmly.*
> *Fieldnotes, North Lincs Museum*

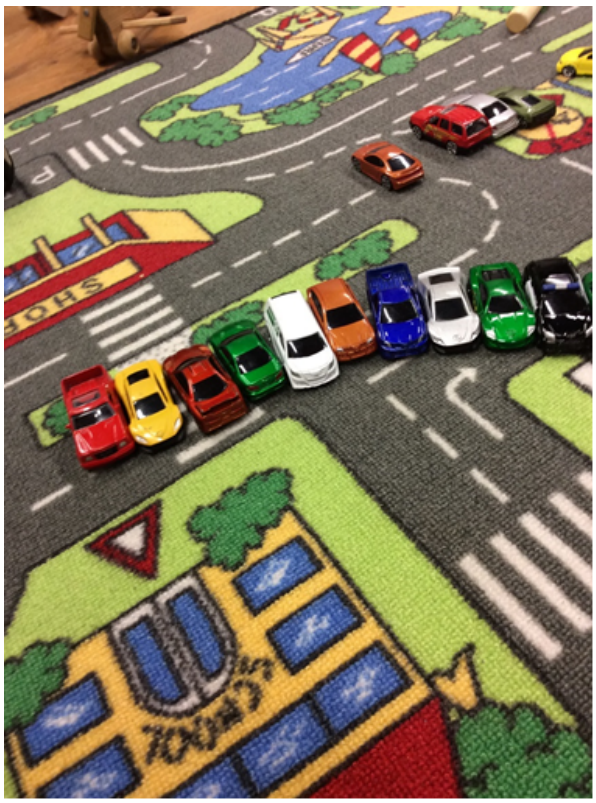
Pauliina Rautio (2013) describes children's propensity to pick up, gather, hoard and arrange aesthetically or sensorially pleasing objects as autotelic practices, that is, "internally motivating in that the activity is the goal and the reward in itself." Understanding some of the ways in which children play with objects as autotelic removes the need to find a verbal, rational explanation for *why* a child does something and *what* this could mean. Rautio writes

> "were we to ask why children carry stones we could proceed in trying to find out a clear rationale from any such child in question…..Explanations would surely surface and lend themselves to be neatly categorized."

However, she goes on to argue

> "we would do well to let go of insistence on causality, linearity and 'neatness' in our conceptualizations. The child-with-stones could be approached as if horizontally, as a momentary event produced by a mesh of related bodies (human and non-human). This would allow us to reconsider the seeming simplicity of the observation that children seem to carry stones (or sticks, corks or any other item) for the sake of carrying them." (Rautio, 2013: 397)

Bennet also calls 'things'[1] recalcitrant, that is, they do not make it easy for humans to understand what sorts of powers they might exert. We cannot know in advance how objects (or things) in museums might move individuals or groups, but being open to the possibilities and potentialities of thing-power and the autotelic practices they can inspire may be useful for planning for children (and for all visitors) in museums. During this study, HMP museums offered young children and their families a range of potentialities for how people and objects could become entangled together and affect each other in different ways.



[1] Bennet (2010) makes a distinction between 'object', which refers to the way a thing appears to humans, and 'thing', which is where matter exists and can influence the world "in excess of their human meaning" (p.22).

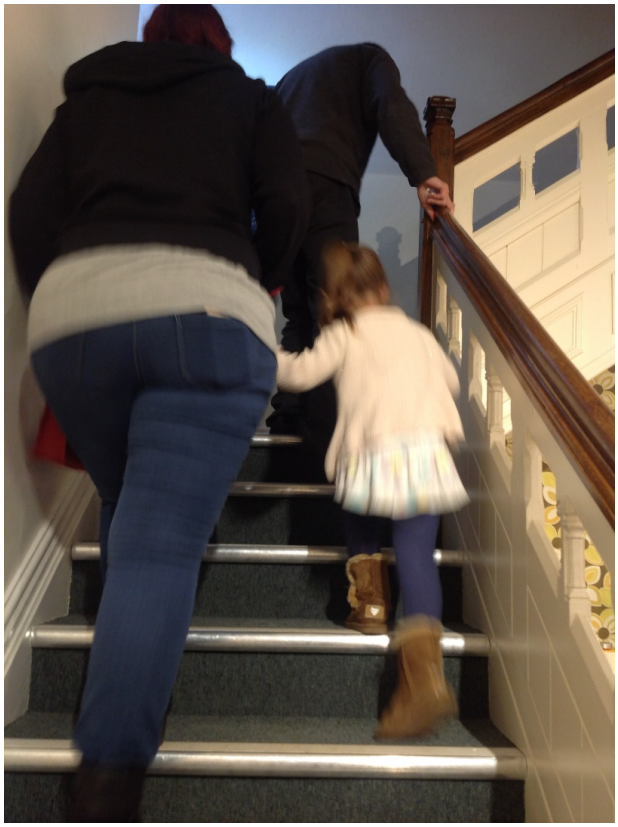
Questions and implications for practice

a. How can we attend to the qualities of certain objects to capture children's attention (for example, kinetic qualities, texture)? How can we make the most of the material pull and sensory experience of objects for young children?

b. How can young children's sensory attention be considered when selecting museum objects?

c. Can the unpredictability of children's engagement with objects be seen as an advantage? What if we see children as innovators and tune into the multiple possibilities for encountering objects that children come up with?

Thinking beyond the objects



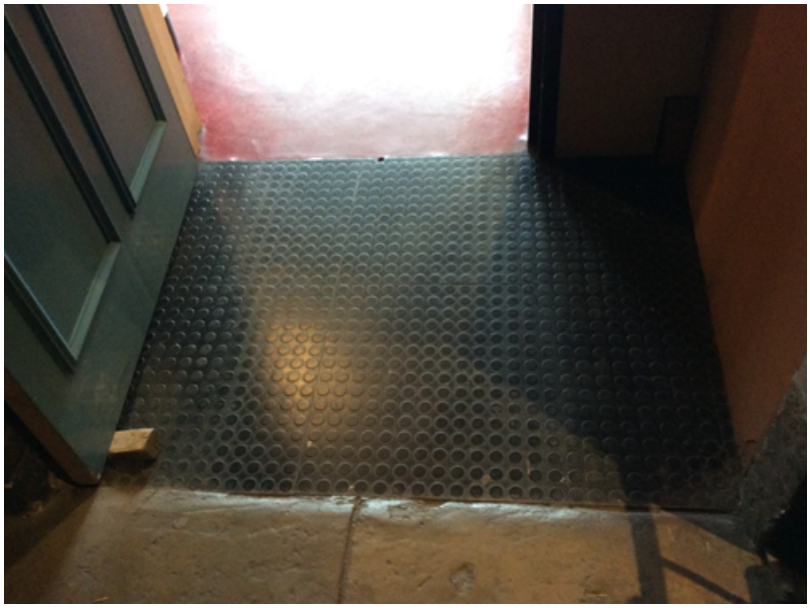
"buildings are part of the world, and the world will not stop still but ceaselessly unfolds along its innumerable paths of growth, decay and regeneration"
Ingold, 2013, p.48

Whilst at some sites, the major focus seemed to be on providing suitable themed and educational objects for children, often the spaces themselves, and the experience of these spaces, were deeply significant to the young children. Examples of this included children's interest in going up and down stairs, in operating automatic doors, or buttons that made doors swing open, in moving through, up and down long narrow corridors, running or lying on the floor in wide open spaces, and in crossing 'thresholds' in the museum, for example through doorways or where the flooring changed. Being able to 'get inside' things was also important to the children, whether this was vehicles at the Streetlife museum or cubby holes in Dudley's Den at North Lincs museum.

> *During the firsts museum visit, Henry leads us up the stairs. He holds the balustrade and seems to stomp… The steps echo the sound of our feet as we march up them. The journey up the staircase feels significant somehow, the steps are a comfortable size for the children, the balustrade a comfortable height, it requires big steps up, but the children are able to move up it without adult support. The stair seems to hold a certain significance for the children as the visits continue. For example, on the third museum visit, Alice tells her mum that she wants to go downstairs. She sits at the top of the stairs and then then slides down each step on her bottom. She gets down to the bottom, looks around, and then tells her mum that she wants to go upstairs again. Encountering the staircase seems to be an important part of the visit for the children.*
> *Fieldnotes, Sewerby Hall*

In the museums studies literature, how visitors experience the physical spaces in museums has received much less attention compared to how visitors understand concepts and make meanings in exhibitions (Jones and MacLeod, 2016). Whilst Schorch (2013) has shown that the architecture of the museum and the concepts (adult) visitors remember from a visit are very much intertwined, architectural features seem to have a particular significance for young children. A diversity of possibilities for moving seemed particularly valuable to the children, as well as possibilities for moving that were different to what they had at home (such as big staircases or large rooms). For children, learning and knowing their way around the museums was important, as previous research has found (Hackett, 2016) and parents, too, want a clear sense of the way and where they were and were not allowed to go (not always clear at all sites). Finally, spaces within the museum where parents and children could relax and dwell, that were clearly child friendly and where parents did not need to be so alert to whether their children's behaviour was safe / compliant with the

rules, were important at all sites.



Questions and implications for practice

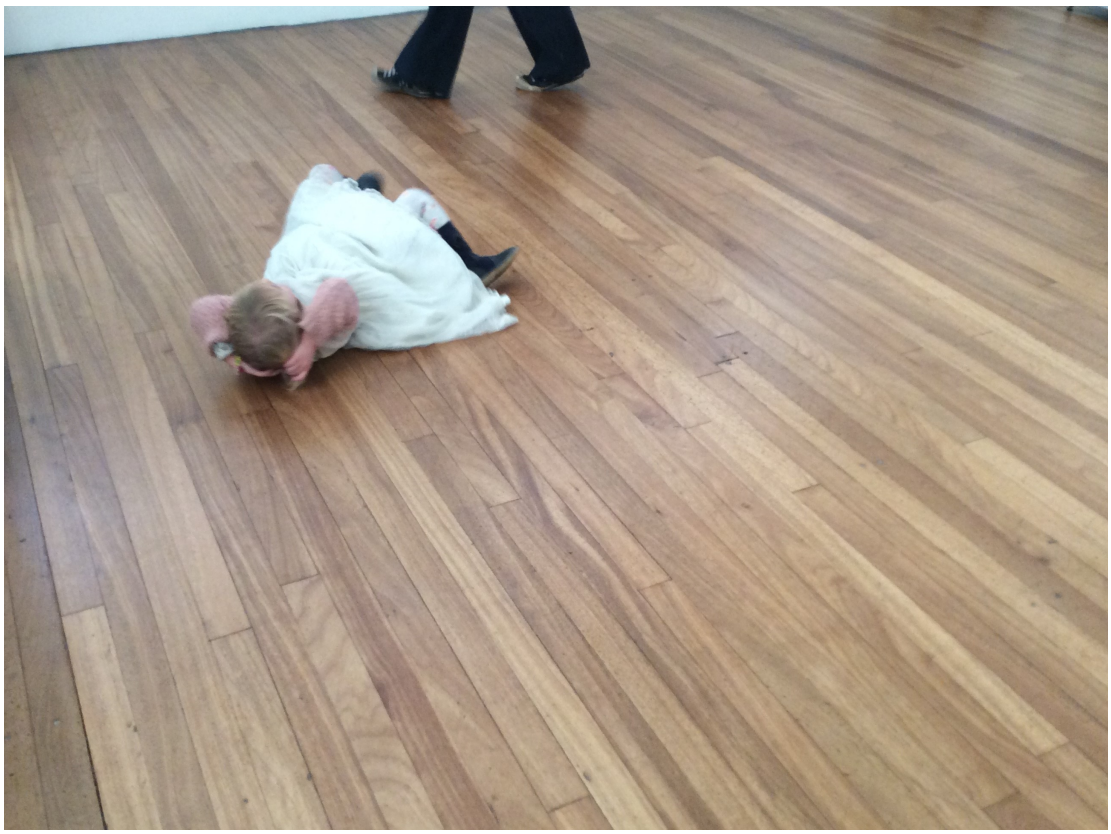
a. A focus on objects might mean that we miss the ways in which physical/ material space and structure impacts on children's experiences of museum. How can we think about the ways in which spaces themselves shape engagement (i.e. the robust nature of a large staircase; the ways in which windows create connections between indoor/outdoor spaces)?

b. Each building comes with its own unique qualities and sometimes these are qualities that children respond to more directly than adults. How can we recognise what qualities matter to children?

c. How can we value the ways in which the small details of architecture might fascinate children (i.e. a small hole in the floor, changes in surface textures) with the understanding that physicality and materiality are really important to young children?

d. Architecture seems to influence how young children move through space and the rhythms of these movements; how can we think about this more deliberately?

Repetition and Rituals



Emergent processes and patterns…….can become the raw material for more complex new patterns unique to the classroom, and they certainly constrain the probabilities of actions and utterances that would invoke these special meanings or contribute positively or negatively to social relationships
Lemke, 2000, p.278

Children who make visits to the galleries with their families often repeated the same behaviour, eventually establishing rituals connected to places or objects in the museum. Examples of such repetition include Alice's play with the doll's house at Sewerby Hall, which often took up most of the visit to the site, and A's interest in the carrying metal cups and pressing the button to open the automatic door at North Lincs Museum. In many of these examples, the materiality of an object or a place seemed to compel or activate the ritual. In the example below, Henry is deeply attached to a wooden dog, which he remembers and refers to from one visit to the next:

During his first visit, Henry played with a wooden train and a set of

wooden animals. He placed the animals in the carriages of the train and created a route with stopping points around the room that the train would take. During his second visit he returns to the train. Soon after he starts to pull the train around, which is already filled with some animals in the carriages, he shouts 'where's the dog?' He looks around for a while and cannot find it. 'The dog' his mum says, 'is it in here?' She looks inside a toy chest in the corner of the room, she finds a small wooden dog, 'is this it?' 'YES!" replies Henry excitedly. He seems really pleased, this small toy seems really important to him.
Sewerby Hall, Fieldnotes

Rowsell and Pahl (2007) have written about the way in which meanings can become attached or 'sedimented' within objects. Carr et al (2012) found 'boundary objects', that is, physical objects that were experienced within and beyond the museum an effective way for children to remember their museum visit. Boundary objects is just one way in which museum practice could make use of the 'sedimented' meaning that objects and places can acquire for children over time. Being attuned to this potential for sedimentation and boundary crossing could usefully inform museum practice.

Such repetition and ritual can powerfully shape the experience of the museum, and the behaviour of adults and children. In the following example, TH and his grandma have developed a ritual for their visits.

TH and the Railway Bench

TH's great-grandma says that she usually does take him round the museum before they go anyway, so I ask if I can join them. She has already told me that he comes here very regularly with her as well as with his mum and knows the museum very well. TH rushes ahead and knows when to turn off to find his special seat. By the time we get to the corner he is already sitting on the middle of a bench – he looks expectantly at us and he faces a large steam locomotive. Next to the bench are a pile of old leather suitcases. His Grandma sits one side of him and he pats the seat on the other side to show me where to sit. Grandma says "look so here's our luggage, where are we going to go?". It is evident this has been done many times before. TH answered "don't know" when G asked him our destination; she suggests a place where they have been on holiday and he nods his head. Grandma says, "shall I make it go, are you ready", and again he nods, and Grandma gets up and goes out of sight to where the motion-trigger is that sets off the sound of a moving steam train and its hoot. It takes a few moments for this to happen and TH's attention is caught by and umbrella hanging off the buggy which he is trying to get off by lifting its loop, he starts to pull my hand to help him, when suddenly the noise starts and he bounces on the seat with excitement. As his Grandma walks back she moves like a steam train with her arms circles, and chuffs loudly and TH smiles at her. Soon his attention is back to the umbrella, which Grandma helps him to unhook. He is intently interested in this and wants to pull it so it extends, and then push back……. The noise stops and this brings TH's attention back from the umbrella, and he says "finished' in a definite voice, and gets off the bench, but at that moment someone in the gallery triggers the noise again, and immediately TH says "sit down" and he and I and grandma all sit back down again. He gives another excited wriggle as the engine hoots, and he then looks up at the very tall ceiling and observes out loud "that lights turned off", and so we all look up and indeed one of the lights in a row of lights is not working, and Grandma says "maybe the bulb's gone". Although his attention seems to be caught by the broken light, as soon as the noise stops for the second time, again, TH says "finished now" and he runs, down the side of the engine round the corner and

then around the next before we catch up with him.
Fieldnotes, Streetlife Museum Hull

In the example above, it is clear that the repertoire of first sitting on the bench and thinking about where the train might be going; then activating the steam train sounds; and finally, only getting off the bench when the sound stopped, was a sophisticated ritual that had been rehearsed over a period of visits and involved actions as well as a verbal narrative. The bench coupled with the sound of the steam train had a powerful activating force on both TH and his Grandma. The bench can be seen as having a vitality that was productive in bringing the ritual to life, but at the same time both TH and his Grandma are have their own dynamic part to play in the ritual. The bench becomes a site of "anticipation", of "memory" and of "attunement" (Manning, 2016:72). TH and his Grandma approach the bench with anticipation, as they have a sense that they are about to enter a particular "shift in register" (Manning, 2016:67) that occurs when once the ritual unfolds. Although the actions they perform are ones they have performed before, each performance is experienced uniquely and carries its own small improvisational differences. When they move on to explore other parts of the gallery, the bench remains as a memory-site that that can be re-visited either in person, or virtually. And as the ritual performance unfolds in the moment, both this past and future are folded into the in-the-moment experience of acting out the ritual. In the unfolding of the ritual, both TH and Grandma become intensely attuned to the bench, the suitcases, and the sound of the steam train, and they are compelled to act in unison. This collective and repeated set of responses to place, object, and sound demonstrates a dynamic and deep level of engagement with both the architecture and as well as the collections afforded by the gallery.

All too often there is an anxiety on the part of adults that revisiting the same exhibits or repeating the same actions is not productive in terms of museum learning (although we were often amazed by the level of attuned improvisation that we saw taking place between children and their carers). However, looking closely at the many ritual events that we noticed unfolding as children journeyed through the gallery, we recognised that there is something very particular about these rituals in the way that they mobilise the body into action. Small rituals produced very singular meanings that had a life of their own and went beyond a pre-defined learning outcomes. These rituals had the effect of embedding very close relationships between children and the material world offered by the museum space. It became clear that these kinds of engagements with the fabric of the museum are not ones that can be planned for, but rather they will flourish when both the space of the museum, as well as the adults who accompany the child, maintain a quality of openness that is difficult to pin down. This openness demands an ability to

anticipate where children's interests may lie, but at the same time to quickly respond to unexpected directions of thought that emerge in the moment of encounters in the gallery. It also requires as adults we recognise that the body itself thinks-in-action, instead of an expectation that learning is always needs to be expressed in language.

Questions and implications for practice:

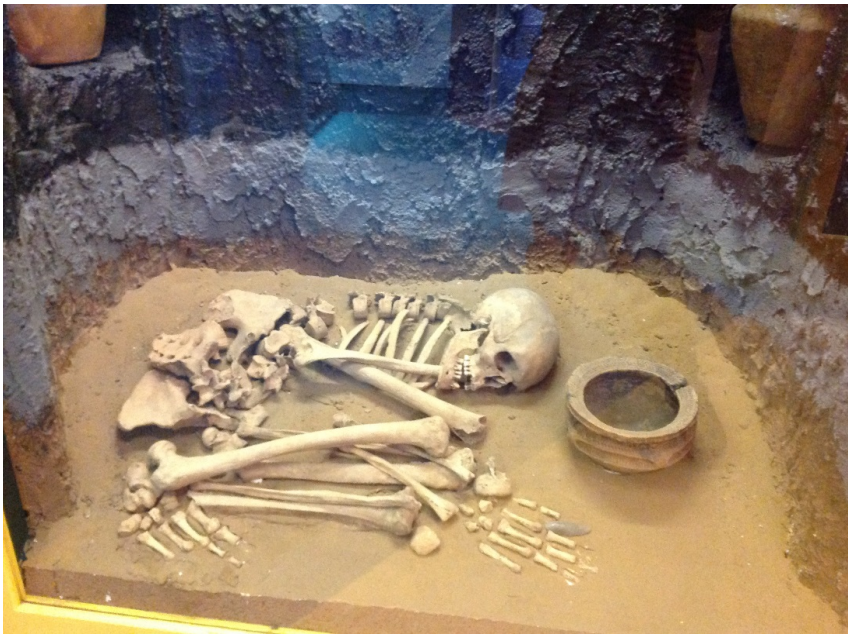
a. Small repetitions could be seen as the beginnings of a ritual (i.e. lining up objects) - how can we recognise both repetition and rituals and think about the relation between these two?

b. We don't want to predict what ritual could be - but what kinds of spaces, objects and interactions might support these things to emerge? And help adults and children to talk about and value them when they do emerge?

c. Repetitions might be triggered by qualities beyond objects, such as sounds or lighting, as in the example about the boy on the bench at Streetlife. How can we think about the ways in which different dimensions of space can support rituals?

d. Children encounter unfamiliar spaces (i.e. the air raid shelter) and objects (i.e. the doll's house) during their museum visits. Perhaps it is this unfamiliarity that makes museum rituals particularly significant and important to children?

Encountering strangeness and familiarity



A sense of wonder that causes children to "stop [in their] tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention." Greenblatt, 1990

During the museum visits, children seemed to display a sense of wonder and amazement at particular things they encountered at the museums. This sense could be expressed through intense gaze, touch, pausing, or verbal and non verbal communication with others about what they had encountered.

> *Grandma – "He always likes looking out the windows" – and indeed he moves slowly through this section of the corridor where there are full length windows that look out into the dock as he goes into more window niches and looks out onto the waterfront. At one point, he notices that there is steam forming on the pane and he uses his finger to make marks.*
> *Streetlife Museum, fieldnotes*

> *Claire and Ella are really interested in the large sculpture of Amy Johnson; they carefully touch it with their fingertips. Ella says 'it prickles', Claire says 'it prickles'. Ella touches the wooden propeller and says 'it's flat'. There is also a brass pole beside us which is used to hand rope barrier from. I say that this feels different, I say it is cold. Claire touches this too and says 'it's cold'. On a future visit, they are both stood beside the Amy Johnson statue, their bodies are still and they very gentle reach out to touch the sculpture. Claire touches the prickly figure, 'it prickles' she says, and then the smooth propeller.*
> *Sewerby Hall, fieldnotes*

Frequently the children also seemed to be working hard to make sense of the unfamiliar things they encountered. One example of this was working out what was and was not real. For example, on the first visit to North Lincs Museum, Z discovered a skeleton. He connected this with Halloween (it was October), commenting it was 'broken' (because it was lying on the floor), and that is could not possibly be real. Here in another example, Z encounters taxidermy,

> *Z wanders, playing with the wooden bead chaser and the coloured shapes on the light box. Me and his mum point out the owl in the air and the mouse in the floor. Z's mum says 'The bird is going to fly down to get the mouse'. Z looks amazed – 'when?' We explain is a model. He looks again suspiciously at the mouse, I say something like 'you like that don't you' and Z asks 'why isn't it walking?'*
> *North Lincs museum, fieldnotes*

For children, many encounters in the museums seemed to exist on the edge of reality, with a slipperiness between what is real / not real, works / doesn't work. This led to a confused bafflement of certain objects and a complicated set of rules about how you behave. Museums can be seen as a unique place for children to explore real-ness. Adults at times reassured children, and at times playfully engaged with these questions too (as Z's mum does in the example above).

For adults, the authenticity of museum objects is often key. Children also were interested in with 'real-ness' of museum objects in a number of ways. At Streetlife Museum, children navigated working out what objects are physically present, and which are virtual. For example, one child was confused by a tram you could climb into, and another identical one behind glass. Like peering into multiple mirrors, children actively worked to unravel which aspects of the museum were really there, and which were not.

Thinking around the edges of what was real or nor real also sometimes connected with a sense of the fear for the children. For example, some children were afraid of the mannequins with sound effects at Streetlife Museum, and of the air raid shelter at North Lincs Museum. Learning through these emotional and affective responses may be particularly significant for young children's experiences of museums. Perhaps museums are places where emotional responses can particularly be attended to, even as they occur, haphazardly and through incidental encounters.

In contrast to this theme of unfamiliarity and exploration, some of the play observed during the fieldwork seemed to re-enact play that was familiar to the children, for example, playing 'tea parties' at Sewerby Hall, crayoning and playing with wooden blocks at North Lincs museum, playing with vehicles at Streetlife Museum. This mixture of experiences that are familiar, or almost mundane, and those that are unfamiliar, challenging or confusing, seemed to provide a rhythm to the families' museum visiting. For example, as North Lincs Museum, the families started and ended in Dudley's Den, which offered a familiar space that felt safe and easy to engage with. Leaving Dudley's Den, the group would often refer to "going to explore", and it was during these explorations of the rest of the museum that they would encounter things that confused, worried or required effort to make sense of. In this way, these rhythms also had a relationship with place; places in the museum that feel safe and where how to engage is obvious, and places that are about 'exploring' and not knowing. During these rhythms, the roles of adults and children also changed; there were points in the visits where adults' attention was directed to the children, and parts of the visit that felt like they were 'for the adults' too.

Questions and implications for practice:

a) What does real-ness mean for young children? Is it real because they can make it work (the fire engine) or because it is going to move (the taxidermy), rather than because it is "authentic"?
b) What do we do with children's fear in museums? And also their interest in returning to things that scare them, or to 'conquering their fear'? As adults (parents and museum staff), how is it helpful to respond?
c) Over time, there are new things for children to push at and to test; they are edging in over time. This creeping, on their own terms, is important to children. The museum could be seen as a comfortable holding space that provides a place from which children can explore the tricky boundaries between what is real and what is not, as well as facing and overcoming fear about frightening sounds and objects.
d) Occasionally in museums, children say no (or express no through their silence). This is important to attend to - because it is not easy for children to say no, particularly to adult strangers (such as researchers and museum staff).

Discussion: How do young children and their families experience museum spaces, and how can museums identify their strengths for this audience?

Our collaborative discussions led to the question of how we want to consider engagement for young children in museums. Does it matter, we wondered, if children (and adults) don't necessarily know what the stuff of/in museums is? Is it enough that this stuff is unique and attracts children's sensory engagement (and in some but not all cases becomes 'known' to children as a particular thing with a particular purpose)? The purpose of this research was not to provide a fixed checklist for good practice for young children in museums, but to indicate the directions museum practitioners could be thinking in, in order to identify what is unique, meaningful or filled with potential in their museum, from the point of view of young children and their families.

Key findings and related questions for practice include:

- Our observations show that children and families build up layers of knowledge over **repeated visits** to museum spaces over time. How can repeat visits be encouraged (i.e. through regular 'playgroups' etc.)?

- Is it ok for a child to roll around on the floor? As adults we are very prone to always thinking that language is the most important vehicle for learning meaning-making, but we must remember that **children learn through and in movement.**

- Modes of engagement in museum might be **different for adults and children**, for example children might want to move quickly at times when adults want to stop and natter. Familiarity with a museum seems to support families to be more comfortable with these differences. In particularly **children's autonomy to decide where to go and at what pace** seems less fearful for adults as they too become more familiar with the museum spaces.

- Wayfaring can be viewed as a form of engagement. The observations included many examples of children figuring out how spaces connected to others and routes between them. Over time, they were **learning how to navigate the mystery of the stuff** that they were encountering.

- The tactility of the stuff (objects and architecture) of the museum space was bound up in children's wayfaring and navigation. **Architectural features** that may be seen as a barrier could be seen as an opportunity, such as the grand staircase in Sewerby Hall, which seemed to engage children through its weight, texture, sound, scale.

- Objects and architectural features that are at a child's scale and therefore missed by adults, such as a small cubbyhole or a hole/crack in the floor, are an important part of children's experiences of museums. Perhaps it is ok if **adults and children don't see the same things because of their position/scale.**

- **The floor** tended to be a more significant part of the museum for children than it did for adults. How can we think more about the role that floors can play in the design/curation of museum spaces, such as placing objects under glass in the floor, considering changes in floor materials to mark changes in pace/activity, abstract floor stencils, and so on.

The ingredients for a successful museum visit for young children

> *"it is impossible for us to know what might be possible for a child or student to learn, to know or become"*
> *Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p.16*

The question 'what are the ingredients for a successful museum visit?' was asked by Sarah Hammond, and based on our research and collaborative discussions with HMP, we offer the following suggestions.

The incidental

Often when museum visits felt meaningful and deeply engaging for families and children in the study, ***the incidental or unexpected lay at the heart of what was happening***. This led us to ponder ***"How can the incidental be part of our core mission for under-fives in museums?"***. A valuing of the incidental can create a sense of tension, because it is difficult to plan for, or guarantee, or measure. It may mean a move away from an outcomes focus for children's museum visits, and a focus instead on the experience of 'being' in the museum? This has implications for how museums communicate the value of museum visiting to parents and to early years practitioners. It requires a move away from the measuring or evidencing of a learning outcome, to other approaches such as, for example, sharing observations of these incidental moments with parents and practitioners, giving them care and attention, making notes or using photography or other visual methods to try to capture these moments.

Some other points the incidental prompts us to consider include:

a) The incidental takes on increasing significance for children over time. Museums could develop strategies through, for example, marketing, regular activity groups or modes of documentation, to encourage families to keep returning to the museum.
b) Museums could consider how the incidental becomes part of how we talk about under fives museum visits. Can we start to develop a language that allows us to value the incidental, perhaps supporting these conversations to happen amongst practitioners after visits/activities with under fives or promoting note-taking using the APSE resource, for example?

Diversity

Moving between ***a range of different kinds of spaces, and in and out of experiences that were familiar / easy and experiences that were unfamiliar / mysterious / hard to understand***, emerging repeatedly as a key feature of museum visits for the children and families in this study. Museums could consider how to ensure a diversity of spatial experiences for families, including enclosed spaces, opportunities to move up and down, long corridors, empty spaces, things to encounter at different levels, small cracks in floors/holes in walls, enclosures at different scales, and on so.

Repetition

Repeated visits with young children to the same museum space bring a great deal of benefits. Adults seem to see more value in the incidental, parents become more comfortable as they start to learnt the rules of engagement for the museum, and see their children develop certain rituals and practices in the museum spaces.
The rituals developed in relation to objects and museum spaces are sometimes examples of 'the comfort of things', in that they are partly about familiarity, and also partly about touch and the actual contact of a thing held. Such rituals seem to engender a feeling of contentment. How could we promote the value of returning to the same museum over time, while also recognising that different parents feel comfortable in different museums? Museums could develop strategy to promote the value of both repeated visits, and the development of repeated actions or rituals during these visits. Again, recognition, valuing, recording and developing a language to talk about these practices, would have a strong effect on shaping how families and museum staff think about young children in museums.

Movement (and learning)

Children experienced the museums through their movements through them. The importance children placed on elements of the architecture of the museum, such as the stairs, windows, corridors and open spaces, illustrates ***the significance of movement in place for young children's experiences of museum visiting***. Although young children's movement is generally considered to be a physical skill, in our data, movement was about much more than the physical. It acted as a mode of learning, of communication, of memory making, and of play.
When we turned to the EYFS, we could see how many of the things we observed during this study connected to the EYFS outcomes, but we were also aware there was so much

more going on. Resisting offered a reductionist and potentially impoverished account of the richness of young children's experiences in HMP, we wondered how museums could re-narrate the EYFS outcomes, through the qualitatively different experience of being in a museum (rather than a classroom). Would a focus on movement support the ways in which we are attending to the incidental, as opposed to outcomes? If we consider thinking to be in children's movement, then perhaps movement undergirds all the 'prime' areas of the EYFS. In which case, because movement and place are different in a museum compared to an early years setting, this is the starting point for ***the case for why early years settings might want to use museums; not because 'the same' outcomes can be achieved through museum visit, but because something different is made possible***.

Sharing a vision for young children in museums

The findings of this project are important because they take as a starting point children and families' own experiences of museums. We aimed to start with what happens for young children in museums when visits unfold in the moment, rather than any pre-conceived idea of value or learning. ***Many of the findings require a reconceptualization of why young children may visit museums, and what a successful museum visit looks like***.

In terms of sharing and communicating about this vision, both within the museum sector and to family audiences, we recommend museums consider:

a) How could we raise the profile of the things that are special to museums, such as movement, incidental encounters, unique spaces and objects etc?
b) Where a structure of sorts is required, for programming or offering visits to early years settings,
c) could this "structure" be more about 1) Space; 2) Time; 3) People; 4) Things rather than outcomes?

What do we see as the core point/value of a two year old being in this space?

At the end of our collaborative discussions, researchers and HMP staff were asked to respond to this question at the end of our meeting. The answers powerfully summarise the perspective of young children in museums that this research seems to be indicating towards;

“A comfortable space where children encounter the unknown, but through ‘creeping’ from familiarity”

“Safe place to explore the world”

“Explore the world around them in one unique space”

“A unique social experience they can share with others, e.g. parents, grandparents, friends”

“Space to move and explore, to learn at own pace, a place to use all sense, a space for parents to feel relaxed, a space to let the child to lead on their own learning”

“Creation of repeat experiences for themselves and for their families”

“New experiences, new conversations”

“Unique materials, objects, spaces, interactions (human and not human)”

“Understanding the world”

“Being there, in the space”

“To explore the unique physical and material environment, to become familiar with it through movement and encounter opportunities with the unfamiliar”

“Engagement with the world”

“Then and now, familiar and unfamiliar”

“Physical development”

“New experiences”

“Intergenerational experiences”

“Relationship building”

“Conversation”

“Fun!”

“Saying no”

“Unique objects”

“Being on the edge”

“Noticing differently”

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