

**Understanding Museums:
Australian museums and museology**

Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds)



Museums, education and visitor experience

Education in most museums has come to mean lifelong learning, expanding well beyond merely providing visits by children in school groups. Positive interventions in childhood have extremely important impacts on later life. Several museums in Australia, including the Australian Museum, the Melbourne Museum and the National Museum of Australia, have paid special attention to younger children.

The essays in this section examine education within museums, including art education, schools programs, children's programs and family visits, as well as looking at museum studies – the education and professional training of museum professionals.

Contents

- Introduction: learning, the visiting experience and the art museum as educator, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien
- 'Protecting the past, safeguarding the future': museum studies, the profession and museum practice in Australia, Jennifer Barrett
- What's driving children's cultural participation?, Barbara Piscitelli
- The museum education mix: students, teachers and museum educators, Janette Griffin
- Family visitors to museums in Australia, Lynda Kelly

Online version: http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/Museums_education.html

Image credit: Visitors to the National Museum of Australia storage space, 2010. Photo: National Museum of Australia.

Copyright and use

© Copyright National Museum of Australia

Copyright

Material on this website is copyright and is intended for your general use and information. Your use of the material is subject to this copyright and use notice.

The Museum does not own copyright in any of the authored content in *Understanding Museums: Australian Museums and Museology*. The authors own copyright and have licensed the Museum to publish the material.

The Museum also does not own copyright in third-party images included in some of the chapters. Copyright owners are credited in the captions of the images.

Use

The material on this website is intended for personal, professional and educational use.

Unless otherwise indicated, you may copy, distribute, display, download or print the material on this website for your own personal use, for non-commercial educational purposes or for non-commercial use within your organisation, provided that you attribute using the citation provided at the foot of each page.

If you wish to alter or republish any of the material on the site, please contact Copyright and Production Services, National Museum of Australia image@nma.gov.au or phone +61 2 6208 5150.

Creative Commons

One of the papers in this collection, Margaret Anderson's '[Museums, history and the creation of memory](#)', is published under [Creative Commons Licence Attribution-Noncommercial](#).



Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed, the authors of the material on this website reflect their views and opinions. The authors have sole responsibility for errors or omissions. The Museum recommends that you exercise your own skill, judgement and care with respect to its use.

Links from Understanding Museums to external websites are provided for convenience only and do not constitute endorsement, the Museum of any material found at those sites.

Contacts

National Museum of Australia
Canberra ACT 2601 Australia
T +61 (0)2 6208 5099
E feedback@nma.gov.au
www.nma.gov.au

Understanding Museums - Museums, education and visitor experience

Introduction: learning, the visiting experience and the art museum as educator

by Des Griffin

Education in most museums has come to mean lifelong learning, expanding well beyond merely providing visits by children in school groups. Janette Griffin reviews the shift in focus of school group visits from just another lesson, often unrelated to what is happening at school and setting tasks such as filling in worksheets, to learning opportunities that include emotional, aesthetic and interactive experiences. The visit is enhanced when it has a clear and relevant purpose, when students choose appropriate parts of the museums suited to the purpose of the visit, and when they are in control of their learning agenda.

In her review of family visits to museums, Lynda Kelly notes that during museum visits family members talk about previous experiences and memories, thus developing shared understandings. Visits are centred on learning rather than primarily for social interaction.

Positive interventions in childhood have extremely important impacts on later life. Several museums in Australia, including the Australian Museum, the Melbourne Museum and the National Museum of Australia, have paid special attention to younger children. Some countries, notably the United States, have developed specific museums for children such as the Boston Children's Museum, Indianapolis Children's Museum and the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia. However there are no such museums in Australia.

Barbara Piscitelli points out that there were very few programs for young children in museums in Australia before 1990. Several museums now have special programs. With a focus on the Queensland Art Gallery, she shows how very young children gain from their visits to museums.

Prior to the 1970s the orientation of education programs in Australian art museums was towards supplementing the school curriculum through introducing students to original works of art. Government administrative links and, in some states, the policy of seconding teachers to museums, tended to confirm this focus. However, post-Second World War optimism regarding what the visual arts might contribute to the welfare of both the individual and to society in general nurtured a wider context in which Australian museum educators contributed to an international movement in art education, locating art not only at the centre of the curriculum but also as a vital aspect of adult education. [1] The Art Gallery of New South Wales pioneered an extensive touring exhibition program to country areas which also brought lecturers to present interpretative programs designed to be of direct educational benefit to children and adults. [2]

Victoria also toured exhibitions. However, when that state meanwhile became a leader in formal art education, art museums were active participants. The National Gallery of Victoria hosted the respected National Gallery School and close links were formed with Melbourne University and with schools.

Art education was still influenced by modernism's exploration of the relationships between self-expression, concepts of mental age and psychological development, with an inevitable reduction of interest in forms of objective analysis and the more social bases of creative endeavour. Self-directed expression was seen as providing a balance to the general orientation of education towards rational analysis, which tended to foster the 'suppression of the instinctual and emotional components of the human personality'. [3] From the 1970s, however, there was a move to balance self-expression with a greater attention to art as a learned language, involving symbolism, acquired reference and contextual meaning.

In the latter part of the 1970s major exhibitions, including biennial and triennial contemporary art exhibitions, became major generators of change. Australian and foreign curators and artists were increasingly involved in shaping a range of public programs around special exhibitions. The subsequent progressive growth in year-round attendances at state galleries created a demand for

further and more diverse public programs; gradually this encouraged increased investment in the idea of education for lifelong learning. Expanded wall texts, room brochures, audio tours, film and video screenings, lectures, curators' and artists' talks, have been complemented by children's events, children's exhibitions and workshops — including tailored activities for the very young — and new programs for previously disadvantaged persons unable to gain access to cultural institutions.

Meanwhile art museums over this period expanded their support of school art education, with specialised programs for teachers, symposia for art educators, online education resources, education kits for downloading, and a variety of online 'interactives'.

Art museums increasingly supplemented exhibitions and collections through material on the Internet and social media. The much-discussed contemporary role of the museum as a multifaceted civic space and community meeting-place has generated a plethora of new programs, including numerous evening events.

An indication of the strong links that have long existed between art education in Australian museums and art education in general is the fact that a number of senior art museum professionals, including three of the four directors of the National Gallery, began their careers in art education. Community outreach programs have been an essential factor in engaging interest, including the attraction of generous private donations to complement meagre government funding for acquisitions.

Just as young children show extraordinary interest in their museum visits, so do many other groups once considered to be marginally interested at most. Adolescents, including adolescents at risk, and other people on the margin of society are well able to articulate what they want from their visits. All people want to be treated as intelligent human beings, albeit with particular wishes in many cases.

The digital environment

At the 2007 'Museums and the Web' conference in San Francisco, Sebastian Chan from the Powerhouse Museum recounted the history of a project that offered visitors to the Museum's website additional ways to interact with the museum and its collections. In June 2006, the Museum had launched a new means for browsing and searching its collection database in order to optimise usage. The site offered 'folksonomies': 'visitors' no longer required familiarity with collecting and museological practice to locate objects of interest to them.

The advance of 'social media' through blogs, wikis, and sites for sharing views and images has attracted great attention and new adaptations seem to appear every week. These include using social media to promote the museum and its events and applications for iPhone, BlackBerry and similar devices allowing tours of exhibitions.

Footnotes

¹ In the post-Second World War period art became a compulsory subject throughout the whole of primary, and the first four years of secondary education in state schools in Victoria and a significant core subject in other states.

² Pamela Clelland Gray, *Public Learning and the Art Museum: Future Directions*, Master of Arts Hons. thesis, University of Western Sydney, Nepean, 2002.

³ Herbert Read, *Art and Education*, FW Cheshire, Melbourne, 1964, p. 11.

Understanding Museums - Museums, education and visitor experience

'Protecting the past, safeguarding the future': museum studies, the profession and museum practice in Australia

by Jennifer Barrett

Museums and their associated disciplines differ in terms of their intellectual bases and their physical manifestations, the supporting technologies and specialist skills that underpin their activity, including the processes employed to attract and inform audiences ... Museum theory and rigorous intellectual discussion is in many ways having trouble in aligning with museum practice, whilst the debates around museum ethics, cultural and humanitarian rights, values and responsibilities are being played out in an increasingly activated public arena of attention to these issues. [1]

A tension between theory and practice is apparent in the above quote from the 2007 Annual Conference of Museums Australia (MA) President's report. An alternative perspective was presented at a sector forum in Sydney celebrating International Museum Day in 2000 by the then Director of the Powerhouse Museum, who suggested that specialised museum studies programs were not very useful or indeed essential. A good degree in a relevant discipline was a preferable basis for becoming a museum professional, suggesting that once in the sector 'learning on the job' was the place for developing knowledge about museums and how they work.

This chapter considers these tensions with reference to their history in Australia and their related international context. It argues that museum studies education provides vital opportunities for maintaining and developing vibrant museum practices and that genuine relationships between the museum sector and educational institutions should be based on this premise, but perhaps not museum studies as it has previously been understood. This chapter draws upon the sentiments of *Museums in Australia 1975*, which believed 'a course in museum studies ... will do much to safeguard the collections held in Australian museums'. [2] Museum studies as an area of academic research and teaching can indeed inspire new scholarship and innovation in a sector which, like many other areas of the public sector in Australia, has undergone enormous change in the last decade. These tensions, I suggest, emerge from a history of museum studies programs being synonymous with the museum sector and its representative bodies at a time when the museums sector was less segmented and complex, and perhaps not scrutinised in the public domain in the way that it is now. Other areas of education that intersect significantly with museum studies, such as heritage studies, arts administration and conservation, are also worthy of inclusion here, but for the purposes of this chapter I have focused on the discourse surrounding museum studies.

Significant developments in the museum sector

Writing in the early 1990s, Stephen Weil doubted that museum work would be lauded as a profession due to its diversity: the diversity of disciplines among museums and the diversity of the knowledge and skills required within any particular museum. Weil also argued that museums' associations in the US have completely failed in relation to the academic training that is offered for entry into the field. This problem involved the 'enormous and unsupervised proliferation in recent years of so-called "museum studies" programs' and 'the question of whether these programs are truly the best preparation for working in a museum'. [3] Weil suggested that the thousands of dollars spent on 'museum studies' might better be spent on discipline-based programs. Ultimately, he believed, it would be a 'terrible mistake' to control the entry of new practitioners to the field by 'licensing or certification procedures'. [4] There is a 'remarkable variety of backgrounds ... [and] an equally remarkable variety of paths ... called upon to perform a still equally remarkable variety of tasks'. [5]

Weil's acknowledgement of the diversity of the sector and its contribution to the museum is in keeping with developments in the late twentieth century. The new museums, restructured museums, social media, the changing roles of curators, and so on, raise numerous issues about the relationships between museum professionals, educational institutions and the state. Suzanne

Macleod writes about tensions between governments or boards and the forces of curators and academics, between scholarship and visitor-centred public programming. She defines museum studies as 'an area of enquiry made meaningful through the participation and active involvement of individuals and communities in training and education, research and practice'. [6] She discusses the problem of the 'theory vs. practice dichotomy', and the difficulties of providing university-based training of relevance within the museum sector. [7] Macleod proposes a three-dimensional conceptual model for thinking about museums studies – made up of the different dimensions of museum practice, museum studies training and education and museum studies research – where universities, museums, practitioners and scholars form a 'community of practice'. [8]

This sounds sensible, but is very challenging given the diversity and the complexity of the museum sector in Australia. The section on Museums and Art Galleries in *Year Book Australia* by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports on a survey in 2003–04 of museums that were open to the general public. [9] At the end of June 2004 there were 1329 museum locations operating in Australia. A staggering 49.1 per cent had no employees but were run by 9382 volunteers. The 676 museum locations with employees employed 7624 people, who were assisted by 11,061 volunteers. Of the employees, 4291 were full time and 3252 were part time. Only 13.5 per cent of the employees were curators. Given these developments in the museum sector, what changes have occurred in the higher education sector and how have these changes impacted upon the relationships between the museum sector and museum studies?

Significant developments in museum studies education in Australia

Since the 1970s museum studies programs have been offered at a postgraduate level in universities around Australia. The 1990 report on the *Development of a Training Strategy for the Australian Museum Sector* resulted in one of the first iterations of competency-based training for the sector. [10] Also included in the report was an indication of how museum studies programs had significant links to the museum sector, yet with differing perspectives on the role of tertiary education in the sector. Parallel to this (as outlined by [Jan Cook et al.](#) on this site), the first materials conservation program was established in Canberra in the late seventies. In recent years, the rise of Vocational Education Training (VET) and TAFE programs has highlighted issues about the levels of qualifications necessary or desirable for working in the museum sector and indeed, which organisations are in the best place to deliver them. Not to be forgotten is the real contribution made to the sector by volunteers and the consideration of their training and educational needs in this respect. VET has gone some way to deal with the needs of those not eligible for tertiary study, but the development of this within the museum sector is uneven throughout Australia. [11] The development of the VET programs is partially due to the ways in which changes in the tertiary sector mean that universities are no longer able to offer such short programs as they did in the past. [12]

The international context has also *influenced* museum studies in Australia. International discussion about museum studies coincides with the development of museum studies courses in Australia. In 1979 the International Committee for the Training of Personnel of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) met in Leicester (England) to continue previous discussions about the training of museum professionals. [13]

The reason for this choice of subject was threefold. First, the very unequal development of training from one country to another; second, the opportunity to make a general proposal of such training programs drawn up according to a universal, theoretical scheme which could then be adapted according to national requirements; and thirdly it was decided that this discussion would be followed up by a discussion on means, methods, and techniques used for this training ... [14]

The emphasis is on a general museum studies, 'not specialists in one specific field such as conservation'. [15] A general syllabus with the capacity and integrity to encompass disciplines in the human and natural sciences was needed because 'university trained people [who] leave the university as fully qualified zoologists or art historians, very often they have no museum training in museum studies – neither general training nor practical experience'. [16] In this context the general syllabus at a university level was expected to meet minimum requirements. Allowing for differences between nations, a general curriculum was accepted by the meeting as: the international museum context, collection management, museum management and museum services. [17] While Leicester University appears to have led this direction of curriculum, they did

consult internationally with museum studies programs, including the University of Sydney program, which commenced in 1976.

A review of seminars and conferences about museum studies education in Australia from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s reveals a general expectation that the industry should guide the museum studies programs. Reflecting trends in Britain, a 1989 symposium insists on this character of the relationship. [18] The publication from the *Museum Training Symposium* held in Sydney outlines the need to understand the impact of increasing numbers of non-museum professionals entering the museum sector (in areas such as finance and marketing), [19] the importance of ensuring that graduates are able to work within communities and in various regions (urban and remote), with local government and other funding agencies. In-service training for museum staff, voluntary staff and boards of management was considered, as was the development of management skills and training, and management and care of Aboriginal cultural material in the sector. There appears to be an emphasis on training the professional as distinct from training *and* education. The emphasis on the core aspects of 'museology' (i.e., museum context, collection management, museum management and museum services) *prevails*.

The invention of the 'new museology' in the late 1980s reflected a profound shift in the museum studies literature. A profession engaged in academia around the idea of praxis developed the new museology. [20] Peter Vergo coined this term in 1989 in an attempt to develop new methods for 'studying museums, their history and underlying philosophy, the various ways in which they have, in the course of time, been established and developed, their avowed or unspoken aims and policies, their educative or social role'. [21]

Vergo, and contributors to the volume from the sector and academia, signalled a new direction at the time to demystify the role of the museum by revealing how the museum constructs knowledge and to significantly redress the museum's understanding of the importance of visitors as active agents in the production of knowledge. These developments saw the rise of education departments and visitor studies in museums. In the twenty-first century, museums exist within new political and cultural contexts. In particular, museum sectors in countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia responded to critiques of their role in the process of colonisation and appropriation of material culture. The responses are evident in a range of policy debates for museums and their related professions, and governments, primarily relating to social inclusion and particularly repatriation.

Also of significance is how developments in social and cultural policy reflected similar concerns about access and provision of public services to communities. In academia new art history (i.e., social and feminist), social and public history, gender and cultural studies became better known for their tendency to unsettle the canons. Museums, in this context, also became prime sites for engaging with the critiques of power for these areas of the academy in particular. It is at this point, I argue, that these developments are also central to the re-configuration of many museums in Australia and the intellectual frameworks used in the museum context. In other words, the academic disciplines central to museum scholarship and practice were also challenged in debates by these new approaches in the museum world.

For example, in Australia critical developments in art history, anthropology and history have been central to the re-conception and presentation in museums of natural history and social history and vice versa. Several examples are well known: the interplay between history, History Wars and the National Museum of Australia; the way in which Curator Mary Eagle's mid-1994 re-hanging of Australian art at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), including the Rex Nan Kivell Collection, was thematic, reflecting new art history rather than emphasising a chronological hang; the way in which the *Indigenous Australians* exhibition at the Australian Museum involved extensive consultations with Indigenous people, as well as Indigenous museum staff being part of the exhibition development team, reflected changes in the discipline of anthropology in the nineties. Which brings us back to the issue of education and training for the museum profession and the relevance of museum studies programs to museums: have museum studies programs changed sufficiently (or too much) to reflect developments in the sectors and relevant disciplines? [22] How do museum studies programs determine and review their curricula? The new museology, I suggest, introduced museum studies as a generator of content as it engaged with the museum in new ways. It has gone on to inspire more scholarship, often with an aim to be both educative and useful to the sector while also engaging with the respective concerns of academic disciplines. [23]

Given the above changes over time, are the subjects that characterised museum studies in the

1970s still taught in museum studies programs? In short, yes. Most courses in Australia include units on the history of museums and museology, collections, management/administration practices and principles, public programs and education.

The following is a list of the courses that generally reflect this pattern.

- The Australian National University offers postgraduate coursework and research programs on campus in museums and collections, art history and curatorship.
- Deakin University offers courses on campus and by distance in the areas of museum studies and cultural heritage. Deakin also offers short professional development courses on and off campus.
- The University of Sydney offers postgraduate courses and higher degree research programs on campus in both intensive and regular modes in museum studies and art curatorship and at times offshore intensively in Hong Kong. Heritage studies is offered as a major at an undergraduate level and the university plans to introduce global heritage studies at a postgraduate level in the near future.
- The University of Adelaide offers programs in art history and curatorial and museum studies on campus at a postgraduate level.
- Queensland University offers postgraduate programs in museum studies on campus and occasional field courses in locations such as Vietnam.
- Curtin University of Technology offers postgraduate programs in arts and cultural heritage studies on campus and by distance education.
- The University of Melbourne offers postgraduate programs in art curatorship, museum studies and conservation.
- The University of Canberra offers undergraduate courses in museology and heritage preservation and cultural materials conservation.

With the exception of Macquarie University, most courses are taught at a postgraduate level and include potential pathways to PhD research or professional degrees. [24] This listing is indicative only and demonstrates the current range of museum studies programs offered in Australia. [25] What such a list does not indicate is the way in which specific academic disciplines, such as history, art history, archaeology and anthropology, philosophy within the respective institutions intersect with museum studies programs. This does vary significantly between institutions, as does the research output of each program. Such a list does not indicate the impact of individual academics who work on the subject of museums in their respective discipline base in areas such as education or history, for instance.

What is not often recognised in debates about museum studies in Australia in the late 1980s is how this development coincided with significant changes to the delivery of higher education, in particular the conversion of Colleges of Advanced Education and Institutes of Technology, which became universities. The Dawkins reforms to higher education were to have great implications for postgraduate education in particular. [26]

By the early 1990s, the capacity to charge fees for postgraduate courses was introduced. In very recent years the higher education landscape also changed significantly with the introduction of fee-paying undergraduate courses and preparations for the introduction of the Research Quality Framework (now replaced by the Excellence in Research for Australia initiative). Add into the mix the expansion of the Australian higher education market, which has been extended to international students (taught locally and offshore), and a complex and dynamic picture emerges. The implications of this for museum studies in Australia are interesting, and perhaps show that museum studies has been ahead of its time in being well established and having a strong partnership with an identifiable sector. Nevertheless, the institutional pressure for such courses has changed dramatically. Overall, the number of courses has increased, although several courses of significance were not offered for a period of time, at least in their previous form, such as the conservation program at the University of Canberra, which still offers museum studies within a cultural heritage program and has recently developed the Bachelor of Cultural Heritage and Bachelor of Heritage Conservation. [27] Academics are increasingly required to ensure that such programs are financially viable and not isolated units within the academy. [28] Teaching is to be

informed by research and have links to the relevant sector. These changes raise a number of issues about how the evolving museum sector and the changing landscape of museum studies education can be articulated in a mutually beneficial manner.

The museum sector and museum studies

Underlying the discussion about the history of curriculum for museum studies has been the expectation that professional staff assist museums to meet certain standards and to be recognised by funding agencies and the sector. Standardisation for museum sector professionals is a difficult issue in a diverse sector such as Australia. Demanding standardisation for museums in general has produced significant discussion about resources, professional development, education and training. Individual university programs in Australia, however, have established relationships with particular museums and staff that contribute in various ways to program development, delivery and research. [29] Standardisation in museums focuses somewhat on the level of education and training of staff, with emphasis also placed on the physical conditions of the institution and the practices and policies it follows. [30]

In Australia, this issue of standards may inform the curriculum of museum studies programs but is not monitored or formally guided by any particular area of the museum sector. Museum studies programs are, however, wise if they choose to remain informed by the developments in this area and to consult accordingly. Similarly, the sector can elect to inform or involve museum studies programs in such processes and discussions.

There is also the issue of ongoing training of existing museum staff in Australia and opportunities for mid-career education. The Museum Leadership Program managed by Melbourne Business School and sponsored by the Gordon Darling Foundation and the Australia Council for the Arts, has been a popular residential intensive program for directors and senior managers of museums and galleries; however it is under review. This course followed a similar one organised by the Council of Australian Museum Directors (CAMD) and delivered by Melbourne University through the executive education arm of the University's Business School at Mt Eliza, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria. An option for many museum professionals in this category has been to attend the internationally competitive Getty Leadership Programs in Los Angeles, or to undertake a (discipline-based) PhD, or other management or public policy postgraduate programs.

In Australia in recent years it seems that the delivery of professional development programs has been most effective at a state-based level. While I understand that in recent years Museums Australia has made attempts to develop its capacity to deliver training programs, it seems to have been most effective in the facilitation and support of the state branches to deliver certified training programs. The strongest appears to have been Museums Australia Queensland. Other branches have tended to develop professional development seminars, and organisations such as Museums and Galleries NSW have contributed significantly to the landscape of the offerings for industry seminars across the state. Like the state branches of Museums Australia they contributed to the development of a National Training Network (organised through the Queensland branch of Museums Australia in 2003).

Writing about museum training needs in Western Australia, Ian McShane suggests ways for training providers to develop on-the-job training and non-academic courses for potential staff. [31] He maintains that the museum sector should encourage the provision of institutional accreditation along with individual training. He acknowledges that training requirements are different for each part of the museum industry: there should be a 'landscape of museum training' – a suite of programs and opportunities – that harness local requirements and existing museum assets and expertise.

In 2002 Museums Australia Queensland commissioned the report, *Training and Professional Development for the Museum Sector in Queensland 1996–2002*. This report summarises the activities of the MAQ regarding training and professional development for the museum sector 1996–2002; it builds on the findings of the McShane report. The MAQ report states that VET is the focus of the report, but that it is one of a portfolio of options available to museum workers, which includes museum studies courses, and professional development courses offered through Special Interest Groups of Museums Australia. Again the focus is on training volunteers — of the 123 institutional members of Museums Australia in Queensland, 52 per cent are entirely run by volunteer staff. The report states 'experience indicates that, particularly for community and regional museums wholly or substantially reliant on volunteer labour, skills development through accredited training is important', but should be 'seen as part of a broader focus on industry

development'. [32] This report went on directly to influence the establishment of a museum studies program at the University of Queensland. Such collaboration continues and is productive for the museum sector, prospective students and the University of Queensland.

Conclusion

Existing historical literature about museum studies focuses on the vocational aspects of courses, yet this seems outmoded in the twenty-first century for both museums and the higher education sector, particularly in Australia. In higher education in Australia today, teaching is required to be both informed by research and the needs of candidates and the related sectors — to ensure that the degree programs have value beyond the academic institution. In this sense, we see Australian government and institutional support for research collaborations between these institutions. This is not merely in the form of Australian Research Council Linkage Grants, but in a common everyday sense with closer relations between universities and museums. This could include the sharing of research resources such as libraries, greater knowledge of collections, and more regular engagement with the development of new knowledge.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that ideas have changed about what constitutes professionalism in the museum sector, and similarly how higher education and scholarship at least in Australia has changed over time. The history of the museum sector and the discussion about changes in higher education highlight that it is impossible for museum studies to provide for all of the professional needs of people working in the museum sector. Museum studies programs give people the foundations, tools and contacts with which to build their careers in the sector. Learning on the job is necessary, whether one has a museum studies degree or a good degree in a relevant discipline. A museum studies degree, however, provides the intellectual foundations to understand the history, theory and practice of museums in Australia and internationally. A good museum studies qualification should enable graduates to engage effectively with the debates emanating from other disciplines about the ideology, practice and future of museums. These capabilities are likely to lead to better museum practitioners, well-run museums responding to changing needs and scenarios, and a better experience for museum visitors. In summary, we can better protect the past and be more able to safeguard the future of museums.

Footnotes

¹ Pat Sabine, President's Report to Council, Museums Australia AGM, 18 May 2007, Old Parliament House, Canberra, p. 1.

² PH Pigott, *Museums in Australia 1975: A Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1975, p. 69.

³ Stephen Weil, *Rethinking the museum and other meditations*, Smithsonian Institution, 1990.

⁴ Weil, *Rethinking the museum*, p. 83.

⁵ Weil, *Rethinking the museum*, p. 83.

⁶ Suzanne Macleod, 'Making Museum Studies: Training, Education, Research and Practice', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2001, p. 51.

⁷ Macleod, 'Making Museum Studies', p. 52.

⁸ Macleod, 'Making Museum Studies', p. 54. Also see E Wenger, *Communities of Practices: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Museums and Art Galleries', *Year Book Australia*, Canberra, January 2006. The scope of this survey included: historic trusts and sites; historical societies with a collection; house museums; social and natural history museums; archives (excluding the national and state archives); art galleries (excluding commercial art galleries); keeping places and cultural centres; outdoor museums; science museums; maritime museums; military museums and transport museums.

¹⁰ *Development of a training strategy for the Australian Museums Sector: Arts Training Australia and the Council of Australian Museum Associations*, Street Ryan and Associates, 1990.

¹¹ Indeed the meeting of the MA National Training Network in Brisbane in 2003 discussed ways in which

pathways to universities could be developed for museum workers with industry experience, VET qualifications and vice versa.

¹² For instance, short courses for the museum sector were offered at some universities up until the late nineties. At a postgraduate level, universities now advise prospective students to enrol in units of study as non-award students with a view to the potential of transferring their program into formal pathways. Some universities do offer 'Executive award' for short courses. The problem still exists however, for volunteers and those without undergraduate qualifications.

¹³ The first ICOM symposium on Professional Training was held in 1978 in Brussels, Liège and Antwerp.

¹⁴ J-B Cuypers, 'Introduction of the President', in International Council of Museums International Committee for the Training of Personnel, *Methods and Techniques of Museum Training at University Level*, report of a symposium held in Leicester, England 16–22 September 1979, p. 6.

¹⁵ Cuypers, 'Introduction of the President', p. 6.

¹⁶ Cuypers, 'Introduction of the President', p. 6.

¹⁷ These areas were also reflected in ICOM's 1972 *Basic Syllabus for Museum Training* and used for the development of a *Treatise on Museology*. See International Council of Museums International Committee for the Training of Personnel, *Methods and Techniques of Museum Training at University Level*, report of a symposium held in Leicester, England 16–22 September 1979, pp. 62–3.

¹⁸ *Papers of the Museum Training Symposium*, The University of Sydney, 16–17 February 1989; the symposium was convened by the Museum Studies Unit, University of Sydney and Museums Association of Australia (MAA) Inc. (NSW Branch) and funded by the Chancellor's Committee at Sydney University and WESTPAC.

¹⁹ Mary-Louise Williams, 'Non credit training', *Papers of the Museum Training Symposium held at the University of Sydney*, Museum Studies Unit, University of Sydney, 16–17 February 1989, pp. 22–25.

²⁰ Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, Reaktion Press, London, 1989.

²¹ Vergo, *New Museology*, 1989, p. 1.

²² An account of how museums in Australia have influenced other academic disciplines is worthy of further investigation but is beyond the scope of this chapter.

²³ Over the past 15 years the number of museum-related titles being published has continued to increase. Books about museums, written by geographers, philosophers, linguists and academics in cultural studies and museum studies have also proliferated.

²⁴ For an excellent list of museum studies and related courses in Australia see Museums and Gallery Services Queensland, *2007 Education and Training Opportunities*, available as a PDF from http://www.magsq.com.au/01_cms/details.asp?k_id=39. The Museums Australia website also has a list of museum studies courses available in Australian universities. Also see Jay Rounds, 'Is there a core literature in museology?', (*Curator*, Vol. 44, No. 2, April 2001, pp. 194–206) for a discussion about the bibliometric evidence supporting the claim that museum studies is a discipline.

²⁵ Programs at the University of Technology Sydney, College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales, Griffith University and the University of Melbourne offer art administration and cultural leadership courses, areas that intersect with museum studies. Academics associated with these programs are engaged in research with museums and galleries.

²⁶ Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education, *Windows onto Worlds: Studying Australia at Tertiary Level*, Report of the Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education, Australian Government Printing Service, 1987.

²⁷ The University of Canberra's museum studies and conservation courses were discontinued in 2003 and redeveloped for delivery in 2009. See [Ian Cook et al.](#) this site.

²⁸ In other words, the postgraduate courses were not necessarily protected on academic grounds, as many undergraduate programs tended to be. Indeed, since Ministers Nelson and Bishop of the Howard government increased pressure on the sector to make undergraduate programs 'economically viable'.

²⁹ Furthermore, in the US it is expected that museum staff hold a traditional discipline-based education – at

Bachelor or Masters level. In other words, museum studies is an additional qualification in the US that qualifies graduates of a particular discipline to work in a museum or gallery. See Reynolds, 2000.

³⁰ For instance, see the use of the term by museums, regardless of size, and respective membership of professional organisations or bodies such as Museums Australia or related state-based affiliations, such as Museums and Galleries New South Wales (MGNSW) and Museums and Galleries Queensland. For an example of a state-based Standards program ([see MGNSW website](#)). MGNSW provides links to other museums standards programs in Australia and overseas. Working with regional partners and providing resources to undertake self assessment have all been integral to the success of this program.

³¹ I McShane, 'Training for the Museum Profession in Western Australia: a report to Museums Australia (Western Australia)', November 2001.

³² Museums Australia (QLD), *Training and Professional Development for the Museum Sector in Queensland 1996–2002*, February 2003.

Dr Jennifer Barrett is the Director of Museum Studies and Associate Dean (Postgraduate Coursework) in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sydney. She is currently completing a manuscript for *Museums and the Public Sphere* for Blackwell Publishing (Oxford and NY, 2008) and *Australian Artists and the Museum* with Jacqueline Millner for Miegunyah (MUP) and Power Publications (2008).

Cite as: Jennifer Barrett, 2001, "Protecting the past, safeguarding the future": museum studies, the profession and museum practice in Australia' in Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, National Museum of Australia, 2011, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JBarrett_2011.html. ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums education and visitor experience

What's driving children's cultural participation?

by Barbara Piscitelli

Children have long been visitors to Australian museums, galleries and libraries, and today they form a significant audience for the stories and objects contained in collections across the nation. Whether attending a cultural venue for a formal school excursion or a more casual family outing, children enjoy learning from objects and stories in Australia's collections.

This relationship between children and collections has changed considerably over time as different museums, galleries and libraries respond to social and educational trends. Early programs and exhibitions for children were academic and often formal in orientation, prompting one 1970s observer to remark: 'Children and museums go hand in hand, though not always willingly'. [1]

Innovative exhibitions for children began to emerge in the 1980s, with the growth of science centres as hands-on learning and entertainment sites. At that time, most major Australian museums, galleries and libraries did not have permanent designated spaces or exhibitions for children; for the most part, interpretation of the collection and exhibitions for children were undertaken in formal public programs.

Opportunities for connecting children with culture emerged very quickly with new programs, spaces and research projects across Australia:

- *Every Body* – designed by Mary Featherston in 1985 for the Melbourne Museum – was an exhibition about the human body and how it works. It drew a large audience over its lifetime, and provided a fresh new way of designing and interpreting for children. [2]
- A number of specially designed exhibition spaces for children were developed, including Kid's Island (1999–2009: Australian Museum, Sydney), [3] Nipper's Railway (2003: The Railway Workshops Museum, Ipswich) and The Big Box (2002: The Melbourne Museum).

Researchers studied children's learning and family learning in museums and galleries in Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra, [4] starting in the late 1980s.

By 2009, there was strong appeal and steady growth in popular demand for cultural activities all across Australia. [5] Interestingly, in the 5–12 year age group, there was a significant growth in cultural participation over the three years 2006–2009, with 1.9 million children (71 per cent) attending at least one museum, gallery, library or theatre event outside of school hours. [6] Children's cultural participation outpaced their involvement in organised sport in 2006, and again – by rising numbers – in 2009. [7]

Rising cultural participation by Australian children: seven snapshots

What is driving the steady rise in cultural engagement by Australian children – and is it sustainable? To explore this question, the chapter presents snapshots of seven strategic innovations that have shaped the growth of children's cultural programs in Australia, and examines their role in promoting a rise in children's cultural citizenship.

Out of the Box: Queensland Performing Arts Centre

Out of the Box is a Brisbane-based biennial festival of the arts for early childhood. Established in 1992 by the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, the festival has become a well-loved part of the cultural lives of many Queensland children, schools and families.

The festival features high quality arts experiences for young children, showcasing culturally diverse stage productions, internationally renowned theatre companies, community-based arts projects, and children's creative outputs. Historical highlights of the festival include a commissioned stage production of Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree*, and a fully interactive exhibition of *The Art of Eric Carle*. [8]

From the beginning, Out of the Box was delivered by a Creative Producer and a dedicated team within an established public performing arts centre. Though different people have occupied the positions, the festival remains focused on delivering high-quality child-centred arts experience.

Not content to simply deliver programs to the public, Out of the Box focuses on building strong relationships with various communities and professions. The partnerships have enabled many innovative arts opportunities, such as Island, a festival stage for Indigenous and Islander children throughout the state to perform traditional and contemporary dance on the big stage at a premier performing arts venue in Brisbane.

Local schoolchildren in Brisbane have co-produced performances and exhibitions in festival-organised partnerships with artists, filmmakers, musicians and actors. Volunteers have worked behind the scenes to make every aspect of the festival a comfortable and welcoming experience for the thousands who attend.

Importantly, Out of the Box partnerships extend to cultural precinct partners, with the gallery, museum and nearby parklands offering spaces and programs for young audiences during the festival.

Each festival features a conference for professional discussion about the place of the arts in children's lives. Featuring artists, educators and researchers, the conferences provide a platform for exchanging ideas and information about research findings, social trends and innovative practices.

In 2004, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre joined with the Australia Council for the Arts and Queensland University of Technology to undertake action research on how parents and children experienced the festival. The research findings led to the publication of guidelines for organisations to use when working with parents of young children. [9]

Children's Gallery: Ipswich Art Gallery

At the Ipswich Art Gallery (IAG), [10] children have been a central part of the program since 1999 with the design and development of a dedicated children's gallery. Informed by community consultation, one key aim of the Children's Gallery was to assure a welcoming and engaging experience for new audiences. The creation of a dedicated space for children's exhibitions and activities meant that the gallery had a permanent home where they could forge new relationships with children and families in the area. [11]

With a space for regular exhibitions and activities, IAG presents a diverse and changing menu of program options for children from birth to 12 years of age. Decisions about exhibitions and programs are based on a set of principles, which articulate the principles, values and beliefs underpinning the gallery's commitment to children. [12]

With a changing exhibition program, the gallery is constantly refreshed. For visitors, this means there is always something new to see at a favourite child-friendly place. Over its decade-long history, IAG has hosted more than 30 exhibitions for young audiences, including *Bright + Shiny* (2008), an innovative contemporary art environment for babies and toddlers. [13]

The gallery invests in research to inform its decisions and to advance knowledge of cultural learning in childhood. [14] Recently, IAG commissioned a small-scale study of how infants and toddlers respond to art and play in a purpose-designed gallery environment; findings have been disseminated at national and international conferences. [15]

Children's Art Centre: Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art

The Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) has been a leader for innovative children's programs in Australian art museums. QAG first participated in child-centred research in 1987, [16] and has since generated many early innovations in exhibitions and programs for children and art. In 1998, QAG initiated a series of changing exhibitions for children. Initially installed in a small area, the popularity of the exhibitions led to increasing size and scale to accommodate the growing audience. [17]

As a partner in the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Museums Collaborative research group (1997–2004), QAG implemented many new design and exhibition practices for young audiences, thus providing an ideal situation to study children's responses to innovative, interactive

learning in an art gallery. Researchers worked collaboratively with gallery staff to investigate children's participation during a series of exhibitions, including *Play* (2000–2001), [18] *APT Summer Spectacular* (2003), *Colour* (2003), and *Lost and Found* (2004). [19]

Among many innovative practices, QAG designs special exhibitions of contemporary art for children, provides multi-sensory and technologically interesting interactive resources, publishes children's activity books to advance artistic understanding, provides teacher in-service education, and focuses on both school and family audiences.

In 2006, the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) opened in the South Brisbane cultural precinct. Sitting alongside the Brisbane River and in the cultural precinct, GoMA offers a venue for contemporary art in Queensland, and hosts the Children's Art Centre, a dedicated space for exhibitions, activities and programs for young audiences.

The changing nature of the Children's Art Centre program allows for repeat visits by a faithful audience, and also allows on-going experimentation in exhibition design, installation and program. The Children's Art Centre is the result of 20 years of innovative practice – a whole generation of knowledge about designing exhibitions and interpretation for child audiences. The gallery hosts conferences and participates in seminars to disseminate information about the artist collaborations and innovative museum practices.

ArtPlay: City of Melbourne

In 2004, the City of Melbourne opened its first dedicated children's arts space on the banks of the Yarra River in the heart of the city. Named ArtPlay in honour of its dual commitments to children's art and play in the city, the site offers a stage for innovative, playful arts programs of all kinds. Under the direction of a Creative Producer, the small organisation has reached out to a wide and diverse audience.

As a space, ArtPlay is simple – it is a large open space formed by the elegant architecture of the former industrial building. The building was stripped back to its essentials during the re-purposing of the powerhouse from its former use to its new identity as a generator of creative practice in childhood. The interior is voluminous, with a mezzanine balcony over a basketball-court-sized open space. Naturally lit from above by enormous industrial-scale windows, the space offers ultimate flexibility and adaptability to the requirements of the diverse ArtPlay program.

ArtPlay quickly made its mark on Melbourne's cultural scene. With its innovative program of artist-led projects, ArtPlay attracted a wide audience – as diverse as the city itself. Each year, approximately 300 different events take place, celebrating artistic and creative practice of all kinds in the company of world-class artists – musicians, dancers, chefs, potters, puppeteers and more. A second venue for children's arts and culture has been developed by City of Melbourne in 2009: Signal is a space for 13–20-year-olds and features an array of options for artist-participant interaction in a space designed to offer new platforms for arts media for a teenage population.

Partnerships of all kinds are at the heart of ArtPlay's philosophy and practice: partnerships with participants, artists, arts organisations, funding agencies, philanthropic groups and university researchers. Each partnership adds new value to the work of ArtPlay and enables expansion of the program and products to wider audiences.

Community studies informed the early concept development for a cultural space for children in Melbourne. [20] As a creative organisation, ArtPlay commenced its research agenda with their operation. In collaboration with The University of Melbourne, ArtPlay is examining children's cultural engagement. [21]

The corner: State Library of Queensland

When the State Library of Queensland (SLQ) re-opened in 2006, there was a significant focus on connecting with children and young people as part of the core audience. During the time of its closure, the library established a committee to advise on matters related to children and young people and then commissioned a review of its policies, practices and programs.

The library prepared in various ways to augment new child and youth-centred practices. Key personnel undertook professional learning on new practices; additional personnel were engaged to lead the new programs; small-scale project innovations were developed and refined; and audience research was completed.

Two major built-in programs were designed to cater to all segments of the population of children and young people. The first was the development of *the corner*, a space for young children (opened in 2006). *the corner* features a curated space for children's play and learning. Four times a year, the exhibitions and interactive play-scapes of *the corner* transform, thus attracting repeat audience participation. The space is set up to cater for children's drawing, writing, reading, computing and dramatic play. Children may also engage in a story, song or rhyme with artists who work in the space.

The second major initiative at SLQ is a space for young people – *the edge*. Focused on young people (5–15 years), *the edge* provides a platform for ideas to be communicated and expressed through various forms of publishing and distribution. Opened in 2010, *the edge* is directed by a creative team including 'catalysts' – technical and conceptual assistants to work with young people in realising their ideas.

The Art Factory: Maitland Regional Art Gallery

The redevelopment of the Maitland Regional Art Gallery (MRAG) was a major expansion project for the gallery in this regional community. The aim was to enlarge the gallery space to a significantly larger footprint with purpose-designed, contemporary spaces. In addition to extending its exhibition areas, MRAG proposed to integrate a large interactive space for children and young people, branded as The Art Factory.

During the construction phase of redevelopment, one of the gallery's top priorities was to undertake a systematic audience research project to learn more about the values, wishes and needs of people in the local community and nearby regional area. MRAG hosted a two-week long community-wide conversation about the value and potential use of the gallery by diverse populations in the local and adjacent area.

More than 150 individuals took part in the conversations in small group sessions, including parents of young children, primary school students, middle school students, secondary school students, young adults, men (aged 25–55), women (aged 25–55), seniors (over 55s), education professionals, Indigenous people, advocates for people with special needs or persons with a disability, creatives (artists, designers, craft workers and others), local government officials and gallery staff. [22]

Every group identified children as a primary audience for a gallery. The design of the interactive gallery space, The Art Factory, generated excitement and animated conversation. Participants were eager to see exhibitions of art by, for and about children in the gallery. They were also eager to see low-cost or free workshops for children to be involved in making art.

When the gallery re-opened in its expanded building in August 2008, The Art Factory welcomed its first visitors. Embraced by young visitors, the venue provides an innovative two-storey exhibition and studio environment. Changing exhibitions by emerging artists and curators provide a menu of possibilities for cultural exploration and engagement.

School Education programs

Over more than 50 years, the sector has built educational programs to introduce school students to their collections and to make the most of educational synergies across the curriculum. Education is a key part of the mission of museums, galleries and libraries, so there are sequenced programs for primary and secondary students at most large venues. In recent times – in response to demand from schools and changing trends in education – museums, galleries and libraries have extended their school education services into the early childhood years, expanding programs and resources for children from four to 18 years.

A serious and substantial part of most cultural organisations' practice involves interpreting and presenting objects, ideas and stories for the school audience. While statistics are available for outside of school participation in cultural organisations, no comparable readily accessible data exists for children's participation during school hours.

Even so, the cultural sector reports a steady audience of school students for exhibitions, programs and events offered during school terms. Over the coming years, this number may rise considerably as the new national curriculum provides many references to learning from objects and stories contained in the nation's collecting and cultural institutions. [23]

Usually school students experience museums, galleries and libraries in a more formal or structured manner than they do when they come to visit the same place outside of school hours. Ideally, students are prepared for the visit at school, with a pre-visit lesson to heighten interest and broaden knowledge. At the cultural venue, most often schools will organise for a guided tour as part of the visit, though not all cultural organisations offer such a service. Following the visit, learning can be augmented in the classroom where the teacher offers reflective and analytical activities to extend ideas.

Over many years, education resources have been developed widely in the museum, gallery and library sector. A few cultural organisations maintain extensive loan resources to be used by school children and the wider community. [24] The National Museum of Australia recently developed a set of primary school textbooks to introduce students to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. [25] Originally education publications were presented only in print form, [26] but now there are many online resources also available for teacher and student use, including blogs about objects (e.g. photographs, paintings, and specimens), on-line lectures and curriculum-related activities.

Partnerships drive many innovative education programs in the sector, with philanthropists contributing to the extension of services to disadvantaged or remote portions of the population. [27]

Drivers for cultural change

Innovative children's cultural participation programs have been sustained in the community for three main reasons – the programs are:

- developed and produced by creative directors;
- supported by sound research and reliable funding; and
- informed by fundamental principles, theories and values.

Creative direction

Visionary leaders have shaped and sparked leading cultural programs for children in Australia. The creative direction of key child-centred arts innovations focuses on twin priorities: a) production of high quality cultural programs and b) widespread access to culture by a diverse population of children and their adult carers (e.g. parents and teachers).

By nature, a creative director works in the zone of innovation. Over more than 20 years, creative directors in Australian cultural organisations have developed and delivered a wide array of innovative exhibitions, programs, productions and spaces for children, often adhering to a set of high-quality indicators [28] to inform their creative decisions – criteria such as:

- **Developmental appropriateness:** Children's cultural background, age and individual differences are taken into consideration. Programs are developed and delivered to respect the differences in maturity and knowledge of the audience.
- **Flexibility:** Multiple entry levels and situations allow for children of all ability and skill levels to take part in some way.
- **Collaboration:** Programs are designed so that children can participate with peers, parents and experts.
- **Interactive:** Interactivity includes opportunities to engage in social learning, with technological tools, and in a multi-sensory environment. Children participate in hands-on, minds-on, self-directed, enjoyable situations.
- **Empowering:** Opportunities are provided for children to make choices and be agents of their own learning.
- **Connected:** Partnerships of all kinds characterise creative cultural programs for children, families, organisations and communities.
- **Quality:** High quality programs are developed to ensure children get access to best practice, original materials and expert knowledge.

- Bottom-up consultative process: Programs are developed through consultation with participants.

Sound research and reliable funding

Innovative programs for children require ongoing attention to social and educational trends. With rapid social and technological change, childhood experiences alter at a rapid rate with the uptake of consumer products and technological devices.

Audience research programs across the country are assisting leading cultural organisations to make informed decisions about how best to structure programs, invest in exhibition design, and remain relevant to young audiences. Leading organisations have built-in audience research and development as a part of core business.

Most cultural organisations have made considerable investments in children's learning and programs from within core budgets, but the growth of children's participation often means new sources of funding must be found to accommodate the spurt in demand. Funds often come from within the cultural sector, or from the community (fundraising and fees), but more and more the philanthropic community is providing resources to enable expansion of programs for young audiences.

Fundamental principles, theories and values

The growth of children and young people as cultural participants and as cultural decision makers is an important new phenomenon. Children and young people form a strong and significant part of the population. As citizens, children and young people have rights to form ideas and to express them through various media, and to participate in social and cultural life. Since 1990, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [29] has assured their rights to express their views (articles 12 and 13) and to participate in cultural life (article 31).

Maintaining and serving an audience of culturally aware and active citizens requires deliberate strategies and initiatives. Government policies (both state and Australian government) support the growth of cultural engagement in young Australians – both in and out of school, so there is commitment at a high level for supporting the cultural life of children. Some leading organisations have clearly defined philosophies, policies, programs and practices to support children's cultural development.

Conclusion

Children's cultural participation has grown significantly in the past generation in Australia. Some hypothesise that the first generation of cultural consumers from the late 1980s and early 1990s are now parents taking their children to a range of exhibitions, events and performances. Others speculate that children and young people are democratising culture as they generate new creative practices and engage in a rich cultural life. [30]

Both are correct in their observations: increasing numbers of children visit Australia's cultural and collecting organisations – and most of them are accompanied in their out-of-school visits by a family member.

And, yes – children are democratising culture. By their mere participation, children are voting with their feet about what appeals to them in the marketplace of entertainment options. To take advantage of this growing audience, various organisations take the time to talk with children about various aspects of the work of creating and delivering cultural programs. For example, ArtPlay invites children to make decisions on grant applications, thus enabling children to gain skills and learn how to make judgements about program funding. Other leading organisations involve children in trialling and testing innovative programs, thus taking account of children's views and feedback during design and development.

So, what is driving cultural participation in Australia? Both children and cultural organisations are driving participation. By working hand-in-hand, both children and cultural organisations have developed new products, new programs and new levels of engagement. This coming together of the audience and the organisation generates respect and commitment – key ingredients to the sustainability of the relationship.

Footnotes

- ¹ John Hodge, 'Museums and children in Australia', *Museum* 31 (3), 1979, pp. 160–3.
- ² Jan Henderson, 'Design Catalysts: Mary Featherston', *Australian Design*, online publication, viewed 05/05/2009.
- ³ L Kelly, S Main, S Dockett, B Perry and S Heinrich, 'Listening to young children's voices in museum spaces', *Proceedings of the AARE Conference*, 2006.
- ⁴ QUT Museums Collaborative, 'Young Children's Interactive Learning in Museums', ART SPIRT Grant #C10024104, 2000–2003 and L Kelly, G Savage, J Griffin, and S Tonkin, *Knowledge Quest: Australian Families Visit Museums*, National Museum of Australia and Australian Museum, Canberra/Sydney, 2004.
- ⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Arts and Culture in Australia: A Statistical Overview*, first edition [4172.0], ABS, Canberra, 2008.
- ⁶ 1.5 million Australian children (54 per cent) visited a public library and 1.1 million (41 per cent) visited a museum or art gallery. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities* [4901.0], ABS, Canberra, 2009. p. 6.
- ⁷ *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities*, p.15.
- ⁸ B Piscitelli and K Weier, 'Learning with, through, and about art: the role of social interactions', in S Paris (ed.), *Perspectives on Object-Centered Learning in Museums*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, NJ, 2002.
- ⁹ Queensland Performing Arts Centre, the Australia Council for the Arts and Queensland University of Technology, *Children, their parents and the arts: some guidelines for working with parents of young children*, Australia Council, Sydney, 2004.
- ¹⁰ The Ipswich Art Gallery (IAG) was known as Global Arts Link (1999–2005).
- ¹¹ Piscitelli, 'Designing galleries with children in mind', in B Henson (ed.), *Exploring culture and community in the 21st century: a new model for public art museums*, Global Arts Link, Ipswich, Qld, 1999.
- ¹² Ipswich Art Gallery, Guiding Principles: www.ipswichartgallery.qld.gov.au/kids/guiding-principles, 2010.
- ¹³ Piscitelli, 'Infants, Toddlers and Contemporary Art', presentation to the International Arts in Early Childhood Conference, National Institute of Education, Singapore, June, 2009.
- ¹⁴ QUT Museums Collaborative (1998–2004) was comprised of researchers from Queensland University of Technology, and Industry Partners from Queensland Museum, Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland Sciencecentre and Global Arts Link.
- ¹⁵ B Piscitelli and B Smith, 'Infants, toddlers and contemporary art: bright and shiny research finding', Third International Arts in Early Childhood conference, National Institute of Education, Singapore, June 2009.
- ¹⁶ B Piscitelli, 'Preschoolers and parents as artists and art appreciators', *Art Education*, 41(4), 1988, pp. 48–55.
- ¹⁷ M Beckmann, 'Engaging a young audience at Queensland Art Gallery', *Artlink*, 21 (2), 2001, pp. 50–4.
- ¹⁸ B Piscitelli, 'Young children's interactive experiences in museums: engaged, embodied and empowered learners', *Curator*, 44 (3), 2002, pp. 224–9.
- ¹⁹ M Mallos, M Everett, K Weier, and B Piscitelli, *Lost & Found: school holiday audience research report*, Queensland Art Gallery/ QUT: internal report, 2004. M Everett, K Weier, and B Piscitelli, *Colour: School audience research report*, Queensland Art Gallery/Queensland University of Technology, internal report, 2003. M Everett, K Weier, and B Piscitelli, *Summer Spectacular: child-family audience research report*, Queensland Art Gallery/Queensland University of Technology: internal report, 2003.
- ²⁰ City of Melbourne, *ArtPlay – an inspiring art studio for children: celebrating five years*, City of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2009.
- ²¹ ArtPlay and University of Melbourne, 'Mapping and augmenting engagement, learning and cultural belonging for children undertaking ArtPlay workshops', ARC Linkage Grant, 2007–2010.
- ²² J Eisenberg and L van Katwyk, 'The Art Factory: Children's Art Space', room brochure, MRAG, Maitland,

NSW, 2009.

²³ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Agency (ACARA), 'The National Curriculum: History', ACARA, Canberra, 2010.

²⁴ For example, Queensland Museum has an extensive loans kit service that distributes kits with specimens, objects and experiments for class and community learning.

²⁵ For example T Albert, *Stories through Art*. First Australians: Plenty Stories series, Pearson/Rigby, Melbourne, 2009.

²⁶ Print education publications, e.g. J Vyrhtlik and E Schaffer, *Kids, Customs and Culture: a teaching resource for years 4–6*, Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney, 1995.

²⁷ A Fulton, 'High school students drawn to a whole new world', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 and 2 May 2010, p. 15.

²⁸ B Piscitelli, M Everett, K Weier, and QUT Museums Collaborative, *Enhancing Young Children's Museum Experiences: a manual for museum staff*, QUT, Brisbane, 2003.

²⁹ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1999.

³⁰ Young People and the Arts Australia, 'Changing Habitats: are children and young people democratising culture?', National Symposium, Brisbane, 2010.

Barbara Piscitelli is a member of the Board of Directors of the Queensland Museum and a former member of the Collections Council of Australia, and Chair of the National Review of Visual Education. She has undertaken extensive research into children's learning in museums, and has published widely on children's understanding of arts and culture. Currently, she is Visiting Scholar at the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Cite as: Barbara Piscitelli, 2011, 'What's driving children's cultural participation?', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/BPiscitelli_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums, education and visitor experience

The museum education mix: students, teachers and museum educators

by Janette Griffin

Introduction

While some school classes may still sit in a classroom, talked at by education officers, or be met at the museum's schools entrance and provided with rules and worksheets, there are now many innovative and interactive programs available in museums. Learning opportunities that include emotional, aesthetic and interactive experiences have replaced 'teaching'. Students spend more time immersed in the galleries, participating in drama, role play, online and hands-on interaction. Changes have been influenced by recent research into school students' learning in museums. Numerous people, especially in the US and the UK, have contributed to these changes. [1] Many Australian educators and researchers have also expanded our knowledge of students' learning in museums through practice and/or research. Some examples of their work will be described in this chapter. [2]

Museums have always positioned themselves as educational institutions, and yet the role of education staff has developed erratically and variably. In school-level programs there has been a trend to smaller groups working with a museum educator: from up to 60 in the 1970s to smaller groups now. Less time is spent in classrooms and more time in exhibition areas complemented by hands-on experiences. Programs are considerably more learning- and student-oriented and less object-driven. If worksheets are provided at all, they now seek thought-provoking investigations rather than simply 'fill in the blanks'. Opportunity for communication with teachers and students has expanded dramatically through web-based information, materials and activities. In this chapter I will explore these changes for the museum educators, [3] the students, the teachers [4] and the museums as a whole. An interesting question that remains as yet unanswered is the amount of influence that students exert on cultural institutions, especially considering how large, diverse and measurable the group is.

Museum educators

Tony Sadler and Beryl Morris, who worked in South Australia, gave a picture of the perspectives and experiences of museum educators across Australia in the 1980s. [5] Many of the articles emphasised the importance of specialist content knowledge, familiarity with the institution's collections and ability to give advice on labels, displays and publications. Interestingly, there was little emphasis on teaching and learning processes.

Even by the 1980s many institutions had only one educator who, because of professional isolation, needed to be assertive and actively promote their ideas and their profession. However new ideas were spreading with discussion about displays engaging 'all the senses' and being more than simple 'copy down the label' exercises.

Over the past 30 years the work undertaken by museum educators has broadened considerably. Programs consisting of children sitting in rows listening to a 'lecture' and having specimens or objects passed around, or filing past displayed objects, have largely disappeared. There has been a major shift towards experiential opportunities for students to enjoy shared, engaging and relevant experiences. Many more programs are conducted within exhibition spaces. Many more programs emphasise learning processes more than outcomes — for example, how to look, interrogate, deduce, and evaluate. Inquiry-based learning, personalised learning agendas and allowing students to have ownership and responsibility for their learning rather than simply gathering information are emphasised.

Museum educators have been increasingly involved in development of web-based and online materials. Electronic booking and access to pre-, during, and post-visit materials are available from many museums. This reduces the need, but sadly also the opportunity, for museum educators to

talk with teachers before the visit. At the same time, however, it provides extensive materials for work in the classroom before and after the visit, and in some instances considerable insight into the museum's exhibitions, programs, information and collections.

Some museums, particularly those with widely scattered constituents, are using school intranet, the Internet and web-based materials as learning tools. Hence, teachers and students can be better informed before going to the museum. At the same time, outreach programs – such as travelling exhibitions transported on trains, buses or trucks and boxed materials – are being reduced. There has been little investigation into the impact of these changes.

Educators have been involved to a degree in exhibition development for some time, but often at the edges only, or after the main themes have been developed. However, Pamela Clelland Gray at the National Portrait Gallery gives us an example of more recent approaches. [6] She looked at the educational aim of art museums and concluded that development of exhibitions involving both curatorial and educational staff leads to greater opportunity for engagement and enhanced visual literacy of wider audiences.

Historically artworks have been subject to curatorial procedures that tend to generate a fixed and single meaning. Art is positioned at an interface between the museum's culture and the audience's and shifts the ownership of the meaning of the works — interpretation rather than perception. Increasingly educators are involved in aspects of text development, aspects of comfort and environment, curatorial involvement in exhibitions, and web-based outreach programs. Education staff on exhibition teams not only represent the school visitor but often theirs is the most authoritative voice on appropriate approaches to understanding.

Many museum educators today have a responsibility that goes well beyond the school student audience. While in some institutions public programs are separate from school visit programs, there is a move toward staff working across all audience groups. This link enables shared theoretical and philosophical approaches which in turn enhance visitor experiences, as well as giving greater recognition to the professional role of educators in all aspects of the museum's work.

At the same time staff are focusing programs for discrete audiences — very young children, primary, secondary/adolescents, singles or groups of adults and family groups — and these programs are seen as 'audience drivers'. Rather than being an adjunct to an exhibition, they are the programs which attract people to the exhibition and institution and provide the key experience for the visit. This has meant that, for example, family and holiday programs are being taken much more seriously by institutions and funded accordingly.

While educators have become involved in more diverse ways, there has also been a trend toward varied employment arrangements. Thirty or more years ago the majority of museum educators were seconded from state or Catholic education systems. Today museums in only one state, South Australia, predominantly employ seconded teachers in museums. Working conditions have ranged from working at the museum for school hours on school days to full-time hours and days. Pay scales were and still are variable from state to state and between institutions in the one state.

A number of museums have moved to having fewer full-time staff who work across many programs, and instead have engaged increasing numbers of part-time or casual staff for each specific program. There are both positive and negative outcomes from these changes: a wider pool of skills provides opportunities for specialists in each of the audience segments. In some museums there are fewer teacher-trained staff, but the skills base is broadened by employing youth workers, communication experts, drama or other arts experts.

Casualisation, however, can lead to increased complexity of jobs and heavier workloads for the remaining full-time staff through project management, leaving less time for professional development opportunities such as attending meetings and conferences at local, state or national level. Casualisation may also lead to lower commitment to the organisation.

Student experiences

Museum educators consider their main job to be providing learning opportunities and student-oriented experiences. The museum educator is no longer accurately described by the contributors to the booklet of Sadler and Morris. Increasing varieties of resources and pedagogies are being used to encourage choice, discussion, questioning and active involvement. Educators must develop understanding of student-centred learning approaches and experiences in keeping with ongoing

research based on sociocultural and constructivist learning processes. This move away from content information in the learning agenda of museums privileges the students, giving individual students responsibility for their own learning. Students are recognised as capable and willing to learn when given the right opportunities in these stimulating environments – be they face-to-face or online.

Research in Australia on learning complements many studies conducted overseas and has informed changes in the nature of public programs in Australia. The studies explore experiences of very young children in museums, primary and secondary school students, adolescents and young people, families and older visitors. Leonie Rennie and Terry McClafferty [7] at Curtin University investigated the design of exhibits and environments in Science Centres to see what can help or hinder learning. The exhibit design must *allow* for the learning objectives to be achievable. Critical characteristics for understanding in museums are the personal nature of learning; being contextualised; and given time. David Anderson [8] found that students at the Queensland Sciencentre learned through reflection, making links to prior experiences, and later application of the resulting understandings in the classroom. Displays and activities that involved a diversity of sensory modes led to greater learning than did any other components of the visit. [9]

Susan Groundwater-Smith and Lynda Kelly in Sydney [10] asked upper primary and secondary students to photograph examples of aspects of the museum that help or hinder their learning. Students then developed posters of their findings. They revealed four categories that helped learning:

Cognitive: when they know how things work, have opportunities to ask questions, seek information from varied sources, and are stimulated through various senses;

Physical: when safe and comfortable, able to move easily, space is well lit, and the scale is appropriate;

Social: when learning with friends, a satisfying social occasion;

Emotional: when connected to their interests but not when emotionally confronted.

Students' understanding of why they are visiting a museum, knowing what they are there to learn about, having choice in the specifics of their learning, and being able to learn and to record information in ways that they prefer, leads to substantial engagement in learning. These parameters are equally important for both primary and secondary students. [11] Sadly, there are many teachers who do not involve their students in decisions about, and the planning of the field trip. I return to this below.

Interestingly, despite teachers and worksheets, students of all ages nevertheless learn from their visit. Observations of individual students visiting museums in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra revealed that learning behaviours account for about (a surprising) 87 per cent of all behaviours. Most adolescents choose learning as the first thing that they think of when asked to describe their thoughts about museums, and most of them have positive things to say about the atmosphere of a museum. They like seeing the real thing, enjoy interactive exhibits and dislike being distracted by others. Students prefer to visit a museum with their school class rather than with their parents, reflecting the positive social experience of being with their friends. [12] Young children in science centres learn more when given the opportunity to interact with peers and adults. [13]

Teachers' (or museum educators') expectations that students should complete detailed worksheets are an impediment to student learning. Students feel rushed to find the answers and do not have time to appreciate the exhibits. Too many museum experiences still seem to concentrate on verbal/linguistic learning processes. [14] Peter Hoban and colleagues at Sovereign Hill present a wide variety of topics and activities from which the students can choose, in consultation with their teacher. The visit comprises five steps: Define your topic; Think, wink and decide; [15] Undertake the excursion; Present the project; Self-assessment.

Young children quickly take on the observed practices of those around them, and happily interact with all aspects of their environment. They are less likely than older people to be concerned about the environment as they readily incorporate it along with all other aspects of the program or exhibits. [16] They readily learn 'about' art, for example, when given opportunities to not only respond to it but also be involved in making it: 'Social interaction is a key to enabling children to build conceptual understanding through their encounters and transactions with objects. Teachers, parents, museum educators, and peers play an influential role in helping children form ideas through dynamic discussion about art objects.' [17]

The experiences of both museum educators and researchers clearly show that students DO learn and enjoy their visits to museums, as long as they are allowed to do so. School teachers, however, may be the ones whose attitudes and behaviours have changed least. This is shown by research and evaluation studies and educators' experiences over more than 20 years in Australia.

Teachers

While museum educators have been working to form closer relationships with schools, there is still an ongoing lack of meaningful communication between museum educators and school teachers. Teachers find excursions to museums to be worthwhile but stressful. There is considerable logistical preparation: a need to consider cost, safety, behaviour, organisation, relevance, justification to parents and principals. On the other hand, they see the benefits as extending classroom learning, involving relevant and interesting learning experiences and widening the students' horizons and life experience. Teachers choose excursion venues based on relevance to their school topic, easy access to the site, and proximity to other excursion venues. [18] Excursions are also seen as an opportunity 'to get out of class', and for social interaction.

Teachers frequently find themselves out of their depth and feel inadequate, even frightened, when conducting excursions. Hence many seem to be running excursions in the same way they experienced them when they were students at school. The 'fear factor' seems to interfere with learning-oriented interactions with the students while in the museum. Often teachers simply hand over the students (and the responsibility of the learning) to the museum educators. (This has been and remains a feature of museum visits in many countries.)

There is very little understanding by teachers of pedagogical approaches which help students learn in a museum. There are gaps between teacher aspirations and teacher practice. For their part, museum staff don't always understand teachers' needs. Teachers make the key decisions regarding field trip planning and implementation, but the inherent conflict between the systems of formal schooling and informal education with their different learning formats, different bureaucracies and different philosophies are not resolved. [19]

Both teachers and museum educators consider 'that better museum-school communication is the most important component necessary to increase the effectiveness of school visits to museums. Teachers should be more knowledgeable of what museums have to offer and museums should provide more information to the right people so that they may become so'. [20] This underlines the need to provide pedagogical preparation for teachers in order to actively participate in the potential learning opportunities provided by the museum. While teachers view the school and museum as complementary learning experiences, very few perceive a difference between classroom and excursion learning strategies. There is a misrecognition of the social relations of power in which museum staff are dominant and in which school-based educators have an ill-defined and often educationally ineffective pedagogical role. [21] The implicit power relations create barriers and silences that impede engagement by teachers. Pathways are needed to develop relationships that make each group's roles and responsibilities explicit and valued.

A framework has been developed to provide teachers with a process that prepares the students for their visit and makes school excursions operate more like family visits. The framework School Museum Integrated Learning Experiences for Students (SMILES) is based on three major elements: Purpose (students know exactly why they are going to the museum because the visit is part of a classroom-based topic); Choice (which specific parts of the museum will be visited and how students will find and gather information); and Ownership (of their own or their group's learning agenda). The students' and teachers' declared outcomes of both learning and enjoyment when the school field trips are run in this way clearly affirms the validity of the process. The preparation allows for meaningful interactions with the museum educators and the exhibitions.

The SMILES framework leads to students and teachers feeling positive about their enjoyment of the visit and the learning outcomes. Aspects of this process have been adopted (if they were not already being used) by many museums in their materials for teachers and in their on-site programs. However, despite the clear benefits, many teachers still do not use the framework.

Opportunities are needed for teachers to undertake appropriate professional development which emphasises that learning in an informal setting such as a museum requires different pedagogical approaches from those commonly used in schools. More opportunities are needed for museum educators to take formal courses or to have appropriate professional learning in this area. Few museum studies courses have dedicated subjects on museum education, although there are public

program subjects in which this is incorporated. Generally museum educators learn 'on the job' and can only rely on their considerable dedication and professionalism.

Museum educators in many states have been active in working with professional teachers' associations in many learning areas. Unfortunately much of the interaction is one way – we need to find ways to encourage and facilitate shared roles and responsibility for teachers and museum educators in the learning process. Some university teacher education faculties include visits to museums: there is, however, a need to be careful not to let this reinforce the view that 'we (the museum) can do it all for you'. University of Technology, Sydney has established a subject for all primary teacher education students that involves placements in museums to gain an understanding of the role of museum educators and of the learning environment. At the same time the program is emphasising the key role that the teachers have in facilitating learning in informal settings. There is an important opportunity here to facilitate more workshops that develop shared responsibility for the learning between teachers and museum educators.

Conclusion

Significantly, six of the 10 Aims for Museums described in the Pigott Report of 1975 [22] included aspects of learning and public programs. Key elements included curiosity, educating formally and informally, extending knowledge, the magic of rare and unique objects, use of art and theatre and relevance to all ages. It is salutary to reflect on this emphasis, and perhaps to revisit these aims.

There are many gems but also some dinosaurs in the combined efforts of museum educators and teachers in providing excellent learning opportunities for school students in museums. Strengthening the membership and activity of the Museums Australia Education National Network across all states is an important way forward. Recent links between this network and development of the National Curriculum [23] in several areas is an excellent advance. The museum education profession has moved forward in many positive directions. The two areas important in making further progress are shared recognition and respect for ongoing learning by both museum educators and teachers.

Footnotes

¹ Leaders in this field internationally include John Falk and Lynn Dierking (Institute for Learning Innovation and Oregon State University), George Hein (Lesley University, Cambridge, Massachusetts), Paulette McManus (University College, London), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (University of Leicester), David Anderson (Victoria & Albert Museum, London).

² To gather a broad picture of past and current programs in Australia 20 interviews and/or surveys were conducted with experienced museum educators from major Australian museums covering all states and territories and including museums of art, botanic gardens, history, maritime, natural history, science, and social history. I would like to acknowledge the following people with whom I have consulted to develop this paper: Helen Whitty NSW, Lyn Beasley ACT, Genevieve Fahey VIC, Janelle Hatherley NSW, Peter Hoban VIC, Brian Ladd NSW, Sarah Main NSW, Terry McClafferty WA, Chris Nobbs SA and Ian Watts VIC.

³ For simplicity, the term *museum educator* is used to describe all people employed or volunteering in a museum to work primarily but not exclusively with school groups.

⁴ Similarly, *teachers* are those who have brought the group from school, and may also include parents and other helpers accompanying the school group.

⁵ Tony Sadler and Beryl Morris, *Museum Educators Think Aloud on Educational Philosophy*, Quoll Enterprises, Seaton, SA, 1989, p. 41.

⁶ Pamela Clelland Gray, 'Public learning and the art museum: future directions.' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, 2002.

⁷ Leonie Rennie and Terence McClafferty, 'Objects and learning: understanding young children's interaction with science exhibitions', in Scott Paris (ed.), *Perspectives on Object Centered Learning in Museums*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 2002, pp. 191–211.

⁸ Formerly at Queensland University of Technology, now at University of British Columbia.

⁹ David Anderson, Keith Lucas and Ian Ginns, 'Theoretical perspectives on learning in an informal setting', *National Association for Research in Science Teaching Conference*, Boston, MA, 1999.

- ¹⁰ Susan Groundwater-Smith and Lynda Kelly, 'As we see it: improving learning in the museum', *British Education Research Association Annual Conference*, Edinburgh, 2003.
- ¹¹ Janette Griffin, *School-Museum Integrated Learning Experiences in Science*, University of Technology, Sydney, PhD Thesis. 1998, <http://hdl.handle.net/2100/254>
- ¹² Janette Griffin, Carolyn Meehan and David Jay, 'The other side of evaluating student learning in museums: separating the how from the what', *Museums Australia Conference*, Sydney, 2005.
- ¹³ Rennie and McClafferty, 'Objects and learning: understanding young children's interaction with science exhibitions'.
- ¹⁴ Peter Hoban and Marion Tonkin, 'Children should be seen AND heard: catering for multiple intelligences in a museum setting'. Presentation at *Museums Australia Conference*. Adelaide, 2002.
- ¹⁵ Think: Things I know; WINK: What I Need to Know: and Decide: Where and how will I find information at Sovereign Hill. Booklet available for download at <http://www.sovereignhill.com.au/?id=wuthenticlearningbey>
- ¹⁶ Lyn Fasoli, 'Following the signs: induction of preschool children to the Art Gallery', *Uncover: Graduate Research in the Museum Sector*, University of Sydney and the Australian Museum (AMARC), Sydney, 2002.
- ¹⁷ Barbara Piscitelli and Katrina Weier, 'Learning with, through, and about art: the role of social interactions', in Scott Paris (ed.), *Perspectives on Object-Centered Learning in Museums*, Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 2002, pp. 121–151.
- ¹⁸ Kathy Stewart, 'Up the garden path', *Uncover*, Vol. 1, 2002, pp. 199–206.
- ¹⁹ David Anderson, *A Common Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom* Department of National Heritage, London, 1997.
- ²⁰ Lisa Edwards, *Museum School Interactions: A Sydney Study*, Honours Thesis, Faculty of Education, University of Sydney.
- ²¹ Donna Mathewson and Penny McKeon, 'Disrupting notions of collaboration: the problematic engagement of museums and schools', *Australian Association for Research in Education*, Brisbane 2002.
- ²² *Museums in Australia 1975, Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1975, p. 6.
- ²³ [The Australian Curriculum website](#), Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority.

Janette Griffin has been teaching and researching in school, museum, a science centre and university programs.

Cite as: Janette Griffin, 2011, 'The museum education mix: students, teachers and museum educators', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at http://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JGriffin_2011.html ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6

Understanding Museums - Museums, education and visitor experience

Family visitors to museums in Australia

by Lynda Kelly

Museums in Australia have recognised the need to become more responsive to their audiences, especially families who both visit museums and see the value of them. Changes in family and social structures have provided opportunities for museums to play an important role in social engagement and bonding and for meeting the learning requirements of families in this complex information age. Research has consistently found that positive early family visits to museums have a significant impact on later visiting habits. [1]

Families are a key audience for museums in Australia. For example, at the Australian Museum, Sydney and the National Museum of Australia, Canberra, they account for over half the number of visitors. In regional museums in New South Wales, contrary to established beliefs, almost one-third of visitors are families. Research has established that families access a wide range of information sources when learning together during their visits to museums. When people visit museums as young children with their family they are more likely to visit when they are older. [2]

This chapter will discuss museum visits and family life and how families form successful learning units illustrated through examples from research with families visiting an Australian Museum exhibition. The principal gains from recent research are the recognition of the importance of learning in family visits and the different roles that various family members play before, during and after their visit.

Families in the new century

The forces of social change, economic circumstances, increasing divorce rates, remarriage/re-partnering, and changing living patterns have meant that the term 'family' is not as straightforward as it was in the past.

The Institute of Family Studies, Australia, defined a family as a group of individuals related by blood, marriage, adoption or cohabitation. The Australian Bureau of Statistics also has a similar but more detailed description: a family is two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who are usually resident in the same household. [3] The common elements in these definitions are that there is some type of relationship, and that the group themselves identify as a family unit.

John Falk and Lynn Dierking of the Institute for Learning Innovation (and now Oregon State University), who have carried out extensive studies of learning in museums, recognise that families are 'those who self-define themselves as a family (in other words, all members are not necessarily biologically related)'. [4]

As in other countries, there have been significant changes in the nature of family groupings in Australia in the past 20 years. Families consisting of couples with children of any age remain the most prevalent type of family in Australia. However, between 1986 and 2001 the number of one-parent families increased by 53 per cent, and couple families without children living with them increased by 33 per cent. Consequently, two-parent families with children are forming a smaller proportion of all families — 47 per cent of families in 2001, down from 54 per cent in 1986. [5] Due to these demographic shifts, museums are increasingly using the term 'intergenerational groups' to refer to mixed groups of people, including children, who are related in some way.

Families in Australian museums

Museums in Australia have long recognised the importance of families as visitors, with several establishing separate spaces for these groups, especially those with very young children. Patricia McDonald, the first professional education officer employed by the Australian Museum, in reviewing the history of educational activities at the Australian Museum, observed, 'From its inception the Australian Museum has been regarded as an educational institution and its activities have been concerned with increasing general public interest in and knowledge of the natural sciences'. [6] The

Museum has provided programs for students and children since the early 1920s, with the establishment of a special *Children's Room* in 1962.

Due to both audience demand and changes in thinking about how people – particularly children – learned, the Museum developed the *Discovery Room*, one of the earliest interactive spaces and one heavily used by families. This was followed by a whole exhibition floor dedicated to interactive learning specifically aimed at children and families (the *Discovery Space*). Since that time these areas have undergone several iterations, with the establishment of the popular *Search and Discover* in 1998 and *Kids' Island* in 1999 as active, hands-on exploratory learning spaces catering specifically to children and their families, and drawing on the Museum's collection strengths and research expertise.

The latest key development in family programming has been the opening of *Kidspace* in 2007 as part of the Museum's redevelopment. These developments were informed by extensive evaluation with both adults and children, which repeatedly found families commenting on the importance of having spaces for young children within the Museum that were enjoyable, promoted hands-on learning, and stimulated children's curiosity and creativity while providing a chance to explore and discover within the special context of the family.

Two other major museums developed dedicated spaces specifically designed for children and families during the past 10 years. The Melbourne Museum's *Children's Gallery* is aimed at three- to eight-year-olds and has a mandate to encourage discovery and exploration within a range of science issues. The aim was to provide an interactive, hands-on and playful space that engages all the senses through continually updated exhibitions. The National Museum of Australia developed *Kspace*, an interactive, technology-focused space where children 'design their own future'. In addition, *Our Place* was designed as a series of cubbies for children to explore the Museum's themes in their own ways, as well as being useful programming spaces.

The Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney, when developing its *Pirates* program for families, realised that, in exhibitions aimed at children, the accompanying adults also needed something to occupy them. The Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, while catering for family audiences through its many exhibitions (both permanent and temporary) and programs, recognised the value of a dedicated space for children who were visiting with their parents. The interactive installation, *Zoe's House*, caters specifically for children aged three to six years to facilitate both cooperative and creative play in children.

All these examples demonstrate an approach to programming for families that is based on constructivist learning principles [7], being interactive, playful and learner-centred, while encouraging social interaction through providing something for all ages.

Families and learning in museums

Learning is a key reason for museum visits generally, by individuals, small groups and families. People who visit museums value learning and seek opportunities to learn in many ways. Those who visit more often are usually better educated. 'The primary reason most people attend museums, whether by themselves or with their children, is in order to learn ... [therefore, they are] likely to see museums as places that provide opportunities for them to expand their own and their children's learning horizons'. [8]

Why is the family such an important learning unit? Culture plays a strong role in learning survival and life skills, with much of this being learned through the family. Studies of literacy and adult learning suggested that an orientation to lifelong learning and readiness to learn in later life is strongly linked to the family. [9] Families live and learn together, and the attitudes and behaviours developed there continue through later life, including their visits to museums. [10] 'Family members talk about what they know from previous experiences and memories ... these discussions provide opportunities for parents to reinforce past experiences and family history and develop a shared understanding among family members.' [11]

Whereas earlier research indicated that the principal motivation for visits to museums by families was to give opportunities for social interaction, many more recent studies reveal that family conversations and behaviours in museums are centred on learning. [12] Family interactions strongly influence how people learn in later life, particularly in forming attitudes, values and views of the world. [13] Learning is a key 'life skill' that assists a child develop along the right 'life path': 'With the correct guidance from the family you hope that they will have a better life with all these

learning skills that they have gained.' [14] Over time a family's behaviour is developed and refined and, through the rich experiences provided by museums, families become more successful as learning units.

Visitors also recognise the important role that museums play in learning about difficult or sensitive issues. Adults visiting the Australian Museum's *Indigenous Australians* exhibition felt that it was important for them and their children to learn more about Australia's Indigenous cultures in order to understand and reflect on past injustices and to better comprehend contemporary issues. [15] Parents with children aged less than five years visiting an Indigenous program at the Australian Museum felt it was critical that their children were introduced to Indigenous issues from an early age to help prepare them for later learning. These families especially valued their visit because it filled gaps in the adults' knowledge about Indigenous subjects and issues and helped them become more confident when talking to their children about these issues. [16]

Family visits to museums in Australia share a number of characteristics. [17] When families voluntarily choose to visit museums they wish both to learn and engage in social interaction in a recreational context. They take time for orientation, enter with a sense of curiosity, bring with them a set of prior experiences and a personal agendas, link what they see to their own prior experiences, are most attracted to concrete and/or interactive displays, have a common viewing behaviour which involves looking very closely at each display in the first gallery, then skimming and moving randomly in subsequent galleries. The visiting behaviour is modified by increased experience with the setting: they like to revisit favourite displays, share their viewing and learning in a social context, enjoy and remember interactions with people from the museum, respond to physical needs by sitting or having a break after little more than an hour and generally stay for less than two hours.

Research has found that visitors play three roles which are particularly relevant to the family group during the visit: *visit manager* by directing and organising; *museum expert* through explaining, clarifying and correcting; and *learning-facilitator* in questioning, linking, reminiscing and wondering. [18] These roles occur simultaneously, are closely linked to the process of learning and are dependent on both the social context of the visit and the group composition, particularly the ages of any accompanying children.

Adults spend as much time playing the visit manager role and engaging their children as looking at displays themselves. Adults have many strategies on hand to manage their children's needs, such as distracting them, asking questions and directing their attention to something they might like.

Accompanying adults play a key role in facilitating family learning: 'Parents can be effective facilitators for their children's learning when exhibitions are designed with collaborative learning in mind and when adults feel comfortable with the content and experiences provided in the museum'. [19] Mothers and fathers take different roles during a visit, mothers being more concerned with the logistics of the visit whilst fathers see museums as 'family business'. [20] Parents often play a 'teaching' role in a museum visit, [21] and assist learning through drawing on their own experiences, and they often took 'central control' over the visit. [22]

The mood and behaviour of the child may influence the learning that takes place through its impact on the accompanying adults. Adults sometimes have to spend time trying to activate interest and enthusiasm from a disengaged and bored child, which can also create tension if the adult wants to see something that appeals to them, as illustrated in another conversation of the same family.

Families sharing learning

Research has consistently shown that social interaction promotes learning and that the role of the parent is critical. A key finding of one study of learning in children's museums showed that 'children stayed longer at exhibits and learned more when they were accompanied by an adult who was actively involved in the activities'. [23] Museum behaviours of family members include reading labels together, discussing what they are looking at and asking each other questions. These family interactions stimulate learning, providing an extensive, continuous reciprocal influence on visitor/exhibit interactions. [24]

Paulette McManus, a UK-based museum audience researcher, also described family visitors as 'hunter-gatherers':

actively foraging in the museum to satisfy their curiosity about the topics and objects which

museum professionals collect and study ... [This] behaviour is practical and economical since the exploration and information-gathering is shared out between the family members. [25]

There is a two-way sharing of learning between parent and child: each has expertise and experience to share. Different levels of expertise can emerge among group members that provide a wider range of explanations than occur among groups with a balanced level of expertise among its members. [26]

Linking to prior, present and past experiences

Visitors engage with exhibitions through the lens of their personal experiences and identity. [27] They make personal meanings from the objects they are looking at and connect these to their own lives. [28]

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill of the University of Leicester in England, well-known internationally for her work on museum communications and education, concluded from her research on teachers and students in the United Kingdom that children exhibited more positive learning identities after visiting a museum. Families can get very excited about exhibitions, holding animated discussions about the many things they had seen and learned in a positive and confident manner.

Tales of successful learners: families visiting museums

'Museum experiences embedded within children's familiar culture and contexts are powerful mediators of memory, enjoyment and learning in these settings'. [29] New museum experiences are linked with familiar prior knowledge, there is a strong tendency to share learning with family members, the physical needs of visitors and their 'natural' viewing itinerary must be addressed, curiosity and choice in learning selections are important.

Parents facilitate learning when the exhibits allow for collaborative participation and they feel comfortable with the information. [30] Adults' views of knowledge, such as understanding the tentative nature of science knowledge, influence the way they interact with their children and how they convey the learning process. Parents make use of learning facilities such as open access libraries and activity kits if they know they are there and understand their role. Family members each take notice of different aspects of an exhibit and construct a shared meaning together.

Museums are one part of the family's free-choice learning activities. Parents consider museum visits to be valuable in creating and strengthening relationships with their children, in spending quality time together, in sharing experiences and in enabling them to tune into what fascinates their children. Museums are seen as a good day out, something the whole family can enjoy as a different form of education and are considered generally good value for money. [31]

In this increasingly complex world, where the real and virtual are blurring and where changes in society can seem overwhelming, museums are able to provide spaces for families to be together as well as learn together. Parents value museum visits because they provide children with opportunities to learn in different ways through bringing concepts to life and enhancing school learning experiences. They stimulate visitors of all ages and open their minds to new ideas, the world around them, history and other cultures. Children enjoy museums as places where they can fantasise, explore and learn in ways that are more engaging than they experience in more formal settings, such as school. The challenge for museums is to use the elements that families value, the ways they interact with museums, and how they operate as extremely effective learning units to apply these principles, not only to the development of future exhibitions and programs but also the ways they plan for other group visitors to museums.

Footnotes

¹ J Falk and L Dierking, *Learning from Museums: visitor experiences and the making of meaning*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, 2000.

² For a comprehensive list of references see L Kelly, G Savage, J Griffin and S Tonkin, *Knowledge Quest: Australian families visit museums*, Australian Museum, Sydney, 2004, and L Kelly, *Visitors and Learners: adult museum visitors' learning identities*, University of Technology, Sydney, 2007.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends*, Canberra, 2007.

⁴ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, p. 110.

- ⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Directory of Child and Family Statistics*. Canberra, 2000
- ⁶ In Ron Strahan (ed.), *Rare and Curious Specimens: an illustrated history of the Australian Museum 1827–1979*, Australian Museum, Sydney, 1979, p. 151.
- ⁷ George Hein of Lesley College, Cambridge, MA, was instrumental in highlighting the application of constructivist learning principles in museum exhibitions: see George E Hein, *Learning in the Museum*, Routledge, London, 1998.
- ⁸ J Falk, T Moussouri, and D Coulson, 'The Effect of Visitors' Agendas on Museum Learning', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1998, p. 40.
- ⁹ K Rubenson, 'Adults' Readiness to Learn: Questioning Lifelong Learning for All', paper presented at the Australian Association for Educational Research, Sydney, 2000.
- ¹⁰ L Kelly *et al*, *Knowledge Quest*.
- ¹¹ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, p. 93
- ¹² G Leinhardt, C Tittle, and K Knutson, 'Talking to Oneself: diaries of museum visits', in G Leinhardt, K Crowley and K Knutson (eds), *Learning Conversations in Museums*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah 2000, pp. 103–133; for other references see Kelly, *et al*, *Knowledge Quest*, and Kelly, *Visitors and Learners*.
- ¹³ Kelly, *Visitors and Learners*.
- ¹⁴ Kelly, 2007 Interview Transcript 3.2: From an interview with an adult visitor discussing their approach to learning.
- ¹⁵ L Kelly and P Gordon, 'Developing a Community of Practice: museums and reconciliation in Australia', in R Sandell (ed.), *Museums, Society, Inequality*, Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 153–174 .
- ¹⁶ Australian Museum Audience Research Centre, *Early Childhood Program Evaluation Report*, ms, Australian Museum, Sydney, 2006.
- ¹⁷ Kelly *et al*, *Knowledge Quest*.
- ¹⁸ These and the following specific comments result from a study of families visiting an exhibition at the Australian Museum, *Uncovered: Treasures of the Australian Museum* (2004). The exhibition dealt with why, how and what the Museum had collected by detailing the stories, images and voices behind some of the most important discoveries of the previous 175 years. It also explained why collections were so important and outlined past, present and future Museum scientific research; for further details see Kelly, *Visitors and Learners*.
- ¹⁹ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, p. 95.
- ²⁰ S Stanton, 'Museums, Families and Cultural Models', *Visitor Studies Today!*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1999, pp. 6–9.
- ²¹ K Ellenbogen, 'Museums in Family Life: An Ethnographic Case Study', in G Leinhardt, K Crowley and K Knutson (eds), *Learning Conversations in Museums*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah 2002, pp. 81–101.
- ²² D Ash, 'Negotiations of Thematic Conversations About Biology', in Leinhardt, Crowley and Knutson (eds), *Learning Conversations in Museums*, pp. 357–400.
- ²³ L Puchner, R Rapoport and S Gaskins, 'Learning in Children's Museums: is it really happening?' *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2001, pp. 237–259.
- ²⁴ L Dierking, 'Historical Survey of Theories of Learning', in G Durbin (ed.), *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong Learning*, HMSO, London for GEM, Group for Education in Museums, 1996, pp. 21–24; J Diamond, 'The Behaviour of Family Groups in Science Museums', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1986, pp. 139–154.
- ²⁵ P McManus, 'Families in Museums', in R Miles and Zavala (eds), *Towards Museums of the Future: new European perspectives*, Routledge, London, 1994.
- ²⁶ J Fienberg and G Leinhardt, 'Looking Through the Glass: reflections of identity in conversations at a history

museum', in Leinhardt, Crowley and Knutson (eds), *Learning Conversations in Museums*, pp. 357–400.

²⁷ Stanton, 'Museums, Families and Cultural Models'.

²⁸ Leinhardt, Tittle and Knutson, 'Talking to Oneself', p. 91.

²⁹ D Anderson, B Piscitelli, K Weier, M Everett and C Tayler, 'Children's Museum Experiences: identifying powerful mediators of learning', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2002, pp. 213–231.

³⁰ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*.

³¹ Blue Moon Research and Planning. *Qualitative study for Australian Museum Forward Plan*, ms, Australian Museum, Sydney, 1998.

Lynda Kelly is Head of Audience Research, Australian Museum. Her interests include audiences, evaluation, museum learning and how to measure it, social media and Web 2.0, organisational change and development. She has worked in the human relations, education and executive management areas of the Australian Museum and contributed to numerous public exhibition programs.

Cite as: Lynda Kelly, 2011, 'Family visitors to museums in Australia', in *Understanding Museums: Australian museums and museology*, Des Griffin and Leon Paroissien (eds), National Museum of Australia, published online at nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/LKelly_2011.html
ISBN 978-1-876944-92-6