



The Whitworth Art Gallery – Claire Wood

Creative Spaces

Children as co-researchers in the design of museum and gallery learning

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Introduction

This publication describes a research project which Renaissance North West commissioned called Creative Spaces. It explored the ways in which young children experience the space of the museum or gallery and the effect this has on their learning.



We wanted to know:

“In what different ways do gallery and museum spaces foster learning for Key Stage 2 visitors?”

Unlike other studies of how children learn in museums and galleries, we worked with children as co-researchers and not just as the subjects of enquiry. That is, we didn't do the research about them, we did the research with them. This publication outlines the research – what we set out to do, how we did it, what we found out and how this ties in with wider learning agendas. It also examines what the term 'co-researcher' actually means.

We hope the publication will interest people involved in planning and evaluating children's learning in museums and galleries. We have written it for:

- ★ museum educators
- ★ teachers
- ★ curators
- ★ academics
- ★ museum managers and directors

Rosie Marcus,
North West Director, Cape UK

Myna Trustram,
Research Manager, Renaissance North West

Who was involved

Renaissance North West funded the project as part of its research programme. Since 2004 it has supported research that sets out to identify and share with others new approaches to managing collections and working with audiences. Renaissance North West is part of Renaissance in the Regions, the Museum Libraries & Archives Council's national £300 million programme to transform England's regional museums.

CapeUK has managed the research with Renaissance North West. CapeUK is an educational trust dedicated to exploring the relationship between creativity and learning through a combination of research, project management and consultancy. CapeUK has wide experience of working with educational researchers in Higher Education and is keenly committed to 'enquiry' as a vehicle for child and adult learning.

The research team

Rosie Marcus, North West Director of Cape UK, co-ordinated the research programme.

Dr. Catherine Burke, an educationalist based in the School of Education at the University of Leeds, was the academic lead (she is now a Senior Lecturer in the History of Education at the University of Cambridge). She is particularly interested in the way that architectural space influences the organisation and experience of learning.

David Dobel-Ober, a freelance researcher, worked closely with the museums, teachers and children in gathering and analysing data. He is the main author of the full-length Creative Spaces research report on which this publication is based. The report is available at www.renaissancenw.org.uk

Four museums and galleries took part

- ★ Manchester Art Gallery
- ★ The Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester
- ★ The Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston
- ★ Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle

Children at four primary schools acted as co-researchers

- ★ Frenchwood Community Primary School, Preston
- ★ St Kentigern's Catholic Primary School, Manchester
- ★ Caldew Lea Primary School, Carlisle
- ★ St Gabriel's CE Primary School, Rochdale



Children as

‘Pupil voice’ and the policy framework

Taking children’s feelings and opinions more seriously is a central aspect of current educational policy and practice in the UK. Recent legislation and policy guidance emphasises consulting children and young people about issues and services that affect them. Their right to have a say is fundamental to Every Child Matters and Youth Matters; pupil voice has been incorporated into the Ofsted inspection framework. (See the ‘To find out more’ section at the end of the booklet for more information about these.) Local authorities and schools have a statutory obligation to involve children and young people in decision-making processes and to demonstrate that they are doing this. It is also worth noting that there is a lively debate about what constitutes authentic ‘pupil voice’.

Consultation with children and young people has a moral and pragmatic basis. Their entitlement to be heard is a basic human right. But in principle consultation results in activities and services that better suit their needs and wishes, while helping them develop as responsible citizens and contribute to society.

researchers

Is research the same as consultation?

Alongside this requirement to consult children, there is a growing interest in the role of children and young people as researchers. But what is the difference between asking children their opinion about something and engaging them as researchers in investigating it?

Research and consultation can be seen as different points on a continuum. Both involve asking and answering questions in a structured way and both depend on the informed consent of the participant. However, consultation is often used to test or verify an issue or decision, with a specific set of consequences in view and the person consulted acting mainly as a source of data.

Research, on the other hand, generally entails a more open-ended and exhaustive exploration of people's responses to a given situation or activity and can encompass many different kinds of evidence, including drawings and photographs. When children and young people act as researchers, they share responsibility for interpreting data and exercise some control over how and what conclusions are reached. Working with children as co-researchers acknowledges them as experts in their own lived experiences.

Some people are sceptical about the claims that are made for working with children as researchers. Research implies a seriousness and methodological rigour which may seem hard to reconcile with children as research partners.

In practice, there are different conceptions of what it means to engage children as researchers, some give a high priority to their autonomy and others stress the importance of dialogue and power-sharing with adults.

Creative Spaces aligns itself with the latter approach. It was a project framed and led by adults, with a starting point provided by the four participating museums and galleries. Children, however, actively generated and analysed the research evidence, as opposed to being merely observed and interrogated by adult researchers. It is in this narrow but nonetheless significant sense that they can be described as co-researchers. By the end of the project, their sense of their own ability to influence the outcome of the research indicated that a genuine shift in the normal balance of power had taken place.

The Mosaic Approach

The project adopted elements of the Mosaic Approach pioneered by Professor Peter Moss and Alison Clark in their work with young children. The 'mosaic' of the title refers to the use of a range of research tools, combining visual and verbal data to build up a composite picture of children's response to their learning environment. (See the 'To find out more' section at the end of the booklet for more information about these.) It typically involves: observation; interviews; use of cameras; map-making and child-led tours.

The Mosaic Approach is essentially a framework for listening, which allows adults and children to gather evidence and construct meaning together and thus establish a relationship of communication and trust.

The research process



Harris Museum & Art Gallery – Claire Wood

Identifying the research question

The first stage of the research process was to identify an appropriate research question. Using the Mosaic Approach, the lead researchers and museum staff carried out walking tours of the museum or gallery building and discussed the design and function of various spaces. This stimulated a discussion, from which the research question could be distilled. In each case, it involved an issue which related closely to the individual site and which could be used to inform the organisation's future plans.

Preparing the ground

It is important to prepare children carefully for their role as co-researchers, establishing an atmosphere in which they have the confidence to say what they really think. The adults which children come across in the classroom or in museums are normally there to teach, support or assess them. Children are sometimes unsure why these adults are there and how they should react to them. In the Creative Spaces project the children encountered adults in another role, as co-researchers. Current educational culture focuses on tasks, targets and outcomes which may pre-dispose children to give the responses which they think adults expect or to assume that there is a 'right' or 'wrong' answer to questions.

The first session with each class involved training the children in how to carry out research, using a model designed by the National Children's Bureau for a slightly older age-group. The training explored the meaning of research and emphasised the importance of respecting other people's views. The overall aim was to validate the children's input, inspire enthusiasm for the project and demonstrate to teachers and other participating adults the value of giving children responsibility as researchers.

Research process and data

The four museums and galleries followed an almost identical series of steps:

- ★ Identifying the research question
- ★ Classroom session introducing children to the programme and training them as researchers
- ★ A visit to the venue
- ★ Two follow-up classroom sessions
- ★ Reflections on the research findings with gallery and museum staff

Throughout the process, the research team collected data by a variety of means, including observation, informal conversation, classroom discussions and more focussed conversations with smaller groups of children. In addition, the children generated their own material:

- ★ Photographs taken with disposable cameras
- ★ Written observations, often annotating the photographs
- ★ Evaluation scales completed on a regular basis during the Manchester Art Gallery discussion
- ★ Checklists completed for each room during the visit to the Whitworth Art Gallery
- ★ Plans and designs for their own ideal art gallery

Once the data had been gathered, the research team and venue staff had detailed discussions amongst themselves and with the children about how it could be interpreted. In one school, the children contributed in considerable depth to this process of review.

Literature review

In parallel with these activities, the adult research team also carried out a review of research literature about 'pupil voice' and about children's learning in museums, so that they could compare the findings of Creative Spaces with other studies of a similar nature. Contrasting or corroborating insights from research programmes elsewhere were helpful in enabling the team to interpret and contextualise the outcomes of their own research. The literature review can be seen in the full Creative Spaces report.



Working with the schools



The research team worked with a class teacher in each of the schools. Head teachers were also fully briefed and consulted. Where senior managers at the school were supportive the experience provided more benefit to the entire school, perhaps because the project connected with the school's wider commitment to creative learning.

The research team decided to work with a whole class at each school. This removed the possibility of creating a biased sample (for example in terms of ability, motivation or special needs) and allowed for a variety of opinions and perceptions to be expressed. This also corresponded to the museums and galleries' normal practice in running education sessions.

The children were from Years 4, 5 and 6 and the classes ranged in size from 19 to 28 pupils. There was a balance to strike between capturing a wide range of responses and leaving enough time for the collection and analysis of data. The smallest class was the most keenly engaged, partly because of the enthusiasm of the class teacher but also because it was easier to generate discussion in a smaller group.

In three out of the four schools, small-scale 'focus group' discussions took place with pupils at the end of the project. Each discussion lasted about twenty minutes, which was long enough to supplement the main research findings with individual verbal feedback. Groups of three generated the best discussion as they were neither too big to overwhelm the less confident children, nor too small to leave individuals feeling exposed.



In general, school expectations of learning, behaviour and adult-child relationships tend to shape school visits to museums and galleries. The point of these visits was not the more usual transfer of knowledge from adult to child, but the exploration of children's responses to the museum or gallery as a place or 'space'. This gave children a degree of independence and freedom of expression which was sometimes at odds with their normal experience of school. There is still some way to go before this level of consultation and involvement becomes a standard aspect of life in the classroom.

What happened



The Whitworth Art Gallery – Claire Wood

The Whitworth Art Gallery

Research questions:

What is an art gallery?

What would an art gallery designed by children contain and how would it feel?

The Whitworth Art Gallery often involves children in the design and interpretation of exhibitions and one such project was already underway at the time of this research. Gallery staff decided to work with the same group of children, on the basis that they would readily enter into the spirit of the research.

The first session in school was designed to give the children information about the gallery and encourage them to think about how they would investigate it as researchers. When they explored the galleries for themselves, they worked in small groups and recorded their impressions with disposable cameras. To begin with, they concentrated on the task of recording different spaces rather than responding to them. An adult was on hand to prompt but not to direct their activity.

The intention was to probe children's preconceptions about art galleries, in terms of who they think they are for, and how they make you feel. Initially, the children tended to give the answers which they thought the adults wanted to hear and it proved difficult to elicit responses that did not simply re-affirm a second-hand, adult view of what an art gallery should be.

They were also inclined to influence one another. Gradually, however, they became more autonomous and more spontaneous in their judgements. Only towards the end of the project did the children begin to express themselves with more freedom. Back in school, in the final stage of the project, they designed their 'ideal' gallery, incorporating elements of the existing Whitworth building and displays, but also adding ideas from other contexts.

They gave considerable thought to the requirements of disabled and elderly people, showing a striking awareness of the need for 'inclusive design'.

Findings

In general, the children's responses to the art on display were varied, individualistic and unpredictable. Many were uncertain what to make of modern art.

Adults tend to see collections separately from the building whereas the children perceived the building and its content as one.

Despite being taken to galleries on school trips most children thought that galleries were only for people who were already professionally involved with art. Children felt that galleries are not places for them.

Initially, they expected art to have definite meaning and purpose or, in educational terms, a 'learning objective'. The idea that it could be experienced for pleasure or even as something that could not be completely understood was new to them.

The children often expressed strong feelings about the representation of nudity (which they perceived as rude), religious subjects and cruelty. They appeared to believe that the act of representing and displaying something meant that the artist and the gallery condoned it.

Perhaps because of anxieties about the subject-matter of works of art, they wanted their own ideal gallery to contain special areas for adults and others for children. They thought there should be "a room for adults with information on all the paintings and sculptures" and "a playroom where kids can play and also make new friends". It is possible that this reflects their feeling that the Gallery isn't really for them, despite the invitation to attend that day.

Their own designs often replicated what they had encountered in the gallery, such as an area for dressing up. Refreshments and accessible signage were very important to the children.



The Whitworth Art Gallery – Claire Wood

Manchester Art Gallery

Research questions:

How do current ideas about time impact on children's learning in gallery visits?

How do children feel about the timing and pace of gallery visits?

What are our assumptions about the pace of gallery visits?

The education team at Manchester Art Gallery chose one of the Gallery's standard Key Stage 2 sessions about portraiture as the focus for its research. They used it to test children's responses to the session and to calibrate other sessions of a similar kind. The two-hour 'Portraits' session is designed to introduce children to the Gallery and stimulate return visits. It shows them how to interpret portraits through a close analysis of six different works, followed by practical activities in the education studio.

The session moves at a fast pace in order to present as much material as possible and to begin creative processes which children can continue at school or at home.

Whereas the other schools in the research programme had some familiarity with their venues, Manchester Art Gallery chose to work with a school which had never visited before. From the start, the facilitator emphasised the need for speed and concentration. The time available for each portrait was approximately 15 minutes, with 30 minutes for the final two activities in the studio. At each natural break in the session, the children were asked to complete a simple set of scales to assess pace, duration and level of interest for each activity. On the whole, the children maintained a high level of interest throughout the session and managed to keep to the timetable.





Manchester Art Gallery – Claire Wood

Findings

Before the visit, some children said they thought it might be boring. They hadn't been to a gallery before and thought that they were mainly for art professionals.

In fact they rated the experience highly and most of the children were surprised at how much they learned and how much they enjoyed it. Several children reported that they had changed their view of some of the paintings because of the insights they had gained.

Overall, children thought that the pace of the session was very fast. There was no break in which they could look at other exhibits or parts of the building, and those who needed the toilets had to miss part of the session.

Most children would have liked the session to be longer. They wanted more time for activities which involved actively carrying out a task.

There was no clear correlation between children's interest in an activity and its pace; they assessed it as 'very fast' or 'fast' whether or not they found it engaging. However, there was a clear correlation between how interesting they found the activity and how long they wanted it to last. Adults might assume that a child will be engaged by an activity if it is fast – that they won't have time to get bored. This finding suggests that levels of engagement are determined more by interest than by pace.

It is possible that the fast pace of the session inhibits children's enjoyment and learning rather than enhancing it. Other studies suggest that highly structured, fast-moving sessions may limit personal response and deeper forms of learning.

Both teachers and children were enthusiastic about their visit and wanted further opportunities to make their own work and apply their new-found interpretive skills to other portraits. The visit needs to be seen as part of a longer learning experience facilitated jointly by teacher and gallery educator.



Harris Museum and Art Gallery

Research questions:

Is the building, interior and exterior, an attraction or distraction or a mixture of both?

What can we learn from the first question that is useful in designing children's experience of museum and gallery spaces?

The Harris Museum and Art Gallery's research questions reflect the mixture of opportunities and challenges presented by the large classical architecture of the building. When gallery staff and researchers first attempted to frame the research question by walking around the building together, it became clear that the sheer scale and grandeur of the architecture and decoration might have a significant impact on children's learning in the gallery.

Most of the children who took part in the research already knew the gallery, having visited previously with school and/or their families. On the whole, they were more familiar with the social history displays than with the art collections. Their view of art focussed on its value, evidence of the maker's skill, and as a source of historical information or illustration. Through discussion, they became more used to the idea that art can be experienced emotionally and does not necessarily need to be part of a learning process associated with objectives and targets.

They responded eagerly to the task of recording the building with cameras, articulating their thoughts as they moved about and rushing very quickly from one area to the next, as if they wanted to take possession of the building and find out exactly what it had to offer. Once they had taken everything in, they sometimes re-visited parts of the building to have a closer look.

They were particularly struck by some of the larger and more dramatic exhibits, for example the 'Poulton Elk' (the skeleton of an elk from the end of the last Ice Age) and Dhruva Mistry's vast sculpture of a female head. Football memorabilia, the emblem of Preston and dressing up areas were also popular.

Although the children's attitude towards the building and its contents was respectful, they were by no means overawed by it. Similar to the children who visited the Whitworth Art Gallery, they were uncomfortable about nudity and easily deterred by inaccessible or inadequate information. They did, however, respond enthusiastically to the information and explanations offered informally by front-of-house staff.

In their focus group discussion after the visit, the children reported how much they appreciated the freedom they had been given to discover the building on their own. Given the choice between going to the museum or having an extended playtime, most of them said that they would like to go to the museum!

Findings

The classical grandeur of the Harris Museum and Art Gallery did not appear to produce strong reactions or make the children feel uncomfortable. In focus group discussions, none of the children mentioned the style of the building without prompting, although some did notice that it looked like a 'Roman temple'. One said, "It makes you want to go in"; another said, "I wanted to go and explore". And another said, "It's simple really, it [the building] just goes up and around".

Although undaunted by the architecture, the children were interested in the layout of the building and impressed by specific aspects of its decoration and content. They were more responsive to individual details than to the building as a whole.

It was very noticeable that children wanted to explore the whole building before they settled to look at a particular area. This is a process of 'cognitive mapping' which is known to be an aspect of the way children respond to new places.

Although the children knew the building already, they behaved as if this was their first encounter with it. Clearly the experience of having complete autonomy was very different from previous visits led by adults.

There was an obvious correlation between understanding things and liking them. But understanding depended on having access to information. When this was not readily available, children soon gave up and moved on.

The children were grateful for information from front-of-house staff and liked having access to verbal explanations, but not in the form of a guided tour which might prescribe how they moved around the space, what they looked at, in what order and for how long.

Images of nudity made the children feel embarrassed. They felt they could not acknowledge it without adult permission.

The children showed great respect for the building and the collections, but were puzzled by mixed messages about whether or not they could touch things.





Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery

Research question:

What is the value of informal learning that goes beyond the standard museum trail?

Sessions for schools at Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery often take place in a classroom adjacent to the main site. With a major capital development under consideration, the education team wanted to look at what informal learning in the galleries themselves might add to children's experience and how this could be used in planning new facilities.

Following their 'young researcher' training in school, each child chose to focus on two themes from a list of eleven which they knew would be available to them at the museum – from Prehistory and the Ice Age to the story of the Border Reivers. They then explored the museum with disposable cameras, taking photographs to record what helped and what hindered their learning.

The children were told clearly that they would not be tested on their chosen themes after the visit, but that the adults would trust them to report honestly on what they had enjoyed and learned.

To begin with, the children moved quickly round the building in order to get an overall view of what was on display. After half an hour or so, they settled down to seeking out information about their chosen theme. By the end of the visit, they were eager to share their findings with their friends.

In two follow-up sessions in school, the children used their photographs, drawings and annotations to create a 'personal trail' – in effect the story of their visit. These provided the stimulus for a focus group discussion which revealed how much the children had appreciated and benefited from the autonomy they had been given.

Findings

As with the children at the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, when the children first arrived at Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, they needed to build a cognitive map of the building before they could concentrate on its content.

The children selected themes with which they were already familiar and tended to avoid the unknown. This pattern of behaviour echoes previous research studies which show how children's informal learning in museums builds and depends on their existing knowledge. More could perhaps have been done to encourage exploration of unfamiliar themes.

Although the children enjoyed hands-on activities and talked about them after the visit, they did not always understand what they were for. There were some misconceptions, for example that the stocks and pillory were used to cut off people's hands or feet.

As at other venues, children were confused about whether or not they were allowed to touch things. They found it hard to tell the difference between an original object and its replica and couldn't understand why they were allowed to touch some things and not others.

The children's responses revealed some uncertainty and ambivalence about the status of certain objects. They were disturbed by apparent human remains, for example the replica of the skull of Robert the Bruce, yet were simultaneously fascinated by them. They were likewise attracted and repelled by the mounted animal specimens, and intrigued by the fact that death could be presented so matter-of-factly in a museum.

Many children had difficulties finding the area of the Museum they had chosen to investigate and found it hard to distinguish between different themes and collections. They looked for written information, and sometimes found it useful, but they quickly lost interest if it was not accessible. Often text was too small, too long or in inaccessible places.

The visit aroused the children's appetite for learning. They did not retain a lot of factual knowledge from the visit, but they wanted to go back and find answers to the questions that had been stimulated. They were proud of Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery and enjoyed their visit.



Conclusion

“In what different ways do gallery and museum spaces foster learning for Key Stage 2 visitors?”

The four individual projects at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester Art Gallery, the Harris Museum and Art Gallery and Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery explored different but complementary aspects of this overarching research question. In the process, many issues came to light which are likely to be of interest to anyone concerned with how children can contribute to research and how they learn in museums and galleries.

Stimulating appetites for learning

A valuable comparison can be drawn between the children who experienced the relatively structured session at Manchester Art Gallery and the children who had a more autonomous learning experience at Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery: the former commented that they had learnt a lot whereas the latter did not appear to have retained a lot of information – but did have a real enthusiasm for finding out more. Children visiting the Whitworth Art Gallery and the Harris Museum and Art Gallery also responded positively to taking a high level of responsibility for their own learning. The research team’s literature review shows evidence from other studies of the difference between formal experiences of learning which have an immediate impact, and the ‘slow burn’ of more informal scenarios.

Museums and galleries ideally need to mix these approaches to ensure that children have both an immediate experience of learning and the motivation to find out more. But neither approach will achieve its potential without adequate preparation and high quality follow-up work after the visit. Unless schools make regular visits they won’t be able to take advantage of mixed approaches.

Creative Spaces recognises the importance of a long term three-way partnership between children, teachers and museum staff – something that the current emphasis on creative learning outside the classroom should promote.



Manchester Art Gallery – Claire Wood

Children as researchers

Children's increased appetite for learning was linked to their responsibility as researchers. The fact that they were given cameras, for example, indicated the trust vested in them by adults and raised the status of the whole experience. The data generated by this approach reveals a richness of response often missing from more conventional forms of consultation and research.

Cognitive maps

In three of the four venues, children seemed to need to understand the buildings before they could concentrate on their content. This process of cognitive mapping appears to be an integral part of the experience and should arguably be taken into account when planning museum or gallery visits.

Building and content

In both museums and galleries children often regarded spaces and their content as one. The appearance of a gallery or room could influence the way the children felt about the collections and vice versa.

Independent learning and the need for information

Children's enthusiasm for independent learning was sometimes frustrated by a lack of information. Even when information was available, it was often in a form they found inaccessible. They responded well, however, when they could ask for information at the moment of needing it. This suited them better than a guided tour, where information is provided whether they like it or not.

Experiential learning

Children valued interactive exhibits and sensory involvement with displays, but the purpose of these activities was not always clear to them. In particular, they were often confused about whether or not things could be touched and the difference between the

real thing and a replica. Instructions and distinctions which seem obvious to adults may be much less so to children.

An inclusive outlook

When the children designed their own ideal gallery they were sensitive towards the needs of other people, in particular the elderly and disabled. Their commitment to inclusive design impressed the research team and reflected a mature understanding of the nature of shared public space.

Challenging material

Some of the material displayed in galleries and museums was problematic for the children. They were shocked and embarrassed by representations of nudity, religion and violence and assumed that the depiction or display of a subject amounted to condoning it. The fact that many children included adult only areas in their ideal art galleries could be a way of telling professionals and other adults that children are not always equipped to deal with some of the challenging material that museums and galleries contain. Perhaps this is also connected with a feeling that museums and galleries are essentially for adults.

Emotional learning

It was noteworthy that children associated museums and galleries with factual knowledge. Even art was seen as a source of information or as an illustration of past events, not as something that could affect how you feel and think or that could simply be experienced for its own sake. With a higher priority now given in education policy to the social and emotional dimensions of learning, the climate in schools is gradually changing. For example, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's Curriculum Big Picture stresses the needs of the 'whole child' and the learning that occurs from the everyday routines and events of school life, as well as from activities that take place out of school. Museums and galleries are well placed to take advantage of this trend.

Creative Spaces: what are the implications?



The Whitworth Art Gallery – Claire Wood

For the museums and galleries

Creative Spaces has helped the four participating museums and galleries re-consider aspects of their physical environment and the way they run activities. On a purely practical level, museum staff learned a great deal about how children respond to signage and interpretation. In the process, assumptions have frequently been challenged.

Across all the venues, it was apparent that education sessions work best when they are part of a long-term collaborative process involving preparation before the visit and consolidation after the event. For example, at Manchester Art Gallery the education team is considering placing in a virtual gallery, the work the children began in the gallery, but completed at home or at school. The children could then receive feedback from the facilitator of their session.

Children's impulse to explore the space of the building before settling down to the main activity of the session has often been observed by education staff, but not always understood in a theoretical sense as a process of cognitive mapping. Some of the venues intend to incorporate this initial period of exploration into the way they run future sessions, recognising that it has a beneficial effect on children's motivation and behaviour.



Harris Museum & Art Gallery – Claire Wood

For educators

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of the research (and one which may require further unravelling) was the children's sensitivity and fascination with more emotionally challenging subject-matter. This suggests that museums and galleries have the potential to play a valuable role in dealing with issues such as the polarities of life and death, which it may be difficult to address appropriately in the classroom. Museums can be important partners in education around big philosophical questions that do fascinate children and that schools often don't have time to deal with adequately. Perhaps because the museum space is different from the classroom, such discussions can more easily be held there. Museum collections can act as a powerful stimulus for social and emotional learning. Yet the potential of collections for activity of this kind has not been exhausted. Museums themselves could undoubtedly do more to promote this aspect of their resources.

A significant aspect of Creative Spaces was the extent to which the children involved found their individual voice. A report of this kind inevitably tends to generalise but in fact the children's views were in reality extremely diverse – to the point where it was sometimes impossible to extrapolate any unified child's view of a particular issue. This serves as a reminder that the aggregating, or generalising, tendencies inherent in traditional audience research often simplify reality.

The richness of the children's response perhaps relates to their sense of empowerment as co-researchers. Whether more conventional forms of consultation could have generated as much useful data seems unlikely. However, a research project of this kind takes time, commitment and careful planning and depends on a genuine three-way partnership between teachers, museum educators and academic researchers.

It is now clear that the input of academic researchers was crucial to the success of a project whose many demands might otherwise have exceeded the capacities of busy teachers and museum educators. The benefits of working with an academic partner have been enormous, not least a legacy of theoretical and pedagogical insight which is rarely afforded by the routine of day-to-day delivery.

To find out more

The Creative Spaces research report is available at www.renaissancenw.org

Information about **Every Child Matters – Green Paper (DfES 2003)** and **Youth Matters – Green Paper (DfES 2005)** is available at www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

Information about **Ofsted** (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) visit: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Peter Clark and Alison Moss have written two books about the Mosaic Approach:
Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach (London, National Children's Bureau, 2001)
Spaces to Play: More Listening to Young Children Using the Mosaic Approach (London, National Children's Bureau, 2005)

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Museums for changing lives

Renaissance is the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's (MLA) national £300 million programme to transform England's regional museums. For the first time ever, investment from central government is helping regional museums across the country to raise their standards and deliver real results in support of education, learning, community development and economic regeneration. Renaissance is helping museums to meet people's changing needs and to change people's lives.

CapeUK

CapeUK is an incubator for the development of ideas and practice in creativity and learning. A research and development agency, our focus is children and young people and those organisations and individuals who work with them. We are both a research and a practical organisation – our approaches are firmly rooted in experience.

We try out ideas
We make meaning
We support change processes
We influence policy and strategy

For more information and further copies of this booklet, please contact the Renaissance North West team on

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