



# First Steps

Providing for the  
Early Years in museums



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## Foreword

Over the past decade, there has been much discussion around the provision for Early Years children in museums. Although many educators and others in the profession have been keen to provide quality opportunities for engagement for this group, some reservations about the nature, efficacy and value of such provision have often been (quietly) expressed. An increasing pressure to establish clear, quantifiable learning outcomes for all educational activities concerns most of those working in museums, and, for a variety of reasons, assessing the impact of educational work with Under fives in museums has not always been easy. In addition to this, museum educators may have felt uncertainly about whether or not they had the appropriate skills for working with Early Years children. Further, some of us lacked confidence in knowing how to structure activities that were solidly rooted in the museum as opposed to those that could be done – as well or better – in another type of institution. This is not to belittle or disregard the innovative and exciting work now being done in museums all across the country – only to honestly admit that as a collective, museum educators were looking for a piece of research that pulled together current thinking, elucidated best practice, illuminated the benefits of museum visits for Under fives and opened a structured dialogue about ways to improve this area of our learning activities.

Jo Graham's excellent report eloquently convinces us that high-quality work for Early Years children is being done in museums now – but that we can do more and better. She provides a context for the importance of this work and reminds us that sensory learning and the development of a wide range of skills at this stage of life underpins all later learning. As all museum visiting is about the subtle, and often intangible, interweaving of learning and enjoyment and also curiosity and imagination, it does indeed seem that the promotion of active learning in museums should, and can, be successfully extended to Early Years. Jo gives clear practical guidance on how museums can do this, at their own pace, working within their own particular restrictions and/or limited resources, in ways which suit their collections, ethos and setting. I am sure that this inspirational advice, so cleverly underpinned with sensible and realistic ideas about improving delivery, will be welcomed by educators working in museums of all shapes and sizes, and I very much look forward to hearing about the ways in which colleagues put some of the ideas in this report into practice.

Let's turn all our little people into visual, inquisitive museums goers now!

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## Using this handbook

This publication aims to offer insight into what makes good quality provision for Early Years children in museums. Based on an evaluation of the provision of London Hub museums in 2007, this book uses examples from Hub partners to bring principles to life. Each section contains a raft of practical ideas for ways to increase your own understanding of early learning and to develop your museum's provision.

The evaluation of London Hub provision for children under five used a quality indicator framework drawn from the descriptions of effective practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The EYFS is the new curriculum and care guidance for everyone working with children under five that becomes statutory in September 2008. This handbook follows that framework, using the four themes of the EYFS as headings and summarising the characteristics of effective practice in the guidance as they relate to museums.

Using the EYFS as a base not only ensures that museums are getting sound advice on effective practice, but that readers will be able to speak the same language as the practitioners we hope will become your partners.



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## Early Years children in museums

Whether you define the Early Years as children under five in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage or as children under eight as the National Children's Bureau do, there is no doubt young children are an increasingly important audience for museums. In 2007–08, London Hub museums welcomed over 7000 children under five. Although not typical, the Horniman Museum illustrates what can be achieved, welcoming around 100 families each week to their Friday morning storytelling sessions for pre-schoolers.

### So who are these young children and what do they need from museums?

The Early Years covers a wide range of developmental stages and children's needs vary accordingly. Children in the Early Years are 'extreme visitors'. They have many physical and sensory needs. Their communication and social skills are still developing and their prior knowledge and experience is limited in comparison to adults, making it challenging for museums to provide learning experiences at the right level. In addition, they like to learn through play and active exploration: a style of learning that may seem in contradiction to the predominantly visual experience many museums and galleries have traditionally offered.

Young children are curious learners. They are consummate learners. Learning patterns established in the Early Years can have profound impact on our later lives. Supported by their first educators: their parents and carers, young children develop the skills that will be the foundation of all their later learning. Recent research in the EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) project has shown that home environment is the key factor in shaping children's well-being and achievement. In this they found it was not who parents are, but what they do with children that has the most impact. Visiting museums, galleries and other interesting places was listed amongst a small number of activities that were all associated with higher intellectual and social/behavioural scores.

Museums have the potential to spark off new thoughts and ideas, new words and conversations, new interests and fascinations. Our buildings can be places of awe and wonder, whilst collections can intrigue or help build a sense of belonging. To help parents, carers, practitioners and teachers to support young children learning in museums we need to provide:

- good facilities
- relevant information
- things to do



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### Good facilities

Ideally a museum should provide at least the following:

- toilets (or access to toilets nearby). Baby changing facilities should be provided: even just a mat and wipes would be helpful.
- somewhere to eat. Space to picnic is important. High chairs, bottle warmers and child-friendly food in a café is fantastic. However, clear rules about where families can eat and directions to a nearby café or park can also be helpful.
- physical access. Young walkers or parents with buggies need level access. If your museum cannot accommodate buggies, you will need a safe, dry place for people to leave them.
- a safe environment. Young children don't have an adult's perception of risks, so doors, sockets, stairs and any play resources need to be safe. Exits, especially to the outside, should be young child proof. Safeguarding policies and procedures should be in place.
- seats. Young legs get tired and sitting together on seats can give a group the chance for a change of pace in a visit.

### Relevant information

Museums should provide the following:

- orientation information. Young children are eager and active. It helps adults if they can quickly find out what a museum can offer. This is especially important at the entrance. Information should show what's on and help groups navigate their way around the building.
- information about displays. Most young children can't read or are emergent readers. Information should be for adults to read with children, for them to listen to together or in picture form. Consult young children to find out what kinds of things they'd like to know.

### Something to do

Museums should provide the following:

- visual access. So much of a museum experience is about seeing. Children need to see too.
- events. These should be as participatory as possible and keep sitting and listening to a minimum. Storytelling, make and take, try things on and sing-a-long sessions are all popular.
- play resources. These could be supervised or unsupervised but they need to be safe. They should relate to your collections but don't have to be specially made. There are pre-school catalogues with lots of interesting toys that could help children explore your collection and they are all CE marked for safety.



Early Years has risen up the political agenda in recent years. As part of the Every Child Matters agenda, in 2004 the government produced 'Choice for parents, the best start for children', the first 10-year national childcare strategy linking all aspects of young children's care and education. The Childcare Bill that brought the strategy into law has radically re-shaped the Early Years sector. It has shifted the emphasis onto Local Authorities to ensure childcare provision is available in their area and put duties on Authorities to reduce gaps in achievement between local children. It introduced many measures aimed at joining up what had previously been two separate areas: childcare and early learning. Drawing heavily from research carried out in the Effective Early Learning Project, the strategy created:

- Children's Centres: one-stop shops for pre-school provision, family support and advice.
- the Early Years Professional: a new role that attempts to raise the standard of qualification, especially in relation to early learning, in every Early Years setting.
- the Early Years Foundation Stage: a new curriculum that combines Birth To Three Matters with the Foundation Stage Framework.

The Early Years sector is changing, with an emphasis on raising the quality of provision as well as the amount of childcare and the outcomes for children. In September 2008, the Early Years Foundation Stage will come into use. Many Early Years settings are already using it to plan their provision. This means that museums need to understand the new framework and make sure they use the same language as Early Years practitioners.

This report uses the four themes of the EYFS to characterise high quality provision. These are:

- a unique child
- positive relationships
- enabling environments
- learning and development

In addition to focusing on services for children, the government has shown increased interest in family learning and parenting. Every Parent Matters highlighted the importance government puts on families and within that, the centrality of the Early Years.



*'Parents and the home environment they create are the single most important factor in shaping their children's well-being, achievements and prospects. . . . The EPPE study (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) showed that what parents do is more important than who parents are. Parents engaging in a range of activities with their child were all associated with higher intellectual and social/behavioural scores.'*

These activities included:

- reading with their child
- teaching songs and nursery rhymes
- painting and drawing
- playing with letters and numbers
- visiting the library, museums and other places
- creating regular opportunities to play with friends'

*Every Parent Matters (2007)*

From this it is clear that it is important for museums to support parents as children's first educators.

Since government changes in summer 2007, the emphasis on parenting has been made yet more evident. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has been re-named the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families). This is not just a cosmetic change, as reflected in the first major plan to emerge from the new department. The Children's Plan: building brighter futures (December 2007) brings together the myriad of initiatives relating to children and young people since Every Child Matters and weaves them into a set of measures to run to 2020.

The Plan is wide ranging, touching on everything from play parks and road safety to targets for qualifications achieved by age 19. It covers health, safety, childcare, education, special needs, parenting and the big issues of achievement, social exclusion and child poverty.

Whilst not solely concerned with Early Years, the Plan has some implications for museums catering for young children. Some issues in the Plan may provide key areas for demonstrating competence and advocating sector contribution. For Early Years these might be:

- parenting: the principle that parents should be supported to parent and to act as first educators.
- enjoyment: children have the right to enjoy their childhood as well as to achieve.
- outreach: the most needy families are still not accessing services.
- play: the plan commits the government to publishing a play strategy by Summer 2008.
- safeguarding: a new nuance that maintains safeguarding in terms of abuse or neglect but widens the term to include accidents and the notion of 'healthy' risks.



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# Developing high quality provision



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## Catering for unique children

The Early Years Foundation Stage says: 'Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.'

### For museums, effective practice based on this principle

- understands the processes involved in babies' and children's growth, development and learning.
- supports babies and children to develop a positive sense of their own identity and culture and a positive self-image.
- encourages babies' and children's communications, both non-verbal and verbal.
- acknowledges the different ways in which babies and children learn, and that learning is a process that cannot be rushed.
- recognises that babies' and children's attitudes and dispositions to learning are influenced by feedback from others.
- encourages children to recognise their own unique qualities and the characteristics they share with other children.
- actively promotes equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice.
- checks whether there is a need for any special services and equipment for children who may require additional support.
- supports children to make friends.
- allows babies and children to do the things they can, helps them with the things they cannot quite manage and does things for them they cannot do for themselves.
- gives children clear and consistent boundaries and is reasonable with expectations about behaviour.
- listens when children voice their anxieties and always follows up any concerns.
- provides opportunities to explore, play and learn in a safe and secure environment.
- recognises signs of child abuse and neglect and knows who to consult if there is a cause for concern.



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## High quality provision is at the right time

Children under five have different daily patterns to school-aged children. When children join Reception class it is not uncommon for them to fall asleep in story time at the end of a day. Children may be in pre-school settings for half a day or a whole day. Whether in a setting or at home, many

children under three will have a nap at some point in the day. The 'right time' of the day for museum sessions to be offered may vary between children and between families, who could be juggling older siblings at school or parental work commitments. Getting it right is important for accessibility.

### London Hub examples

The Horniman Museum runs three storytelling sessions on a Friday morning. The first is at 10.40. It regularly attracts over 50 family adults, bringing at least one child each. The second session is at 11.25 and the third at 12.10. Progressively fewer families use these two sessions and by the third children are eating and showing signs of tiredness during the session.

The Museum in Docklands piloted a new session for babies on Mondays at 1.00 and a storytelling session on Thursdays at 2.00.

Each has attracted low numbers. One of the parents explained that the time was perfect for her son, but most of her friends' babies were asleep at that time.

The Geffrye Museum offers activities for children 3+ (with other activities for 5+) during school holidays and on Saturday mornings four times per year. The sessions begin at 10.30. They are fully subscribed in holidays and well attended on Saturdays.

### Suggestions

#### Improve your understanding

- talk with, or visit, a local nursery or Children's Centre and look specifically at their daily routine. See for yourself how children need to expend energy and then rest and what effect having a break for a snack can have.



© London Transport Museum

#### Planning provision

- try a weekday mid-morning session for pre-school children. Fridays often seem popular. Check that your timing doesn't clash with other local provision, e.g. music sessions at the local Children's Centre.
- offer to host an already successful session for a nearby Children's Centre or other provider, perhaps one working with difficult to reach families. For example, invite them to hold their Jolly Babies song sessions at your museum once a month. Remember many families won't want to travel far.
- team up with partners to provide outreach to sessions parents with pre-schoolers go to that can be quite dreary, for example approach Health Centres who are running baby clinics or immunisation sessions.
- advertise any afternoon events at local nurseries that run separate morning and afternoon sessions. Make sure you leave time for lunch and travel before your afternoon event starts, but bear in mind end of school times for older siblings that may need collecting.
- organise a toddler and parent day once a month with activities for under threes and lots of things to play and do dotted around your museum. Don't forget to include any outdoor spaces.

## High quality provision is the right length

A common misconception is that young children have very short concentration spans. In fact children can concentrate for sustained lengths of time, if they are motivated to do so. This concentration is likely however to be given to a group of activities, rather than just one. Children need to be physically engaged

in the activities, not expected to sit still. They need freedom to move between the set of activities they are doing. As they get older, they are able to spend longer on one activity. The more open-ended and varied the activity is, the longer they will stay with it.

### London Hub examples

An under-fives craft session at the Geffrye Museum lasts one hour 15 mins. In that time children handled snow globes from the handling collection, drew round their hands, cut them out, decorated them with shiny materials, created a reindeer headband, helped colour a large scale backdrop with chalks, posed for their photo, cut round and stuck photos on to a backing. Children from 22 months to five years were fully engaged for the time it took them to complete the activities, which varied between individuals.

Storytelling sessions at the Horniman Museum and the Museum in Docklands last 30 minutes. They include at least one, possibly two stories and a number of action rhymes and songs.



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### Suggestions

#### Improve your understanding

- visit a local Children's Centre and look at the wide variety of play opportunities children are given every day.

#### Planning provision

- provide toys and activities for families and groups to use independently in gallery spaces. They can then spend as long or short a time as they like to suit their children's interests.
- if you are running a facilitated session, keep led activities short and snappy. Mix them in with chances to play with objects or toys or to interact with others.
- choose spaces for sessions that enable children to wander about safely without distracting others.
- keep sitting still to a minimum and provide things to hold or 'play with' for any longer periods, e.g. give everyone a cuddly toy or puppet to hold for part of a storytelling session.

- treat all sessions for children under five as 'drop in' even if they have a formal start and end time. Welcome people as they arrive and make it easy for them to join in with the next action rhyme, song or game. Make sure resources for activities are accessible to family adults so they can help their child to join in at their own pace and make it easy for families to leave if children have finished before the end time. Provide associated toys or extra activities for children who are quicker than others in their group or younger siblings to enable all to stay in the activity together.
- combine short 'events' such as storytelling with picture trails, treasure hunts or explorer activities so that families feel it is worth making the effort to come to the event.

High quality provision expects the right level of understanding

Children under five need the right level of challenge and familiarity or they become frustrated. This will, of course, vary depending on their age and developmental stage. A level of understanding of child development is therefore necessary for anyone creating provision for this age group.

Young children are very literal. They deal in concrete rather than abstract ideas, basing their understanding on previous encounters. For this reason, concrete themes work best. These connect with children's existing knowledge, challenging them to think again about what they already know and to weave in new knowledge or perspectives gained. Whilst their abstract thinking can

be developed through imaginary play, their information processing and reasoning is best developed through first hand experiences.

Young children need time to develop their understanding. They need to revisit new ideas from different perspectives. Their first choice for exploring new ideas is always hands on experience. There is only so much 'just looking' or 'just listening' that young children can take. Once actively engaged in exploring however, young children can show surprisingly high levels of concentration and are often keen to return to the same game or activity a number of times to really cement their learning.

London Hub examples

The Early Years Officer at the Museum in Docklands has produced a set of guidelines for staff leading the storytelling sessions. It gives a clear view of what to expect from children of different ages and highlights how active a story session needs to be.

The storyteller at the Horniman Museum is very experienced. One story chosen was familiar, the other new. Both offered repeated refrains and actions. Songs chosen were

mainly familiar. The structure of the session was familiar week on week, with a 'goodbye' song to signal the end.

A Reception child looking at a model of a Roman building made his own sense of what he could see, drawing on things he already knew. He commented on 'a swimming pool' and triangular structures. He then called out to his friend that he had spotted a secret door.

Suggestions

- Improve your understanding**
- watch some TV shows aimed at young children. They are usually well researched and matched to their audience's understanding level.
  - observe young children responding to a particular object, art work or display. Note down what they say and do and their approximate age. This will work best if the objects can be handled.
  - look at the development matters section of the EYFS when planning a session. For example look at how Exploring Media and Materials as part of Creative Development develops as children grow. Try to offer something for each developmental stage.

- Planning provision**
- make sure any sessions you provide have familiar elements to them as well as new things to explore.
  - try to provide objects or replicas that children can touch, handle and use. The more open-ended you make activities, the easier they can join in whatever developmental stage they are at.
  - choose concrete themes for any sessions or resources. Break big abstract themes like transport down into more manageable chunks: like looking at cars or trains or even wheels.
  - focus on helping children to explore using all their senses, to talk about their ideas and to represent their thinking, for example through singing, dancing or drawing. Singing can also help when you want to give instructions and provides a good way of repeating instructions without seeming didactic.

High quality provision expects the right level of skill

Children's physical skills develop at different rates. High quality provision recognises this and provides a range of resources and activities that are built on a realistic expectation of the possible skill levels. Expecting too low a skill level can lead to tasks that are too simple, that children tire of quickly. Where the level of physical challenge is too great however, children can become frustrated and disengaged.

The Early Years Foundation Stage gives a good guide to what to expect at various

stages. It also provides a guide to the communication skills one could expect. The Development Matters charts show the importance of non-verbal communication, even as children master words and sentences. They highlight the importance of speaking and listening with children, both for children's communication skills and their thinking skills. The charts confirm that children are communicating from birth, underlining the importance of opportunities for children to communicate as part of any provision.

London Hub examples

The Foundation Stage puppet session at the Horniman Museum provided a range of puppets including finger puppets, glove puppets, string puppets and rod puppets. This enabled children to use some of the simpler ones for themselves and to seek adult help in using the more complicated versions. The Reception children observed found string and rod puppets difficult and some children did get frustrated as a result.

The craft session at the Geffrye Museum included a wide range of skill levels for example drawing round hands, colouring, cutting and sticking. With some very simple

tasks and some more complicated, children from 22 months to five years were able to participate. The more dexterous aspects gave accompanying adults legitimate things to do, whilst children had plenty of things they could do independently. This worked particularly well because the physically simpler tasks were the more creative, keeping ownership of the finished product with the children.

Both sessions combined 'led' parts with 'independent activity' where children could talk to each other as they worked.

Suggestions

- Improve your understanding**
- ask someone with lots of Early Years experience to review your provision looking at the level of skills each activity assumes.
  - watch the Early Years Observations of children on the ICAN DVD: 'Learning to talk, talking to learn' and then watch them again with the narration. These excellent clips give lots of insight into communication skill levels at various ages.
- Planning provision**
- check you're offering the right furnishings for the ages for which you're catering. Small babies need to lie down, be strapped into chairs or be 'propped' on cushions. Avoid stools with toddlers who are still gaining balance and tend to move around a lot.
  - choose materials to be as inclusive as possible. Whilst children from four or so can often manage suitably sized scissors,

- even very young children can tear paper if it is thin enough.
- choose toys that are safe for even babies to hold so that everyone can join in at their own level. Providing toys and props of different sizes can encourage siblings or family adults to take part in games as well as catering for a wider age range.
- keep activity sheets for older children. With children under five try to provide physical or sensory experiences.
- if you do want to provide a trail give children something physical to match up. This could be postcards of paintings, single colour fabrics to hunt for the same colour or photos of objects, parts of objects or bits of your building.
- consider focusing on a skill rather than a concept for a session or an activity. For example a trail could be a 'looking really closely' trail or a play session could be all about sorting, looking for similarities and differences.



High quality provision is inclusive

It is just as important to be inclusive with young children as it is with any group. Children have the right to be treated equally regardless of their ethnic, cultural or social background, their gender or abilities. A sense of belonging is important for young children. It provides the security needed before learning can take place.

Alongside equal treatment, young children need diversity to be reflected in the resources on offer to them to ensure they connect with them. Being able to create something that

reflects their own personality or culture can also be affirming and motivational.

Since young children tend to have limited experiences it is especially important to ensure that services and resources for them reflect a wide range of people and communities. The Early Years are a key time when we build a picture of what we consider 'normal'. The broader range of people we meet, the more able to understand and celebrate difference we are likely to become.

London Hub examples

In the welcome circle time in a project session at the Museum of London, children were encouraged to tell their names to the bird puppet as it flew round the ring. This enabled names to be correctly pronounced and gave even those with little English something they could say.

The pool of community artists who lead sessions at the Geffrye Museum is culturally diverse, reflecting the local community the Museum serves. This enables sessions to

provide positive role models and ensures cultural connections can be made.

The craft session at the Geffrye created both a reindeer headaddress that children could wear and a photo of themselves to put inside their snow globes. The excitement as children watched their own image appear on the Polaroid and then saw themselves again in the snow globe ensured children really connected to the end product.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- read Jennie Lindon's article on *Cultural Diversity in the Early Years* on the Community Playthings website (referenced on the useful resources page at the end of this book).

Planning provision

- make sure you provide some support for families visiting your museum independently as well as those taking part in organised sessions and events. Some non-traditional museum visitors don't feel comfortable in workshops, no matter how informal they are.
- bring references to other cultures into the content of any Early Years interpretation. It is a good idea to use simple, concrete and quite detailed themes for children. If for example your theme is food try looking at cutlery and crockery. As well as being more developmentally appropriate, these concrete themes offer more opportunities for cross-cultural references and for

- open-ended creative activities, drawing on children's own experiences.
- look for opportunities to use story times to provide positive images of a range of people. If the books that relate to your collections don't offer enough diversity, you could always add puppets.
- Early Years settings are a good way to get in touch with a broader range of families than currently often visit museums. Why not work with a local nursery or Reception Class to design a poster advertising your museum on their notice board?
- consider offering a 'Dads and little ones' session with the sort of topic that might appeal more to fathers. Whilst not all dads enjoy the same thing, construction toys often have a broad appeal and can be used by children from babies onwards in a variety of ways.

High quality provision is accessible

Since the physical size and capabilities of children from birth to five vary enormously, physical accessibility needs consideration. Very young children will be in buggies or prams. By four or five some children may be wheelchair users. Whilst children may be walking by 12 months, most will still use a buggy on a day out until they are two or three years old. Accommodating buggies is often a difficult issue but one that has to be addressed for this age group.

Whilst dedicated provision must be physically accessible, ideally, so should museum displays. Children under five are short and may not be able to see into many traditional display cases. Whilst being picked up by parents and carers to see specific objects can provide a cuddly sharing moment, this needs to be the exception rather than the rule.

London Hub examples

Storytelling at the Horniman takes place in the African Worlds gallery. There is enough room for restless toddlers to move about but family adults can keep a clear view of where they are. When instruments are handed out, there is enough for everyone, even when very large numbers of children attend.

After the storytelling many families went to the Aquarium where most of the tanks are either floor standing or very low. A baby in a pram was able to be positioned to watch the fish as they swam past.

In the craft session at the Geffrye Museum, materials were put on the table in front of children, within easy reach. Further resources were set out on the table behind where family adults and children could go and help themselves.

The *Platform Promenade* workshop at London Transport Museum includes sitting inside two tube train carriages. Level access means that children in buggies or wheelchairs can also take part.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- explore your museum on your knees or crouched down at the height of a three-year-old. What can they really see?

Planning provision

- use the lower parts of display cases to house objects that might engage young children. These may not always be the things you would predict so test out your ideas first.
- add 'masking' or screening to the lower parts of displays to draw children's attention and encourage them to 'peep through', for example at Stoke Potteries Museum a duck's nest can be viewed through a hole cut in some reeds.

- add hands on experiences near relevant displays, for example add different designs of chair to try out next to a display of historical chairs.
- make sure children can reach displays, activity surfaces etc, or provide alternative lower surfaces. Comfortable communal seating is great for families and the floor can be useful, although some adults may not be able to sit on the floor, even with beanbags or cushions.
- if a space is wheelchair accessible it is often good for buggies too. However often children like to get out of buggies to explore. Try to find a space near any dedicated provision where buggies could be left. If you have a cloakroom, try to accommodate a reasonable number of buggies.



High quality provision is safe

Safety is extremely important for babies and children under three as they have little sense of danger and are not fully physically coordinated. Environments and resources need to be safe enough to allow curious young children to explore. As the Foundation Stage guidance states however, children don't live in a risk-free world and being over-protective is not good for them. A balance of sensible risk assessment

alongside clear rules and boundaries is required. The Early Years Foundation Stage makes it clear that part of keeping safe is being responsible. Children need to learn about making choices and the cause and effect of their own behaviour. Good quality provision emphasises consideration and sensible choices, without dictating children's behaviour.

London Hub examples

The storyteller at the Horniman Museum did not insist that children sit down and left control of children's behaviour to parents and carers. At one point she stopped a child climbing onto her chair (for safety reasons) but didn't stop singing as she did so. The Toddler Group at the Museum in Docklands uses the interactive gallery *Mudlarks* as a base. This has a soft play area in one corner which is ideal for letting children from as young as six months join in the session. In the session observed a six-month-old girl sat on the cushioned floor and was given instruments and other

portable toys. When the Baby Group uses the space extra rugs are put on a carpeted area and baby books and toys are added to make it a cosy corner. Staff at the Museum of London turn a basic classroom into a welcoming and safe space for the Toddler Group. Chairs are left round the side of the room for adults, although positioned near to activities to encourage joining in. Mats, rugs and cushions are put out with a range of different toys and a story and song space is created in a corner with a carpet.

Suggestions

- Improve your understanding**
- ask an experienced Early Years professional to help you risk assess your spaces. Doors are especially important. Can young children get out unnoticed? Are there finger traps? Could they be knocked over by an opening door?
  - make sure you are familiar with the MLA Safeguarding Guidelines that provide advice on all aspects of child protection.

- Planning provision**
- place dedicated provision for young children in spaces that provide good sightlines for parents and carers, whilst avoiding large open spaces that may encourage running and boisterous play.
  - provide cushioned mats where very young children are playing if the floor surfaces are hard. Babies and toddlers can over balance and hard flooring can cause injury.

- provide a safe space for babies where largely stationary little ones can be laid or propped up, have a break from their buggy or sling and have a different view of the space or join in an activity.
- make rules clear and intuitive. If something is very precious and fragile make it very difficult for young children to be able to touch it. Add hand print signs to things that can be touched and played with. Try to keep rules positive for example 'Please eat snacks and picnics on the benches provided' rather than 'No eating'.

Building positive relationships

The Early Years Foundation Stage says: 'Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.'

- For museums, effective practice based on this principle**
- listens to parents' ideas and needs.
  - offers different levels of interpretation built on varying degrees of sociability: not everyone one wants to join in a large group.
  - provides opportunities for children to play alongside each other and cooperatively, as well as independently.
  - respects and seeks advice from professionals when catering for children with additional needs.
  - acknowledges, and caters for where possible, languages other than English, especially in greetings.

- uses names where appropriate and is always friendly and welcoming.
- encourages learning and motivates children through accentuating the positive, praising effort and celebrating success.
- listens to what children have to say and takes their views seriously.
- maximises the chance of success for children by pitching activities at just the right level.
- emphasises museums as places where learning happens and staff as learners, as well as families and children.
- understands the importance of a key person, especially for younger children.



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High quality provision includes parents, carers, practitioners and teachers

The adults that accompany children to museums know those children. They may know what motivates them or any specific needs they have. They will be with the children as they visit the museum displays, able to listen to what interests children and provide help in interpreting the collections. They are also in a position to build on any interest sparked or skills developed during a visit.

Unlike Early Years settings, museums frequently have the opportunity to include parents and carers as an integral part of the learning experience on offer to young children. Whilst children need some room in activities to be independent, or to play with friends, a familiar adult can be a very powerful learning partner.

London Hub examples

The Foundation Stage puppets session in the Horniman was structured so that children worked in small groups with their group leader. They explored each set of puppets in turn. The adults demonstrated each type of puppet or made up a snippet of dialogue and helped children if they had any difficulties in moving their puppets.

Storytelling and song sessions at the Museum in Docklands and the Horniman Museum included parents and carers as singers and participants. Action songs that required two people ensured that all adults joined in, whilst songs with opportunities for cuddles and tickles enabled family bonding.

At the Toddler Group at the Museum in Docklands, most of the time was spent with family adults playing with children or observing them, rather than in 'organised activities' such as singing. A natural mix emerged of children playing together with adults, children playing independently and children playing alongside other children.

In the craft session at the Geffrye Museum, children could tackle most of the craft activity themselves, but younger children needed adult help in drawing round hands and cutting them out.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- find out how an experienced Nursery Manager or teacher uses adult helpers to lead group work in their classroom or setting.
- watch Michelle's story on the DVD *Celebrating Young Children and Those Who Live and Work With Them* from the DCSF.

Planning provision

- build in natural opportunities for parents, carers and teachers to join in with any led sessions you offer. Songs like 'Row, row, row your boat' or 'Round and round the garden' that require partners to make the actions work are a good idea.
- think about adults' roles in craft activities. Whilst it is important that children can do most of an activity themselves, a small

- part which requires adult help can involve and engage family adults in a natural way.
- create some activities that have an obvious adult role, like a board game or a trail. Try to structure these so that they are adult facilitated and not adult dominated, for example create a trail in which some things that children have to find are their own choice.
- support group leaders in any Early Years group visit. Structure activities so that they work in small groups with the group leader helping children to engage. Keep leading from the front to a minimum.
- provide group leader sheets that will support adult helpers as they take children round your museum. Encourage them to listen to children's ideas. Encourage teachers to brief adult helpers and to find a way for them to feed back their group's ideas and comments after a visit.

High quality provision supports parents and carers as first educators

'When professionals talk about working with parents, they usually mean, 'How can we get parents to help us?', by reading with their children at home or promoting healthy lifestyles. Professionals would have more success if they recognised parents as the most important agent in a child's life and saw their role as supporting parents. Parents, not health professionals, carry the primary responsibility for child health; parents, not teachers, are a child's most important educator.' (Empowering Parents 2001)

The Foundation Stage guidance calls for Early Years settings to treat parents as partners and Every Parent Matters (March 2007) lays great emphasis on the importance of parenting to early learning. For museums, this means that parents and family adults are the people who will help their children interpret the collections, who will mediate the visit and keep it alive in children's memories. To support children's learning in museums we need to put some effort into supporting parents to interpret our displays.

London Hub examples

One of the mothers at the Toddler Group at the Museum in Docklands was new to the group. Whilst made to feel comfortable and welcome by the Explainer, she was given space to play on her own with her child until she felt confident to meet other parents and carers.

*All Aboard* play equipment at the London Transport Museum is placed directly by the picnic area, making it easy for parents to stay

in touch with their children as they play. Play vehicles are large enough to accommodate adults playing with their children.

The craft session at the Geffrye Museum included a photo opportunity. Children wearing their reindeer headdresses had their photos taken to go inside the snow globe. This provided families with a take away memento they would be likely to keep and that would act as a talking point in future.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- choose a popular gallery and find out from families what parts of your collections young children are interested in and what kinds of things they want to know, so you can consider providing some of these facts.
- observe families with young children using a museum trail. Who is doing most of the talking and who is initiating the activity? How equal is the engagement?
- watch the TV clip *Early Years – From Reggio Emilia to the West Midlands* from Teachers TV, especially the five minute section on family learning in the nursery setting.

Planning provision

- provide the right environment for families to interpret your collections themselves. Think about adding some comfortable seating to share in front of objects or paintings likely to appeal to younger visitors. Adding related story books at that point signals a welcome to families as well as providing something to do together.

- provide support materials to encourage families to play and talk together about the collections. This might be drawing equipment, puppets to take round for the visit or a song and rhymes CD to listen and sing along to at certain points.
- provide explorer trails for families to follow up themes of sessions, for example 'Wear your mask and scare these museum monsters' following a monster mask making activity where all family members make their own mask or 'Find one thing for each colour of the rainbow' following a stained glass activity.
- provide resources and activity ideas for parents and children to do together on the way home or when they get there, for example provide a play dough recipe following on from an activity using home made play dough at the museum.
- provide photo opportunities around your museum and in activities, for example making things to wear, playing dressing up, something interesting to stand next to or peep through.



High quality provision offers opportunities for building friendships

Friendship is important for young children. They are just beginning to develop their own identity and recognise those of other children. They start to make friends and choose people they like to play with. Friendships give children emotional support and sometimes practical help. Good provision for young children recognises the social dynamics around friendship and understands the social aspect of their learning. For very young

children this may be in providing enough resources to enable them to play happily alongside each other, whilst older children may be able to join in group games and play cooperatively. In museums there is the additional aspect of parents socialising. Many parents and carers bringing children to early years or family provision are doing so partly for a chance to get out and meet people for themselves.

London Hub examples

At the craft session in the Geffrye Museum, two families brought their four-year-old girls. Throughout the session, combinations of the parents and younger siblings from the two families took part in supporting the girls making their snow globes. Both girls talked together and to any of the adults about their choice of materials, their cutting skills and so on. At the end of the session both put on their antlers and ‘pranced’ around the room. Two mums, who brought their babies to the Baby Group at the Museum in Docklands,

always go out together on a Monday. They clearly liked their babies to interact, but were also spending time together as friends. They meet with friends regularly on Wednesdays to go to *Mudlarks* and the café. Not all the families arrived on time for the start of the Museum of London Toddler Group. The group leader waited until all the families were there before beginning the welcome session, so that everyone would be able to welcome each other and learn everyone’s names.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- read the *Planning and Resourcing* section relating to *Personal, Social and Emotional Development* on the EYFS website. Focus especially on *Making Relationships* for ideas on helping build friendships.
- watch the video *Greeting a friend* on the *Positive Relationships: Respecting Each Other* page of the EYFS website.

Planning provision

- provide things for young children to do in social areas such as a café, where parents or carers might meet each other.
- provide comfortable social seating in parts of your museum where children may be able to safely explore whilst parents catch up with friends.
- offer friendly trails designed for two friends to do together, e.g. a pair of hand puppets

- to take round, two magnifying glasses to hold or two different hats to wear.
- where sessions have a reasonable number of participants, begin with a welcome song or rhyme in which everyone can say their name.
- provide social seating which enables friends to take part in led sessions together. Floor rugs and cushions are often good, although some higher seating nearby will be needed for adults unable to sit on the floor.
- include songs, action rhymes, joining in stories or participatory games like parachute games, so that children can all feel part of the activity.
- build lots of chances for friends to learn together into Early Years sessions. Avoid the temptation to treat Reception children too formally. Use small group work or even ‘talking pairs’.

High quality provision establishes a two-way dialogue

Being partners with parents means opening up a two-way conversation and involving them in decision making. This kind of good practice is reflected in Inspiring Learning For All where the value of partnership is emphasised and good practice is seen to include sharing ownership of services with audiences.

As always in service development, user views should inform decision making, not dictate decisions. A two-way dialogue enables museums to explain their provision just as much as it enables them to listen to parents, carers and practitioners expressing their needs and interests.

London Hub examples

The Geffrye Museum has always collected feedback from its events and uses it to inform planning. Most recently, family adults have advised that the stools provided were not ideal for younger children and the team now plan to change these. The Hub has created a generic feedback form for all under-five events and has commissioned an evaluation based on them. The data gathered is of use for Hub wide planning but also for feedback to specific services. Regular provision with limited numbers such as toddler groups at the Museum in

Docklands and Museum of London enable the session leaders to get to know families. They encourage informal feedback. At the Museum of London in particular, family adults have been told that the group is a pilot and each week they feed back on the activities on offer. The Horniman Museum Learning Team felt that the way to cater for younger children was to be flexible in adapting sessions created for older children. Consulting teachers ahead of sessions enables staff to tailor workshops more accurately for Foundation Stage groups.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- make sure the aims of your provision are really clear both in terms of user outcomes and organisational outcomes. This will make evaluating much easier.
- take time to observe children’s learning, even if someone else is delivering a session for you. The *Look, listen and note* section of the EYFS gives details of what to look for at each developmental stage and in each aspect of each area of learning.
- contact a local school or Children’s Centre that has been successful in engaging parents in children’s learning. Work with them to audit and develop your provision.

Planning provision

- choose a month when you could evaluate your typical provision so that it will provide enough reliable feedback for you without intruding.

- have a suggestions box at events for families with young children and make sure staff encourage its use.
- establish a relationship with a local Children’s Centre so that you have a critical friend to give feedback on any new provision. You could even set up an Early Years Panel or network if enough settings were interested.
- work with your local Childminder Network Coordinator to create and try out new provision. Working with a group of childminders in this way is likely to give you access to a wide range of ages of children.
- provide information for parents, carers and teachers to explain your provision. For example if you make changes to interpretation, create a leaflet or ‘before and after’ panel to explain your thinking, what prompted the change, any consultation and how they can comment.

Providing an enabling environment

The Early Years Foundation Stage says: 'The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.'

For museums, effective practice based on this principle

- seizes on all learning opportunities, even those that weren't originally planned.
- includes opportunities for those planning (and delivering) sessions and other provision to observe young children as they learn and to feedback observations into the development cycle.
- documents children's learning journeys and shares those with children, parents, carers, practitioners and teachers, especially where regular sessions take place.
- provides for developmentally appropriate activities that stimulate and follow children's interests.
- uses the experiences children bring from home and their settings as starting points for new experiences.
- has a clear idea of the learning journeys that could take place for a wide variety of children as they experience the museum or its sessions.
- involves people from a wide range of communities and backgrounds.
- gives children control over the environment wherever possible, especially in regular sessions.
- uses outdoor spaces as well as indoor where possible, making links between them.
- provides points of familiarity as well as intriguing novelty.
- gives unambiguous messages about what behaviour is expected.
- recognises that children's behaviour is determined by their age and stage of development.
- structures the environment so that children and accompanying adults intuitively know how to use it.
- provides pre-visit information so that everyone knows what to expect, especially parent helpers supporting group visits.
- provides information or resources to enable children to tell everyone involved in their learning about their visit.
- shares information about approaches and practice with practitioners and professionals from a range of Early Years settings and support services.
- makes the most of children being out of their regular setting.
- enriches the learning environment in the setting by supporting practitioner-led work and taking museum staff and resources into Early Years settings.



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High quality provision uses indoor and outdoor spaces

The Effective Early Learning Project highlighted the importance of both indoor and outdoor environments for stimulating children and providing first hand experiences. Museums are in a good position to provide exciting indoor environments. Their buildings are often unusual spaces for children and their collections can create a sense of 'Aladdin's Cave'.

The Horniman and Geffrye Museums have wonderful outdoor spaces, with obvious appeal and potential for young children.

The other three hub museums have interesting locations which, whilst not necessarily their own spaces, offer the possibility of connection. Museums do not need extensive parklands to connect to the outdoors. Parts of the living natural environment can be brought inside and natural history collections can offer close up encounters with things children would not usually see, such as nocturnal animals or sea creatures. The urban environment also offers learning potential, which museums can exploit and connect to collections.

London Hub examples

In summer months both the Geffrye and Horniman Museums base some of their events in the outdoor spaces, looking at plants and herbs, mini-beasts or animals.

The *Platform Promenade* session at London Transport Museum takes children on a tour of vehicles that they can either go inside or get very close to. After the workshop groups

can play in *All Aboard* whilst small splinter groups explore more of the vehicles with adult helpers.

The *Hands-On Base* at the Horniman Museum is a highly stimulating environment for sessions for young children. Many of the objects are out to be touched, or can be made easily available.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- watch *Adam's story* from a nursery in the North East on the DVD *Celebrating Young Children and Those Who Live and Work With Them* from the DCSF.
- read the report of a project in Manchester Museum *Imagine their shadows*, in which children explored the Museum building as a new environment.
- watch the Basic Skills Agency DVD *Communication Friendly Spaces* which provides a toolkit for creating spaces in which young children feel encouraged to communicate.

Planning provision

- use outdoor natural spaces for led activities such as planting, treasure hunts and story building sessions.
- provide support for families to learn independently in natural spaces, such as matching games and explorer packs.
- provide resources to encourage learning from the built environment close to the museum, following on from collections or activity themes, for example children might explore doors in the museum and then spot doors on the walk to the nearest station.
- include natural objects for handling as part of led sessions or in activities such as treasure baskets, especially for babies.
- if using an education space away from galleries, transform the space to make it as interesting and different from a classroom as possible. Use mats and rugs, cushions and beanbags, fabric drapes, interesting lighting, music and even smells like coffee, spicy or fruity smells.



## High quality provision introduces intriguing ideas, spaces or objects and high quality resources

### London Hub examples

The Foundation Stage guidance is clear that settings need to provide high quality and well-maintained resources. Museums need to go further than this. The challenge for museums is to offer something substantially different from other settings children might encounter, as well as providing familiar resources that children know intuitively how to use. The natural advantages museums

have are their collections and unusual spaces, which is why it is important to ensure that children's museum experiences are as focused on these as possible.

Museums have the potential to intrigue family adults and practitioners as well as children. By doing so, they encourage genuine inter-generational learning that is likely to be highly motivational and long-lasting.

In the puppet session at the Horniman Museum, children and adult helpers got to explore a set of puppets completely unlike any they might have in their setting.

During a creative project at the Museum of London, children from a local Reception class handled Roman 'treasures' and then played a fishing game, finding treasures in the river. Later they discovered the same treasures in the Roman displays in the Museum and recognised them the following week.

The London play table in *All Aboard* at the London Transport Museum provides small world pretend play, something children

know how to operate. The inclusion of the London Eye, Tower Bridge and a cut away underground system encourages children to draw on their own London knowledge or prompts family adults to introduce new vocabulary. It also makes the small world different to other toys children may have or use.

The water exhibit in *Mudlarks* at the Museum in Docklands offers children the chance to play with water and gravel: a change from the more usual sand or water.

### Suggestions

#### Improve your understanding

- visit a number of local settings to build relationships and note the most common resources.
- look at the Reggio Emilia approach to pre-school education to get ideas for creative approaches and interesting uses of spaces, objects and materials. Sightlines is the UK group that champions this approach. Their journal is a useful resource.

#### Planning provision

- try to use gallery spaces for early years provision instead of, or as well as, education spaces. Make the most of interesting features of your museum building, including the sense of space it may have.
- plan to include objects in as many sessions as possible. When children encounter

objects in led sessions they often want to go and find more in the displays.

- are there objects in your collection that children could be allowed to touch, examine closely or listen to?
- provide intriguing facts that might interest younger children. You will probably need to try them out to test their appeal but many three- to five-year-olds are genuine 'collectors' of technical facts about such subjects as dinosaurs, minerals and fossils, ships, trains and cars and animals.
- include familiar kinds of toys and materials but try to give them an unusual twist, for example use a sand tray and sand toys with grain instead of sand.
- try to include more unusual materials in activities, for example mix homemade play dough with glitter or use large lengths of interesting fabrics in movement, story or role play activities.





## High quality provision starts with the experiences children bring

‘Learning is a continuous journey through which children build on all the things they have already experienced and come across new and interesting challenges.’ (Early Years Foundation Stage)

It is not always necessary to start with the totally familiar with young children. An unfamiliar object can be intriguing, as long as it has some point of reference for them. Successful learning experiences enable children to build their own ideas, actively

using new information, not just passively receiving it.

Skilful questioning or presenting by a workshop leader or familiar adult can provide children with the tools to build these ideas for themselves. Asking children, for example, what story a puppet might be from plants the idea that puppets can be used to ‘act out’ stories and gives children an idea of what to make their puppet say when they play with it.

before going on to making them. It traded on many familiar points of reference: reindeer, Rudolph, hand prints, dressing up and having photos taken, whilst providing novelty through children being in the snow globes themselves and the ‘magic’ of Polaroid pictures. ‘Look, I’m appearing.’ as one four-year-old put it.

### London Hub examples

Storytelling at the Horniman Museum and Museum in Docklands, plus the Toddler Groups at the Museum in Docklands and Museum of London, all used familiar stories, songs and rhymes, interspersed with a few less familiar ones.

The Geffrye craft session began with the concrete experience of handling snow globes,

### Suggestions

#### Improve your understanding

- watch some children’s TV. It is good at both reflecting their experiences and providing them.
- talk to your local children’s librarian and ask them to recommend some of the most popular story books for children under five.



© Geffrye Museum

#### Planning provision

- include as many open-ended activities as you can in your museum. Because these don’t have set answers, they enable children (and their accompanying adults) to draw on their own experiences.
- look for the chance to link to familiar characters, stories, songs or other common shared experiences within your displays.
- begin group sessions, especially Reception class activities, with some specific questions designed to find out children’s level of prior experience and understanding of the session topic. Be prepared to adjust the pitch of the session to suit what you find out.
- offer children some choice in sessions so they can follow their own interests. Make sure that sessions include group or pair work or even individual play opportunities as whole group sessions restrict the choice children have and the opportunity for their learning experience to be personalised.

## High quality provision recognises and values children’s learning journeys and focuses on children’s learning

Recognising the individuality of children’s learning journeys, documenting them and helping them to reflect on their own learning is seen as very best practice in the Early Years sector.

Whilst this level of reflective practice might not be practical for ‘one off’ sessions, it could form an element of early years provision where an ongoing relationship is being built. Even in single sessions, parents and carers or practitioners and teachers could be ensuring that the museum experience is documented

as part of their child’s learning journey, for later reflection.

What’s more, provision that focuses on the learning process signals to children the value of that process. It is important that those working with young children comment on what children have done, what they’ve learned and the thinking this seems to show. It provides the chance to encourage children’s efforts, praise their success and opens up a dialogue in which children can make their thinking clear.

### London Hub examples

The Explainer at the Docklands Toddler Group noticed that a 10-month-old boy seemed interested in a ‘lift the flap’ activity. She spoke to him about the feathers underneath. However she soon spotted that he was really exploring the flap, so switched her conversation, encouraging him to lift and

drop the flap and introducing the words up and down.

Regular events such as toddler groups and storytelling have enabled Hub staff to get to know certain families. This relationship means staff can begin to comment on children’s development over time.

### Suggestions

#### Improve your understanding

- watch the TV clip *Early Years – From Reggio Emilia to the West Midlands* from Teachers TV, especially the five minute section on observing, monitoring and documenting children’s learning journeys.
- download the *Knowledge and Understanding* learning journey from the resources part of the *Enabling Environments: Observation, Assessment and Planning* section of the EYFS website. This gives you a good idea of the kind of learning journey records practitioners may be keeping.

#### Planning provision

- use a digital camera to capture learning moments in sessions. Don’t forget to get parental permission to take photos.
- try commenting on children’s learning during led sessions. Take time out from leading during activities to observe how children are getting on. Comment on not only what children are making or doing but the learning taking place.

- create learning journey packages with Reception classes in local schools. Young children benefit greatly from repeat visits or connected experiences. Offering a learning journey over a series of sessions rather than an individual visit will be a more powerful learning experience for the children. The sessions could be in your museum or a combination of museum and school-based. Such a structure offers the chance to build in progression, for example in developing a sense of time.
- make a group scrapbook with regular groups like a toddler group, or a Centre or school working on a partnership project. Put photos into the scrapbook each week. Children can help decide which photos should go in. Put in things children (and sometimes their adults) have said during the session. You will need to write them down as you hear them and tell children that you’re writing it down to put in the scrapbook later. As children get used to the system they may even start to explain ideas to you so that you can write them in.



High quality provision maximises community learning opportunities and enhances learning in the setting

London Hub examples

It is good practice for Early Years settings to take children out into their community to learn and to bring aspects of the community into the setting. Early Years practitioners may not have considered museums either as a suitable place to visit or as a source of intriguing materials and resources to refresh their learning environment. Families too benefit from learning in new environments, engaging with new topics and sharing new experiences.

The Horniman Museum is experimenting with Early Years outreach. The outreach has begun by adding value to an existing Sure Start play bus scheme, using objects from the world cultures collections to tell stories. This partnership has enabled the Museum to connect with difficult to reach families through existing successful initiatives.

The Museum of London worked on a creative project with two Reception classes at a local school, within walking distance of the Museum. Both classes had three led

Museum provision for young children needs to ensure that it capitalises on what is unique about the museum or adds a distinct and different value to something that children experience elsewhere. Museums can also use their community connections to build bridges between children in the Early Years and their local communities.

sessions at the Museum and one of the classes came to the Museum between sessions to look at objects again. The structure of the project enabled the school to really make the most of coming out of the classroom and using a local resource.

Before the puppet session at the Horniman Museum, the teacher was asked how the session would fit with what children were doing back in school, so that the content could be slanted to ensure it could be followed up.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- watch the TV clip *Early Years – From Reggio Emilia to the West Midlands* from Teachers TV, especially the five minute section on visiting central Birmingham and the sculptures that followed.
- accompany a local Early Years teacher as they plan, organise and go on a visit to a museum (other than your own).

Planning provision

- put together a series of visits for local Early Years settings, with work in the setting as well as at the museum if possible.
- offer multiple linked visit slots for Reception classes within walking distance.
- create activity sheets for teachers and practitioners with ideas on how to use objects and art works in settings and classrooms.
- provide pictures of key objects or art works online for teachers to use with children.
- use interesting people from your local community in programmes for families with young children or Early Years groups.
- think about creating a handling collection that could be taken to settings, preferably being left there for a week before being collected.

Supporting learning and development

The Early Years Foundation Stage says: 'Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and inter-connected.'

For museums, effective practice based on this principle

- provides open-ended play resources that can be used in many different ways.
- offers a variety of different kinds of play experiences to suit different preferences and cultural approaches.
- stimulates play in different ways, including using stories as stimuli.
- encourages staff to join in with play situations where appropriate.
- values children playing.
- creates environments and activities that ensure children feel sufficiently secure and confident to explore and participate .
- provides a measure of control over, and ownership of, the learning experience by children.
- facilitates children as independent learners, in particular through making activities, displays and resources interesting and accessible.

- encourages staff to act as facilitators, extending children's learning rather than always leading it.
- provides the opportunity for a balance between child initiated and adult initiated activities.
- enables children to take control of the physical environment: moving things, shaping things and sometimes making a mess.
- documents children's learning to facilitate reflection, and sharing with family adults.
- provides models of adults being creative and taking creative approaches to problem solving.
- tries to include content and topics from across the six areas of Learning and Development.



© London Transport Museum

High quality provision offers independent, parallel and cooperative play opportunities

The Early Years Foundation Stage makes it clear that ‘children have to experience play physically and emotionally’ and that ‘children may play alone or with others.’ Play is a key way that young children learn. The very youngest begin life playing independently (with their toes, their fingers) or cooperatively with adults (Peekaboo). Children under three

tend to play independently or in parallel with other children. They like to be playing alongside others, doing what they are doing, but not sharing resources and not building a game together. From three up, children can begin to play more cooperatively (e.g. a game of ‘Hospitals’ with children taking different roles).

London Hub examples

Children at the Museum in Docklands Toddler Group were able to play independently and in parallel in the gravel and using the building blocks. The blocks also gave some parents the opportunity to play in parallel with their children, building their own towers then letting their children knock them down. The blocks and Duplo enabled some children to play cooperatively with their adults, sharing the bricks to make something together.

Reception children in a puppets session at the Horniman Museum were able to

play independently and in parallel with classmates as they explored different kinds of puppets.

A group of children under three that didn’t know each other were able to play in parallel at the London ‘small world’ table in *All Aboard* at the London Transport Museum. There was plenty of space to play around the table, each child could have a vehicle and there were enough features on the townscape for each player to have something significant to be doing.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- watch *Early Years Workshop: Play to learn* on the Teachers TV website. As well as seeing children play, the team explain what learning is taking place.
- read the *Introduction to Treasure Baskets* document from the RNIB website.

Planning provision

- check that you have provided enough resources to enable parallel play where it is likely to happen, for example enough figures in a small world play set or enough blocks in a building activity.
- provide a safe space and risk assessed objects and toys for babies and very young children to play with. Treasure baskets are

- great for this age group and can be easy to relate to displays.
- consider whether your museum could provide more play spaces as part of its learning environment.
- audit sessions for families with young children and Early Years groups to see how much play you encourage. Try to indentify more chances for play to be involved.
- add toys and collections related play props to family events to enable siblings to be in the same space and to give children something else to do if they finish the set activity or need a break.

High quality provision provides for a range of types of play

Educational research has identified a number of different kinds of play. Piaget identified four main types of play, which were then added to by other theorists. For planning, five broad types of play can be useful: exploratory play, pretend play, games with rules, construction play and physical play. Different children may prefer different kinds of play at different times. Family adults may feel more comfortable with certain types of play, particularly in a museum setting. Games with rules or construction play may offer a clearer adult role to less confident family adults. Pretend play may not be appealing to self-conscious grown ups and tends to work better with children who know each other.

The emphasis in play is always on activities determined by children themselves. Children decide what to play, what to use, and how the play will map out. Their choices are governed by their own developmental stages and interests. The end result is open, not pre-determined. Hence a child following a recipe is baking, but a child exploring what happens when they mix up different ingredients they’ve chosen is playing. Both have learning value, but the latter has more learning potential, more opportunity for developing thinking skills, more motivation power and a lower risk of failure.

London Hub examples

Children at the Museum of London Toddler Group could choose between exploratory play with Play-doh, construction and pretend play with Duplo and a *Playtown* mat and physical play using a crawl through tunnel.

Two girls from a Reception class and their group leader were playing in the taxi in *All Aboard* at the London Transport Museum. The child driving asked where they wanted to go. With the adult’s help they had a very realistic conversation around going to the shops.



© Geffrye Museum

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- the *Early Years Workshop: Play to learn* episode on Teachers TV gives an excellent overview.
- read *The Excellence of Play* by Janet Moyles for all there is to know about the value of play.

Planning provision

- offer some play opportunities related to museum displays, for example small world play like a doll’s house or farm, a puppet theatre, building blocks, role play props like tea sets or simple card games like pairs or snap. Remember to use handling items, replicas and images of objects as much as possible to relate the play to the collections. Try to include things that need

- more than one to play as well as toys for independent use.
- think about including some opportunities to explore and play with materials as part of any craft based activities you offer, for example provide crazy foam or salt dough to play with. Children can take away a salt dough recipe rather than a model.
- create some play trails round your museum. Choose themes that children will enjoy like pirates, fairies, superheroes, scientists and explorers and provide dressing up accessories and props.
- even if you haven’t got enough space for play, why not provide some ideas for ways to play back in the classroom or setting following on from themes explored in the museum.



High quality provision balances adult initiated, or led, activities with child led activities

The Early Years Foundation Stage says that adult involvement in play should be to ‘plan and resource a challenging environment where children’s play can be supported and extended’. Research has demonstrated the importance of facilitating and extending children’s play. Adult interventions can provide new ideas or language for the game, or bring in new resources that could deepen or broaden the play.

This approach to facilitating as much as leading extends into all kinds of early learning, not just play. The Foundation Stage guidance acknowledges the challenges such an approach can bring, ‘gradually giving children greater independence in their learning while retaining control over the curriculum’. However it is clear that in the best provision, children lead activities, adults lead in an inclusive way and activities are structured to provide as much decision making, autonomy and choice as possible.

London Hub examples

Having seen a child choose to play with a musical instrument, the Explainer at the Toddler Group at the Museum in Docklands, picked up an instrument too. She suggested playing Twinkle Twinkle and repeated the tune until the child joined in. The child then suggested swapping instruments, which they did. The Explainer then suggested Incy Wincy and asked if other children nearby wanted to join in.

In a craft session at the Geffrye Museum, the workshop leader led a short handling session, then explained the craft activity. She then

took a ‘back seat’ bringing resources to the table and helping where needed, but leaving family adults to work with their children, and children to work independently if they wanted to. One father commented on the amount of creativity this encouraged.

The Foundation Stage session at London Transport Museum is engaging and participatory but mainly adult led. This is nicely balanced by a free-play session in *All Aboard* which offers pretend play in various kinds of transport.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- ask a three to five year old you know personally to be your guide around a museum or art gallery.
- watch the video *Early Years Role Play – Managing and Changing* on Teachers TV which looks at how role play can develop when children are in charge, facilitated by adults.

Planning provision

- try to include opportunities for children to initiate some activities in any led sessions. This could be through using talking partners, giving children choices or decisions to make or including a play activity such as a chance to role play or use small world toys.

- try giving a Reception class a set of digital cameras and asking them to make their own tour of your museum.
- provide a choice of activities for Early Years groups. Let children choose whether they want to take a sketch pad and pencils, a magnifying glass and torch or a hand puppet round your museum or a specific gallery.
- encourage families to put their children in charge. Provide large ‘Tour Guide’ badges for children and let them decide where to take their family and what to look at.
- provide sets of sorting objects or materials for families to use, for example wooden things, fabrics, a materials box, plastic animals, fossils and stones, things with interesting textures or a mix of all these kinds of thing. Let families play with them however they want to.

High quality provision provides for active learning

The Foundation Stage guidance describes active learning as children being mentally and physically engaged in their own learning. It characterises active learners as intrinsically motivated and interested, exploring, making decisions, problem solving and becoming absorbed in the process. Such children are confident, ready to take risks and make choices. They need to be given control and ownership of their learning and be helped to reflect on their learning journeys.

The Effective Early Learning Project highlighted the importance of children’s involvement with the learning process. They concluded that the most successful and high quality learning experiences were ones in which children were actively engaged. Planning active learning experiences means planning to stimulate different kinds of thinking, follow children’s interests, enable individual and group responses, to cater for variation in learning style and to celebrate success.

London Hub examples

Four-year-olds in the craft session at the Geffrye Museum were actively engaged in making their headdresses. They carefully drew round their hands and cut them out, concentrating hard. They made choices about the decoration of them. A good change of pace was offered as they used chalks to create a backdrop. Children cooperated or worked in parallel with large scale

movements, exploring the smudginess of the medium.

A two-year-old boy spent 15 minutes playing with Play-doh squeezed through a ‘spaghetti’ maker. He could not squeeze it through himself, but made the group leader do it. Together they made up noises for the dough going through the holes.

Suggestions

Improve your understanding

- watch Adam’s and Lone’s stories on the DVD *Celebrating Young Children and Those Who Live and Work with Them* from the DCSF.
- watch the video of a child exploring corn flour on the *Learning and Development: Play and Exploration* section of the EYFS website.

Planning provision

- develop a handling collection so you can give children the chance to get up close to objects and investigate them in a hands on way.
- make sure children have access to tools and equipment in sessions and, where appropriate, can help themselves to what they need.
- if you can’t provide equipment, why not work with local schools or settings and encourage them to bring their own along. Many will have exploring tools like magnifying glasses or torches. Teachers

- may like to bring stories along to set challenges for children to solve or suggest ways children could explore.
- try to avoid planning craft sessions where everybody makes the same thing. Only offer templates for people as a last resort. Instead plan craft activities where children can use their imagination and creativity, for example jewellery making where children can choose what jewellery to make and which materials to use. Basing a session on a material or skill switches the focus away from a set product, for example in a ‘creating with pasta’ session children could make any kind of 2D or 3D creation.
- think about taking some pictures of children actively learning in your museum. With permissions in place you could use the pictures on marketing materials to encourage other children to consider the museum an enabling environment. You could also use the images on interpretation panels to ‘give permission’ for active learning.

High quality provision looks across the areas of learning and development

The six areas of development in the Foundation Stage are all interrelated and frequently cross over. The curriculum for children under five does not concentrate on factual knowledge, but focuses on skills, and general areas of understanding. As one teacher put it: ‘Our topics are very flexible. Almost anything fits in with the curriculum and we can fit the Museum in with that.’

One event, programme or gallery area does not need to cover all areas of learning and is

likely to be more successful clearly focusing on one particular skill or set of ideas at a time. These are likely to be cross-curricular.

Planning for learning outcomes helps to ensure that the focus is fully explored and any related learning opportunities exploited. However, the point of this is to be prepared to facilitate as many different learning journeys as possible from the jumping off point provided, not to limit children’s interests or pre-determine what learning will take place.

London Hub examples

The Early Years Officer at the Museum in Docklands was aware that the toddler group provision offered activities across the areas of learning but not many creative development opportunities. She introduced Messy Mondays, once a month, with a creative craft activity led by an artist.

The workshop leader at the Horniman Museum speaks to teachers ahead of their session to decide what focus to give the puppets session. The children observed were due to make puppets back in school. The focus of the leader’s talk, and the children’s

explorations, was therefore on how the puppets worked, how they moved and what materials they were made of.

One of the parents at a storytelling session spoke about how important she felt the sessions were for her boy of 17 months to develop social skills.

*All Aboard* at the London Transport Museum deals with the idea of travelling in different forms of transport. Its clear focus makes it easily understood and channels likely conversations and play.

Suggestions

- Improve your understanding**
- look at the *Development Matters* sections of each area of *Learning and Development* on the EYFS website.
- Planning provision**
- think about which areas of the EYFS Areas of Learning and Development your provision covers. Try to include a broader range of topics or skills, for example if most sessions are ‘making’ (Creative Development) then consider adding some role play or investigative sessions.
  - think about the Personal Social and Emotional Development opportunities that a museum visit offers and try to plan in opportunities, for example taking time to build children’s confidence in spaces through familiarisation activities.
  - go on a short welcome visit to local settings before they come to the museum.

- Take pictures of the museum building, entrance and a few key objects. Introduce yourself to children or show them pictures of other staff they will meet. This doesn’t need to be a long visit, but can really help children to feel comfortable enough to learn when they come to the museum.
- provide a simple planning sheet so children can plan their own visit.
  - think about Communication, Language and Literacy Development opportunities in your provision. Try to build in chances for children to speak to each other as much as possible.
  - look at the concepts and ideas covered in Knowledge and Understanding of the World and find the concepts your museum could enable children to explore, for example if you have local history collections think of things they could do to recognise features of their locality.

High quality provision helps children develop their communication skills

Whilst it is important for children to build skills across all the areas of learning and development, language skills are at the core of learning. Communication skills underwrite everything from personal and emotional development through to developing language for thinking. This centrality, coupled with alarming statistics nationally about language delay amongst children starting pre-school, puts the development of communication skills high on the political agenda in the Early Years.

A recent study in the South West has demonstrated that museum collections can be an excellent resource for stimulating and extending children’s communication skills. High quality provision provides chances for children to communicate in different ways, including verbal and non-verbal. It encourages children to talk to each other as well as to adults.

London Hub examples

Storytime at the Horniman is highly participatory. Children join in with songs and rhymes and hear their parents and carers joining in too. Even very young children listen to the stories well and join in any actions.

A visit to the Roman gallery at the Museum of London to look at a model of a Roman bridge prompted Reception aged children to talk to each other about what they were looking at. They discussed the animals crossing the bridge and from this deduce that the bridge was needed because the water must have been too deep.



© Laura Mtungwazi

Suggestions

- Improve your understanding**
- read Communicating with Objects: Children under five engaging with museums.
  - read Communication Friendly Spaces (or watch the DVD) to find cheap and easy ideas for ways to amend spaces to encourage children to talk.
  - most Local Authorities offer training for practitioners on developing communication skills with young children. Find out if your Local Authority offers this and whether you could take part.
  - watch the DVD Learning to Talk Talking to Learn, especially the sections on how children learn to communicate and top techniques.
- Planning provision**
- make sure led sessions offer opportunities for children to participate verbally and non-verbally.

- add adult sized dressing up accessories to children’s dressing up clothes. This encourages adults to join in and will be likely to spark more conversations and extended play.
- use ‘circle times’ in group sessions to recall previous sessions or to sing songs or play word games that welcome everyone or introduce new concepts.
- use talking partners in school group sessions to encourage children to talk to each other.
- include a quiet cosy, semi enclosed space in a gallery or temporarily as part of a session to encourage small group or adult-child communication, for example one activity on offer during a session could be a ‘story tent’ made out of a draped cloth, with characters or props inside.
- provide family interpretation and text that is about prompting talking together throughout your museum.



## High quality provision provides for all kinds of learners

Although learning preferences and the types of intelligences people have become clearer and stronger as they get older, children do vary in their preferred ways of learning. What's more young children can develop quickly and their preferred approach may also change as they develop. Some early years experts consider Piaget's theory of 'schemas' to be important in determining how a child might prefer to learn at any given time. Schemas are a set of associated ideas and/or actions. In child development, a series of common schemas have been identified. By building on a schema that an individual child may be engaged with, learning experiences can be made more motivational and

meaningful. For example, a child investigating a rotation schema exploring all things linked to going round may be motivated by activities such as winding wool round things, investigating objects that can turn or looking at vehicle wheels.

Since young children mainly think in a literal and concrete way, making abstract ideas more tangible, e.g. through images or sensory experiences, can be helpful to them. As with any set of learners, it is important to cater for those who like to learn through doing and those that prefer to watch first, those who learn best through speech or music and those who need to communicate visually.

### London Hub examples

To begin the Platform Promenade at London Transport Museum, children crawled through a 'time tunnel'. As they popped out in the olden days, they had a sense of having travelled.

During the session at the Horniman Museum, children moved their arms and legs mirroring the puppets' movements. This enabled them to understand the way the puppet moved and

helped make the link between the movement of the puppet and of the puppeteer.

In a session with Reception children at the Museum of London, the workshop leader used hand gestures to help visualise her speech. Activities included children using their bodies to be buildings along the river bank and moving long pieces of blue and white fabric to be the river.

### Suggestions

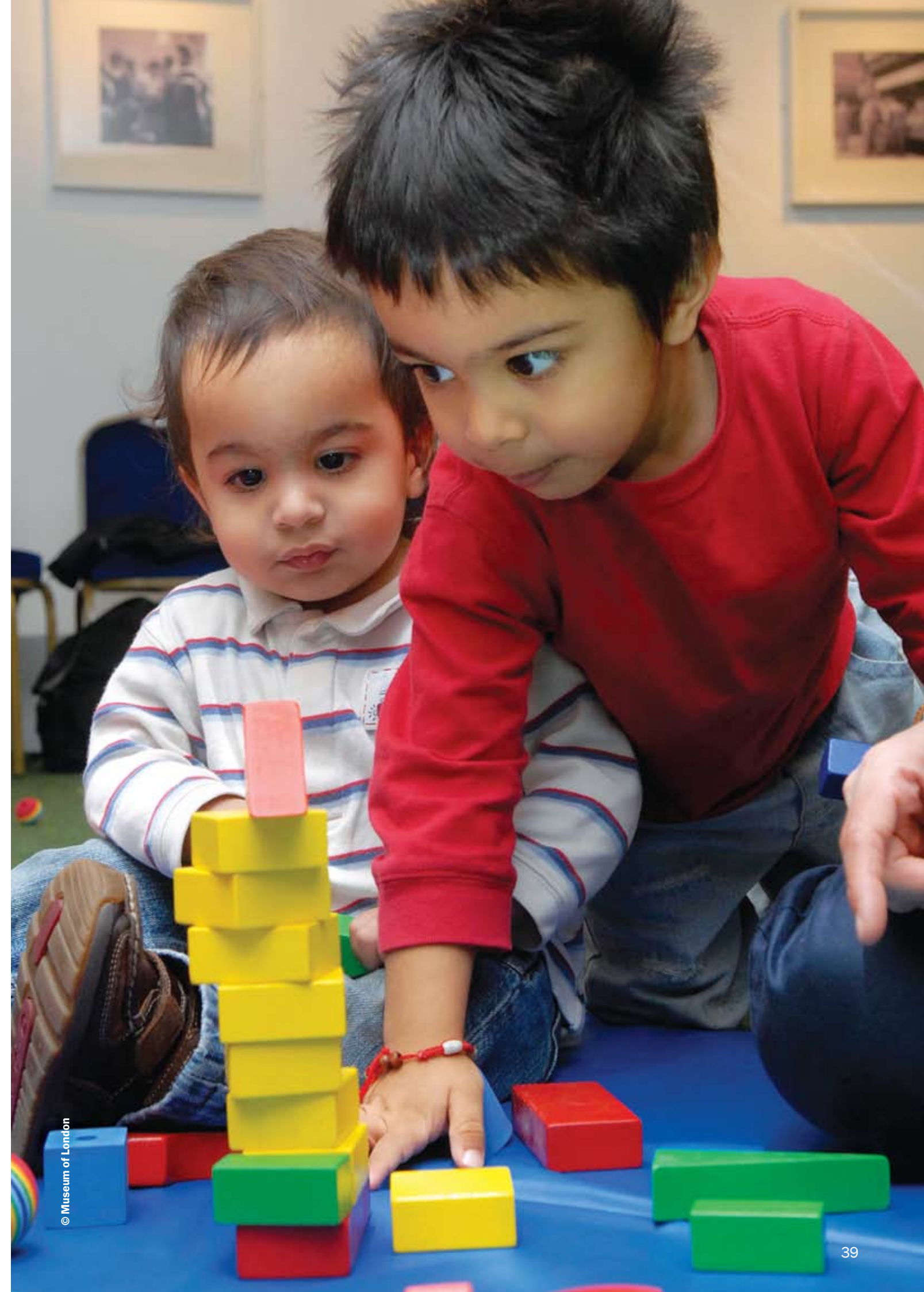
#### Improve your understanding

- read What do we mean by learning? on the Inspiring Learning for All website to find out about learning styles.
- watch the TV clip Early Years – Using puppets from Teachers TV giving a wide range of ways puppets could be used to appeal to a variety of children and give children an element of control in sessions.
- read about schemas in Threads of Thinking: Young Children Learning and the Role of Early Education by Cathy Nutbrown.

#### Planning provision

- provide open-ended activities and toys and props that can be used in different ways so that children can explore using all their senses.

- add visual and kinaesthetic elements to listening events like storytelling sessions. For example add actions, dances, instruments and objects to hand round.
- think about the sensory aspect of craft sessions and choose materials with a range of textures or smells.
- provide ways for children to turn visual experiences into multi-sensory ones, for example put lengths of blue, green and white shimmery fabrics next to paintings of the sea or a box of instruments next to pictures of galloping horses or people dancing.
- use a puppet to encourage children to take the lead in sessions, to take part in storytelling events or for children to animate characters in your displays.





Listening to users

Talking to children under five about their experience of your museum is difficult. Whilst children will have views, even those who have clear enough communication skills for you to understand are unlikely to share their views with a stranger. The ability to understand very young children's communications is based on much experience and consulting with children under five requires particular methods, usually immersive ones, working with the children.

A pragmatic approach for museums that can't run a consultation project is to listen to the adults that accompany young children. A good way to do this is to ask adults to listen to children on your behalf, making it more likely you will get what children actually think. How you do this will depend on what you want to find out. Some ideas are listed on the following page.

Reception aged children or nursery children in the summer term may be an exception to this approach. These children are aged between four and five and may be used to giving their opinions in a public context. They can be set tasks and can often communicate their thinking clearly through photos, speech or drawing.

Observing users

Observing young children often provides valuable insight. You could use the observation framework towards the end of this book to audit all aspects of your provision or select certain indicators to look at, for example 'How age appropriate is what the museum offers?'

Observation is a good way to assess how enjoyable an experience visiting your museum is for young children. It is also excellent for finding out what catches children's interest about the buildings, collections or displays. Noting what children say is a great way to find out what they are learning.

The EYFS website provides lots of guidance on how to observe children and document their learning, as this is an integral part of best practice. You can also find helpful videos on the Teachers TV website. The ICAN DVDs provide commentaries on footage of children that helps viewers begin to understand the learning they are witnessing.

In any evaluation with children be aware of child protection sensitivities and data protection issues.

Children in charge

Ask parents, carers or practitioners if they could follow children's lead and note down what their children like to look at or do in your museum. Suggest they ask children 'Where shall we go next?' whenever possible.

What makes something interesting?

Ask children to work with their adults to find all the interesting things in your museum or gallery. Give them digital cameras to photograph each thing or post it notes with smiley faces to put on each thing they find. Look at the photos together and talk with children about their choices or go round together to collect up the stickers and listen to children at each point.

My tour

Reception children could make their own picture tour. Use a photo album with built in voice recorder. Let children take photos, print them out and then record their ideas with each picture.

Build a museum

Alternatively work with a Reception group to make a museum back in school, for example with building blocks or in the role play area. Use photos of your collections and let children choose which to include in their own museum. Listen as they discuss what to include. They may be able to suggest games to play involving these objects.

Take a vote

Families coming to regular sessions can be asked what children would like next week. Give them stickers to put on a shared voting sheet. Do they want more singing, more stories or more action songs in the storytelling session? Don't forget to provide a 'keep it the same' column.

What did you discover?

With children towards the top of the Early Years age range, sessions could conclude with children talking to a puppet, who would like to know what they have discovered in their workshop.

On reflection

Nursery and Reception aged children who are used to story mapping techniques may be able to draw the story of their museum experience, reflecting on what was interesting and different about their time with you. This will probably make most sense if their familiar practitioner or teacher annotates the story.



© Museum of London



Observation framework

Categories for scoring

1 capitalises on uniqueness of museum environment or collections

- A set in museum space
- B activities link to object or museum story
- C activities offer link to museum beyond the session
- D encourages further connections to culture, heritage or the museum
- E develops the audience for the museum, e.g. acts as consultation group
- F provides unique or different resource

2 enables and supports family adults and carers to act as first educators

- A includes parents and carers
- B clear role for family adults and carers in activities
- C some activities require adult interaction
- D some aspect is of adult interest
- E parenting support activities or materials provided
- F Two-way dialogue established with parents and carers about learning and development
- G things to do at home or on the way home are provided

3 provides age appropriate activities

- Play:
- A offers independent, parallel and cooperative play opportunities
  - B offers activities which could allow siblings, friends, unfamiliar peers and adults to play together
  - C provides for a range of types of play
  - D provides opportunities to extend play
  - E provides good space and time for play
  - F provides high quality play resources
  - G child led play is valued
  - H outdoor environments are capitalised upon
  - I activities last right amount of time
  - J incorporates right level of skills
- Active learning/thinking skills:
- A increases children’s and parent/carer confidence
  - B children are enthusiastic, interested and engaged
  - C children have independence and control
  - D activities include decision making and explaining
  - E activities encourage recall and reflection
  - F provides opportunities to investigate
  - G provides opportunities to reason
  - H provides opportunities to be creative/think creatively

4 provides inclusive and accessible activities

- A connects to and reflects a variety of cultures and experiences
- B caters for VAK or multiple intelligence based learning preferences
- C connects to or encourages individual children’s interests (e.g. do children bring things in)
- D group leader’s engagement with adults and children supports learning
- E physically accessible
- F questioning is limited and where used is open-ended
- G structure and timing of sessions is flexible around user need
- H there is a balance between child-led and adult-led activities
- I children’s ‘voices’ and learning journeys are made explicit, through documentation

5 builds positive relationships

- A offers opportunities to build friendships
- B range of cultures and abilities given positive value
- C friendliness is shown to parents and carers
- D there is an understanding of family dynamics
- E there is a two-way flow of information
- F parents and carers contribute towards the development of the service
- G the group is ‘built’ e.g. welcome in a number of languages, children’s names included
- H group leader focuses on highlighting the learning happening
- I group leaders observe children
- J group leaders listen to and talk with children, not at them
- K other partners, especially from local communities, are involved in delivery

6 role of provision in relation to the museum

- A aims of the programme and intended audience are clear
- B range of ages in the under-five bracket attend sessions
- C a range of ethnic and social backgrounds are represented
- D records of attendance are kept and statistics generated
- E marketing effectively reaches target audience
- F progression for the museum or Hub is clear

Useful organisations

ICAN

[www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

ICAN works to support the development of speech, language and communication skills in all children with a special focus on those who find this hard. ICAN has developed a network of Early Years Centres across the UK and runs a programme called Early Talk which supports practitioners to build their understanding of communication development.

- Learning to Talk Talking to Learn. DVD
- Chatter Matters. DVD
- Early Talk magazine

DCSF

[www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)

The Department for Children, Schools and Families has the responsibility to ensure that England is the best place for children and young people to grow up. Their website has a number of key resources to link to or download.

- Children’s Plan 2007
- Early Years Foundation Stage (<http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs>)
- Sure Start website, especially project examples on Inspiring Creativity
- Early Years Magazine
- Standards site for case studies on using ICT with Early Years

Teachernet

[www.teachernet.gov.uk](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk)

Teachernet is a comprehensive government site for people working in learning. It includes an online publications area with useful resources relating to teaching and learning. It has all the government publications on Early Years, including some that are a few years old but still useful.

- EYFS Statutory framework
- Foundation Stage toolkit (includes Celebrating Young Children DVD)
- Seeing Steps in Children’s Learning

Teachers TV

[www.teachers.tv](http://www.teachers.tv)

Teachers TV is unsurprisingly a TV channel. However it also provides a huge catalogue of downloadable short videos for free. The Early Years section contains useful materials on good practice especially relating to learning though play.

Sightlines

[www.sightlines-initiative.com](http://www.sightlines-initiative.com)

Sightlines Initiative is a national charity which aims to support the development of creative approaches to early years learning and teaching, in particular linking to the Reggio Emilia approach.

- ReFocus Journal
- Reggio explained

Communication Friendly Spaces

Can be ordered online from the Basic Skills Agency (archive. basic-skills.co.uk)

Introduction to Treasure Baskets

Download from www.rnib.org.uk

LTS Scotland

www.ltsotland.org.uk

This website supports quality practice in Scotland. It has a large section on active learning, useful pages on different approaches to early learning and links to lots of useful resources.

Imagine their shadows

www.museum.manchester.ac.uk

An exciting project in which children explored the museum building using light and shadow. Go to the learning page and select the EYs programme. The report is at the bottom of the page.

How light is black?

www.engage.org

An action research project in Wales looking at what artists and galleries can offer children in Early Years settings. Go to the Cymru page and under reports, download the full report.

Communicating with Objects

South West Museum Hub office

Contact the South West Hub (0117 922 4653) for copies of the report detailing findings from research carried out in 2007. Also available: *Close Encounters with Culture* an Early Years practitioner publication based on the same research.

By Children, For Children

www.4children.org.uk

A leaflet, by Curiosity and Imagination, looking at how four participatory projects worked with children to make sure their voices were heard and shaped the end result. Three of the four involved children in the Early Years.

Possible places to visit

Visiting a museum that already provides for Early Years is a good way to begin planning provision of your own. Many museums have provision for Early Years children but the following have either long-standing experience or have produced publications about it.

London Hub Museums:

- Museum of London
- Museum in Docklands
- The Horniman Museum
- The Geffrye Museum
- London Transport Museum

Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood, London  
The Science Museum (Pattern Pod and The Garden), London  
Discover, Stratford London  
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London  
The New Art Gallery (Baby Palace), Walsall  
The Potteries Museum, Stoke  
Bilston Craft Gallery (Craftplay), Wolverhampton  
ThinkTank (Kids City), Birmingham  
Banbury Museum, Banbury  
Oxford University Museums, Oxford  
Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, Norfolk  
Eureka! Halifax, West Yorkshire  
Weston Park Museum, Sheffield  
Merseyside Maritime Museum (Sea Urchins), Liverpool  
The Manchester Museum, Manchester  
Falmouth Art Gallery, Falmouth  
Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth  
Kelvin Grove Art Gallery and Museum (Mini Museum), Glasgow

Early Years children are already a key audience for many museums, whether they come as part of families or in educational groups. Nonetheless there is huge potential to expand this audience, encouraging more children to come and increasing the number of museums that provide for them.

The introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage gives the museum sector the opportunity to reflect on its provision. The EYFS gives clear guidance on what is effective practice in catering for young children, based on research largely from the influential EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) project. It provides both useful tools for museums to assess and amend their practice and an impetus for Early Years practitioners to consider using museums as part of an enabling environment. It reminds us that the Early Years start at birth, not Reception class.

Whilst provision for young children has grown across the museum sector, it has largely done so based on an intuitive understanding of early learning, drawing on experience of learning with older audiences. This has sometimes meant that there is a tendency towards structured programming of provision, rather than providing play opportunities. Whilst staff led events can attract visitors and provide high quality learning experiences, the EYFS makes clear that there needs to be a balance between adult initiated and child

initiated learning. Young children need to be able to connect to buildings and collections in a multi-sensory way, exploring and playing to learn. Whilst creative expression is vital to this age group, it needs to be harnessed to the unique things a museum can offer. On its own, it is not enough.

Providing chances and resources for children to explore and play also provides museums with the opportunity to support parents and carers as first educators. This is good practice and a sustainable way for museum services to evolve. Young children learn best within sustained relationships. They need the right balance of familiarity and challenge. This is reflected in the high numbers of repeat visitors that many museums attract from this age group and may be a different visit pattern to other visitor groups. Teachers interviewed as part of the Hub research also expressed keen interest in repeat visits and regular museum use. Since Early Years groups can't travel far, this suggests that museums would do well cultivating in-depth relationships with local settings incorporating multiple visits and probably outreach too.

The evaluation of provision for Early Years across the London Hub unearthed many examples of good practice but also highlighted some key areas of challenge. These challenges are common across the museum sector and more could be done to share understanding and ideas within museums. Hopefully, this handbook can go some way towards beginning that conversation.





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