

# Watching learning

Researching the experiences of young children with learning difficulties in an interactive museum gallery.

This presentation will explore the specific considerations for the researcher of children with learning difficulties and the implications of the findings for gallery and learning programme development.

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# Central Proposition

- The cognitive development of children with learning difficulties can be supported through the design of museum galleries, the activities therein and the support provided by museum staff
- Specific difficulties exist in researching the experiences of children with learning difficulties but there are ways to overcome these difficulties

# Content

- In this presentation I will deal with the following issues
  - Some of the issues in researching learning in museums
  - Specific considerations for the researcher of children with learning difficulties
  - How can research be used to influence exhibition and educational programme development to benefit children with learning difficulties

# Researching learning

- The number of published examples of research into learning in museums is small despite the fact that many people are conducting research in the sector
- Much of the research that does take place is retrospective – typically evaluation which asks specific questions
- Evaluation is often constrained by limited means and application of results

**Sources:** A Common Wealth: Museums in the Learning Age (DCMS 1999)

Learning in the Museum (Hein 1998)

# Researching Learning

- Consulted varied sources of information
- Identified the necessity within role at the museum
- Demonstrated that the research would be relevant and could bring in more visitors
- Used my own time!

# Researching Learning – Recommendations

- Draw examples and theories from other disciplines – cognitive development theories in formal education
- Identify the need for research prior to exhibition or programme development and including in budget setting or funding application

# Learning difficulties – specific research considerations

- Involving people with learning difficulties in research has issues of consent
- Those who are differently articulate pose difficulties to the researcher in gathering data
- Qualitative data was appropriate when researching children's learning experiences – but statistical data is frequently called for

# Learning difficulties – research practicalities

- Consent from teachers, consent from parents/ guardians, consent from pupils, anonymity of subject
- Observation is a very direct method of gathering data where communication is difficult for the researcher
- Qualitative research in informal learning environments calls for careful consideration of reliability

# Learning difficulties – research recommendations

- Consider how you collect data – even if it causes you difficulties. Protect the identity of your research subjects
- Use data collection methods that suit the needs of those with learning difficulties
- Use a variety of data sources to ‘back up’ results

# Influencing Practice

Ensuring that research is used to develop exhibitions and educational practise to benefit children with learning difficulties



# Influencing Practice

- Present in an accessible format for others to access
- Follow up recommendations from the research straight away
- Talk to your colleagues about your research
- Publish your results!

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