

Copyright & Privacy Notice

Please note:

Sections of this thesis containing photographs of the children who participated in the research have been removed for privacy reasons.

The full thesis is available for viewing at the University of Canberra Library

Thesis submitted for PhD
from the University of Canberra

**Young Children in the Art Gallery:
Excursions as Induction to a Community of Practice**

By Lyn Fasoli

June
2002

ABSTRACT: Young Children in the Art Gallery: Excursions as Induction to a Community of Practice

Learning in ‘communities of practice’ is a new way of describing and investigating how people learn and has not been applied extensively in research in early childhood or in art galleries. This thesis is a critical case study undertaken with preschool children as they prepared for, participated in and followed up a series of excursions to the National Gallery of Australia. The study explores and analyses children’s induction into the practices of the art gallery and their negotiation of the meanings around these practices in the gallery and in their preschool. Children’s engagement in practices is analysed using a sociocultural framework for learning called ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) in combination with a multilevel analysis of the artefacts of practice derived from the philosophical writings of Wartofsky (1979). Multiple data sources included photographs of children, their drawings, tape recordings of their incidental talk and group discussions, and results of play activities as children participated in the practices of the art gallery and the preschool. Data was also collected through semi-structured interviews with gallery and preschool staff. In a study involving such young children, the use and juxtaposition of these multiple sources of data was important because it allowed for the inclusion and privileging of the material and non-verbal resources as well as verbal resources that children used as they engaged in practices. Outcomes of this research have been used to illuminate and problematise early childhood as a site for the intersection of multiple communities of practice. Learning to make sense of experience is portrayed as more than language-based ‘scaffolding’ and the representation of experience through child-centred play activity. The study provides a detailed descriptive account of children’s learning and sees it as a fundamentally unpredictable and emergent process. It shows that relations of power are always a part of learning and can be seen through an analysis of the resources available to children, those they took up and were constrained by in the local situation and those they brought from other communities of practice. In this process, the children, as well as their teachers, were active negotiators. They participated in complying with community-constituted views of knowledge as well as shaping, resisting and contesting what counted as knowledge. This study makes a contribution to understanding children’s learning in early childhood as fundamentally social, unpredictable, productive and transformative rather than individually constructed, stable, predetermined and representational of experience.

Acknowledgements

I wish to record my deep gratitude first and foremost to my doctoral supervisor, Professor Marie Brennan. Through her finely targeted critical feedback, generous spirit of inquiry, apparently boundless capacity to support and understand, she has given me more than she will ever know.

Special thanks go to my parents, June B. and Paul A. Fasoli, who provided me with their full support and love.

The people who played the most significant role in this thesis were the children, staff and families of the University preschool and I give them my sincere thanks for their enthusiastic involvement and willingness to accommodate my project. I will always remember those children who participated directly in the study for teaching me to embrace uncertainty, unpredictability and serendipity in early childhood programs. I am indebted most particularly to the staff who came with us to the gallery and to the entire staff of the centre for helping in so many invaluable ways. They include Kate Cairns, Angela Freeman, Wenone Jackson-Hope, Careen Leslie, Kerrie McIntyre, Emily Shumack, Skye Thompson, Lorelle Waghorn, and Sophia Williams. I am especially grateful to 'Elsie', a remarkable teacher, for being willing to share with me the points of confusion as well as exhilaration that come with working in an 'emergent' way with young children.

Thanks are also due to many colleagues, friends and family members who supported me over the period of this intensive journey, through to completion. I am grateful to my generous colleagues at Northern Territory University, Lorraine Connell, Margot Ford, Kim Chapman, Donelle Steel, Bonnie Moss, Karen Sinclair, and all of the staff in the Science, Information Technology and Education Faculty who carried the extra workload while I was away. I give particular thanks to Mel Hazard for reading and discussing drafts of my final work, for asking the 'curly' early childhood questions that provoked me to think more deeply and for being a friend indeed. Lesley Hosking, my critical friend who has accompanied me on so many of life's journeys, read the entire opus. Her clear eyed and critical comments helped me to produce a much more polished and comprehensible product than might have otherwise been the case. Christine Woodrow was always available to help by long distance and I am very grateful for her wise counsel and continuous encouragement. I am also very grateful to my new colleagues and friends at the University of Canberra. By being available to talk and listen over many hot cups of coffee, they provided invaluable support. These included Kathy Mann, Tamarisi Yabaki, Katja Mikhailovich, Margaret Kylie, and Chris Trimmingham Jack. I thank Marilyn Fleer for making available office space, a computer, and support for transcription costs and for the opportunity to discuss this complex idea of 'communities of practice' with another interested early childhood educator. The most constant support came from Caroline Gopalkrishan who listened, read, and helped me talk this thesis into being, nearly on a daily basis. I thank her for a treasured friendship and for prodding me constantly to see beyond my 'taken-for-granted' notions of how the world works.

My research was greatly facilitated by the Jean Denton Memorial Scholarship for which I am very grateful. This scholarship enabled me to travel and meet with museum colleagues, attend a conference and visit some wonderful museums. It also enabled me to purchase some of my equipment for collecting data. Most importantly the funding meant that I could work full-time on my thesis.

Moving out of the early childhood community of practice was a bit unnerving having spent my whole professional life within the one discipline. I am very thankful to the museum professionals who made the transition so painless by welcoming me into their community. I am very grateful to the staff at the National Gallery of Australia for accepting my proposal to undertake this research in their gallery, particularly 'Matt', for his generous help in inducting me into some of the mysteries of museums. I also thank the staff for their critical feedback on a conference paper that trialed most of the key ideas of this thesis. I am grateful to Margie Kevin for taking such an interest in my work. She also offered much valuable knowledge and insight into working with young children in art galleries. Elizabeth Beckman took a supportive interest in my work helping me to connect with other museum professionals. In this group I also include friends and colleagues Barbara Piscitelli, Sarah Main, and Susan Ostling. Barbara encouraged and supported me from the first moment that I began to formulate this project nearly ten years ago. She provided very timely and concrete support over the last two years by sharing many museum articles collected by the Queensland University of Technology Museums Collaborative and, with her colleagues, by reading and discussing early drafts of my work. Sarah Main kept me linked to the museum network in Sydney and offered museum literature, friendship and a much-appreciated Sydney retreat. Susan Ostling, shared a classroom of 5-8 year olds with me 28 years ago. Now we share a fascination with young children, learning and art. I appreciate her encouragement and thoughtful criticism on my work. I am also very grateful to Theano Moussouri for her early suggestions and for sharing her work with me.

I am grateful to many people who helped out when the technical challenges of putting this thesis together, particularly when wrestling with photographs and text became overwhelming. In Canberra, David Marsden-Ballard, Anita Cahill, Alan Nicol, John Knight, and Andrew Spiers each provided advice and/or technical 'know-how' at critical points for which I am grateful. At NTU I would like to thank Cheryl Arnott for her technical support, Peter Wignell for his editing and kind words, and Brian Devlin for dropping everything to help when help was needed.

Final thanks and deep appreciation must go to the one person who really made this all possible, my husband Russ Miller. Without his willingness to do virtually everything over the last two years, and to do it with incredible good grace, I doubt that this thesis could have been written.

Table of Contents

<u>Chapter 1 Young Children in the Art Gallery: Induction to the Community of Practice</u> .1	
<u>Hearing practices in an art gallery</u>1	1
<u>Study Overview</u>6	6
<u>Key Questions</u>8	8
<u>Sub-Questions</u>8	8
<u>Description of the Study</u>8	8
<u>Significance of the study</u>13	13
<u>Museum Literature</u>14	14
<u>Early Childhood Approaches</u>15	15
<u>Sociocultural Approaches</u>16	16
<u>Personal Experiences</u>18	18
<u>Overview of Thesis Chapters</u>20	20
<u>Chapter 2- Museums and Young Children</u>20	20
<u>Chapter 3 – Researching ‘Practices’</u>21	21
<u>Chapter 4- Learning to ‘look’ - Finding the practices in the art gallery fortress</u>24	24
<u>Chapter 5 - Incidents and Accidents: The Gallery Goes to Preschool</u>25	25
<u>Chapter 6 - Excursions as Induction and Border Crossing</u>26	26
<u>Chapter 2 Museums and Young Children</u>29	29
<u>Introduction</u>29	29
<u>Constructions of the young child visitor</u>34	34
<u>Construction of the nature of knowledge</u>47	47
<u>Conclusions</u>54	54
<u>Chapter 3 Researching Practices</u>60	60
<u>Introduction</u>60	60
<u>Section One: Wenger-Wartofsky Framework</u>62	62
<u>Wenger’s ‘Communities of Practice’</u>62	62
<u>Wartofsky’s Artefacts</u>70	70
<u>Section Two: Wenger’s views contrasted with traditional psychological and contemporary sociocultural views of learning</u>72	72
<u>Vygotsky and sociocultural theories of learning</u>73	73
<u>Situated perspectives on learning</u>78	78
<u>The Situated Psychological Camp</u>80	80
<u>The Situated Anthropological Camp</u>81	81
<u>Conclusion to Section Two</u>82	82
<u>Section Three: Discourse and Interpretive Communities</u>84	84
<u>Conclusion to Section Three</u>90	90
<u>Section Four: Research Methods and Data Collection</u>92	92
<u>Research Questions</u>92	92

<u>Data Collection Procedures</u>	94
<u>Research Participants</u>	94
<u>Case Study Methodology</u>	95
<u>Researcher Roles</u>	100
<u>Data Collection and Analysis</u>	102
<u>Previsit Activities</u>	105
<u>Post-visit Activities</u>	106
<u>Analysis of Children’s Talk</u>	107
<u>Analysis of Digital Photographs of Children</u>	109
<u>Analysis of Children’s Drawings</u>	113
<u>Analysis of Field notes</u>	116
<u>Analysis of Preschool Staff Interviews</u>	117
<u>Analysis of Gallery Staff Interviews</u>	117
<u>Summary of Analysis</u>	118
<u>Ethical Considerations</u>	119
<u>Informed consent</u>	119
<u>Confidentiality</u>	121
<u>Description of Data Chapters</u>	123
<u>Chapter 4 Learning to ‘look’ - Finding the practices in the art gallery fortress</u>	124
<u>Introduction</u>	125
<u>Part One: The Children’s Gallery: A Gallery within the Gallery</u>	131
<u>Children at the gate</u>	131
<u>Learning to ‘look’- What’s an ‘Exhibition’?</u>	140
<u>Learning to ‘look’- Bodies ‘look’</u>	141
<u>Learning to ‘look’- Touching with torches</u>	144
<u>Learning to ‘look’- The computer knows</u>	150
<u>Learning to ‘look’- Words on the Wall</u>	160
<u>Conclusion to Part I</u>	168
<u>Part Two: ‘Welcome’ to the Adult’s Gallery</u>	169
<u>Useless Bodies</u>	171
<u>‘Hey I know where it’s from!’ – Multiple practices in the adults’ gallery</u>	174
<u>On the Ledge – Interpreting space</u>	178
<u>Resisting Practices: Horses Bums</u>	181
<u>Computers: Who cares what’s real?</u>	184
<u>The Dance of Bliss- Why’s Shiva Smashing the Baby?</u>	189
<u>Conclusion to Parts One and Two</u>	194
<u>Chapter 5 Incidents and Accidents: The Gallery Goes to Preschool</u>	197
<u>Introduction</u>	197
<u>The Preschool Context</u>	198
<u>Typical Preschool Excursion Practice</u>	200
<u>Group time - Verbal Orientation to the Excursion</u>	202
<u>Resisting Practices: But everyone goes on our excursions</u>	208
<u>Being ‘Detectives’ in an Art Gallery</u>	210
<u>Harvesting the Gallery Back in the Preschool</u>	217
<u>What goes in an art gallery?</u>	220

<u>Protecting the Objects in the Gallery</u>	224
<u>Negotiating a Mix of Practices</u>	229
<u>Why Buddhas and Gods?</u>	234
<u>Conclusion - Multiple Practices: Hybrid Communities</u>	240
<u>Chapter 6 Excursions as Induction and Border Crossing</u>	245
<u>Introduction</u>	245
<u>Learning through practice</u>	249
<u>Using the Signposts: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Gallery</u>	253
<u>Implications for Gallery Educators</u>	259
<u>Implications for Preschool Teachers</u>	264
<u>Methodological Implications</u>	275
<u>Contributions, Limitations and Areas for Further research</u>	280
<u>References</u>	285

List of Figures

Figure 1 - Wenger's (1998, p. 5) model for components of learning.....	67
Figure 2 - Overview of Data Collection Procedures.....	94
Figure 3 - Overview of Data Analysis.....	105
Figure 4 - Welcome to the fortress.....	124
Figure 5 - Children's first visit.....	124
Figure 6 - Cloakroom sign.....	131
Figure 7 - Provision for children in the gallery.....	137
Figure 8 - Jake, Carl and Cathy as they first entered the children's gallery.....	140
Figure 9 - 20 In the Children's Gallery.....	142-143
Figure 21 - Jake & Karl with torches.....	145
Figure 22 - Rachel and Elsie.....	148
Figure 23 - Jake & Karl at the computer.....	153
Figure 24 - Finding silhouettes.....	153
Figure 25 - Mary.....	159
Figure 26- Mary Writing.....	159
Figure 27 - 'Eye Spy' clue words on the wall.....	160
Figure 28 - Tom & Harry.....	161
Figure 29 & 30 - Australia Brooches.....	161
Figure 31 - Mary shows Tom 'turtle Australia'.....	164
Figure 32 - 'a head in the way?'.....	166
Figures 33 - 44 In the Adults' Gallery.....	171
Figure 45 - Mary, Jake & Elsie with 'Broken Ear'.....	174
Figure 46 - Jake 'gets it'.....	174
Figure 47 - Arumbaya Fetish.....	176
Figure 48 - Mary sits on the ledge.....	178
Figure 49 - Mary invites Jake onto the ledge.....	178
Figure 50 - Rachel, Harry, Tom & Bonnie in adults' gallery.....	181
Figure 51 - Jake touching the screen.....	185
Figure 52 - Elsie approaching.....	185
Figure 53 -Elsie retrieving Jake.....	185
Figure 54 - The Shiva.....	189
Figure 55 - Jake & Mary looking at the Shiva.....	190
Figure 56 - Mary gives me a mortarboard.....	199
Figure 57 - The gallery before children's contributions.....	219
Figure 58 - First Buddha.....	222
Figure 59 - Second Buddha.....	222
Figure 60 - Constructions for the gallery.....	222
Figure 61 - Buddha collection and 'a funny statue'.....	223
Figure 62 - Jake's case.....	223
Figure 63 - Bonnie looking at the gallery.....	223
Figure 64 - No eating! Because you might leak crumbs.....	224
Figure 65 - No breaking.....	224
Figure 66 - No guns, no smoking, no drinking water.....	225
Figure 67 - No soccer balls, no lipstick.....	225
Figure 68 - No drinking, and no roller scates (sic), no eating, no lunchbox.....	225
Figure 69 - No skateboards (sic), no paint and no throwing toy whales.....	225
Figure 70 - No touching.....	225
Figure 71 - No guns.....	225
Figure 72 - Emergency! Push button to get firemen.....	225
Figure 73 - Harry's sign.....	225

Figure 74 - Gallery with signs posted.....	226
Figure 75 - ‘Don’t’ signs in National Gallery.....	226
Figure 76 - Bonnie’s ‘don’t’ sign.....	229
Figure 77 - Under 3s with exhibits under the table.....	230
Figure 78 - Harry’s guard’s chair.....	232
Figure 79 - Harry’s guards for the gallery.....	232
Figure 80 - A ‘Caterpillar’ inspects an exhibit.....	234
Figure 81 - Sonia reading Buddha book.....	236
Figure 82 - Bonnie in the gallery looking at Buddha pictures.....	238