

Journaling in Museums: Young Children at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum

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### Abstract

This paper articulates the need for hands-on experiential learning for young children in traditional museum settings. Consideration of developmental stages and milestones is important when designing guided learning tools. The theory of constructivism provides a framework for the creation of a museum journal targeting 5 and 6-year-old visitors to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tennessee. Constructivism places learners as active participants in the construction of their own knowledge as they interact with their surroundings. The benefits of journaling with young children are explored, and a compilation of activities to be included in a Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum journal are presented.

### Journaling in Museums: Young Children at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum

The mission of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum is to collect, preserve, and interpret the evolving history and traditions of country music. The museum's 350,000 square feet include galleries, archival storage, education classrooms, retail stores, and special event space. The galleries reveal the story of country music through artifacts, photographs, and text panels as well as recorded sound, vintage video, and interactive touchscreens.

The most recent renovation of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum added the Taylor Swift Education Center (TSEC), where the Education Department facilitates programs for visitors of all ages. Here, they also provide materials to facilitate the engagement of young visitors in the museum. The Youth and Family Programs team recognized the need to create an activity that caters to young learners after observing that many children appeared to be bored in the galleries (Personal Communication with Madeline Adams, former Youth and Family Programs Manager). Anderson, Piscitelli, Weier, Everett, and Tayler (2002) state that the most memorable and enjoyable experiences for children in museums involve touching objects and creating multisensory interactions. Unfortunately for young visitors, all displays at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum are contained in glass cases, and there are no opportunities to interact with artifacts. Additionally, much of the descriptive text included in the cases is what Madeline referred to as "adult copy." It is text written by adults for an adult audience. It is small in size and does not easily attract or hold the attention of young audiences. In order to make the displays more approachable to young guests, the Youth and Family Programs team created a scavenger hunt activity (Appendix A). This activity follows the order in which the artifacts are displayed, and asks participants to locate, examine, or recreate costume designs or instruments. While the scavenger hunt has proven to be successful, it does require a certain level of

independence and proficiency in reading. It is most popular with older elementary and middle school aged children. The Hall of Fame Education Department acknowledges that not all young visitors have yet reached the milestone of literacy, and they are currently in the process of designing a set of activities for preschool learners. The goal of the Preschool Activity Bag is to connect content from the Country Music Hall of Fame to concepts and activities that are developmentally appropriate for pre-literate children around the ages of 2 to 4 years old.

The project detailed in this capstone is a learning tool in the form of a museum journal that will target the audience that the current activities in use or development are missing: 5 and 6-year-old early readers. The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum began in the 1960s just before the concept of children's museums took off. Between 1976 and 1990, 80 new children's museums opened in the United States (Munley, 2012). These museums, designed specifically with children in mind, originated in response to the traditional museums which catered to adult audiences, as well as the highly structured nature of formal learning environments such as school. Children's museums provide opportunities for active, unstructured learning in hands-on, multi-sensory environments that stimulate curiosity and motivate learning through play. Traditional museums, like the Country Music Hall of Fame, are a stark contrast to these noisy, brightly colored, interactive spaces. Although children's museums pay far more attention to young learners than traditional art and history museums, research suggests that traditional museums are also suitable environments for early learning. Access to objects encourages active learning as well as prompts language development for thinking and communicating (Graham, 2008). Museums are places where children have genuine choices, take control over their own learning, construct meaning, encounter challenging tasks, collaborate with others, and feel positive about their efforts (Griffin, 2004). The number of programs offered for children in

traditional museums has increased in recent years. However, most of these programs focus on classes, tours, and professional development for educators. Families and caregivers are more of a secondary market, and of 170 Smithsonian Affiliate museums, only 22 were recognized as making strong attempts to serve a young audience (Munley, 2012). In addition, children are losing access to creative arts education in schools due to the emphasis on high-stakes testing (Gormley & McDermott, 2016). The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (2001) states that optimal learning occurs through challenging experiences in low stress environments. As Griffin (2004) noted, museums provide learners with the opportunity to explore at their own pace and take control of their experiences. Therefore, providing programs and activities that challenge learners in these settings that do not present pressure to perform creates most favorable conditions for learning.

## **Theory**

The theory driving the creation of a museum journal for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum is the cognitive theory of learning. Cognitive theorists are concerned with how people acquire, store, transform, use, and communicate information. There are multiple branches of cognitive theory, and the framework of the museum journal combines aspects from more than one of them. It is primarily grounded in constructivism, both cognitive and social, and information processing theory sheds light on the journal as a tool for processing and storing information to create memories of museum experiences.

Constructivist learning theory suggests that learners create their own knowledge of the topics they study rather than passively receiving that knowledge (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010). In other words, learners are active participants in constructing their own understanding and knowledge. This view of learning comes from developmental theorist Jean Piaget, who believed

that knowledge is neither altogether preformed within the learner, nor is it completely external, awaiting discovery. Rather, knowledge is invented and reinvented as learners interact with their surrounding environment. (Driscoll, 2004) Constructivist methods aid learners in assimilating new information into existing constructs as well as enabling them to make modifications to existing frameworks in order to accommodate new material.

Piagetian views of constructivism gave way to what is now cognitive constructivism. This perspective focuses on individual, internal constructions of knowledge. Learners interpret experiences and information using their current knowledge, stage of cognitive development, cultural background, personal history, and so on. The emphasis is on the individual's search for meaning and how they modify their own frameworks through interactions with others and their surroundings (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010). Vygotsky, another developmental theorist, placed a greater importance on social interactions in the construction of knowledge. Social constructivism suggests that learners individually internalize knowledge only after it is first constructed in a social context. Whereas Piaget viewed social interaction as a way to test and validate knowledge schemes, Vygotsky saw it as providing an avenue for the acquisition of language and the exchange of ideas (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010).

Both views suggest that instruction in the form of lecture and explanation should be limited and learning activities should place students in cognitively active roles. Social constructivism, however, underscores the importance of learning from more knowledgeable others, such as parents, teachers, and other instructors, and maintains that rather than staying out of the way so that children may do their work, those with more knowledge should provide "scaffolding" to guide interactions. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) define scaffolding as the "process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal

which would be beyond his unassisted efforts...controlling those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity," (p. 90). Scaffolding aids learners in successfully navigating tasks considered to be on the upper end of their "zone of proximal development." The zone of proximal development, constructed by Vygotsky, is the region of potential for cognitive growth constrained on the lower end by that which the learner can accomplish independently, and on the upper end by what the learner is capable of with the assistance of more knowledgeable others. This dynamic construct shifts with cognitive growth and development as the learner becomes able to complete independently what once required assistance (Doolittle, 1997).

Where constructivism concerns itself with the ways in which new information is approached and acquired, information processing theory accounts for how that knowledge is transformed and stored in memory. The process occurs in three basic stages. Incoming stimuli are perceived and stored very briefly in sensory memory, conscious thinking then takes place in working memory. From working memory, information is transferred to long-term memory through the process of encoding. Encoding can take many forms. Schema activation awakens relevant prior knowledge in order to make connections to new knowledge. And, elaboration increases the meaningfulness of new information by connecting it to existing knowledge. Information is permanently stored in long-term memory and can be pulled back into working memory through the process of retrieval. (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010).

As stated by Puchner, Rapoport, and Gaskins (2001), educators in children's museums typically take a constructivist view that children learn best through active involvement and first-hand concrete experiences. They also recognize that learning through experience may not be adequate, and museums should be social places which provide context for learning that is

mediated by interaction with others. Much research on the importance of scaffolding has been done indicating that children spend more time interacting with exhibits and learn more when accompanied by an actively involved adult (Puchner, Rapoport & Gaskins, 2001). Children who receive vague guidance show an advantage over those who receive no guidance or precise guidance (Haas, 1997).

**Developmental Milestones**

Constructivist theorists state that learning is relative to the learner’s stage of cognitive development and understanding a learner’s existing intellectual framework is central to understanding the learning process. Therefore, before creating a learning tool for 5 and 6-year-old museum visitors, it is important to be aware of developmental milestones for this age group. The following milestones come from Berk (2008) and Davies (2004).

Developmental milestones for children can be classified by category. They include social, emotional, language, cognitive, and motor (gross and fine).

By 5 years old, children can be expected to:

<p><b>Social</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show interest in new experiences</li> <li>• Show more independence</li> <li>• Like to sing, dance, and act</li> <li>• Cooperate with adult requests a majority of the time</li> </ul>	<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persevere longer on a difficult task</li> <li>• Identify and talk about feelings in relation to events</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work alone at an activity for 20-30 minutes</li> </ul>	
<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand concepts of “same” and “different”</li> <li>• Say rhymes or sing children’s songs</li> <li>• Tell stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end</li> <li>• Use future tense</li> <li>• Recall part of a story</li> <li>• Describe past, present, and future tense</li> <li>• Tell long stories about own past experiences</li> </ul>	<p>Cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know most of the letters of the alphabet</li> <li>• Have improved ability in distinguishing fantasy from reality</li> <li>• Understand time of day and days of the week</li> <li>• Know about things used every day in the home (e.g. money, food, appliances)</li> </ul>
<p>Motor Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw lines, simple shapes and a few letters</li> <li>• Draw person with body</li> <li>• Dress and undress with little help</li> </ul>	

By 6 years old children can be expected to:

<p>Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete most tasks with few reminders</li> </ul>	<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand some words about time and order</li> <li>• Tell about own experiences and ask about yours</li> <li>• Have a vocabulary of about 10,000 words</li> </ul>
<p>Cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be able to distinguish between fantasy and reality</li> <li>• Demonstrate a more realistic understanding of space, size of objects, and distance in drawings</li> </ul>	<p>Motor Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print words and numerals</li> <li>• Color within lines</li> <li>• Have an adult grasp of pencil</li> </ul>

**Benefits of Journaling**

Merriam-Webster defines a journal as a record of experiences, ideas, or reflections. At the age of 5 and 6 years old, children are beginning to write as well as tell stories, and when they are given the opportunity to write, draw, dictate, or represent what they know through any such mode are actively constructing, internalizing, and refining knowledge and concepts (Neuman,

Copple & Bredekamp, 1999). These constructivist processes are present in the act of journaling. Brenneman and Louro (2008) found the use of journals in a preschool classroom to be decidedly successful. While the journals they used were for the purposes of science education, they also found them to be supportive of emerging language and literacy skills. Sharing journal entries allows children to describe observations using new vocabulary and to practice that vocabulary in context. Journals are also an opportunity for learners to observe closely, represent observations, and practice and consolidate new ideas (Brenneman & Louro, 2008).

Dockett, Main, and Kelly's (2011) use of journals with children at the Australian Museum provided them with the opportunity to document their museum experiences in the ways that they chose. Actively involved adults scaffolded interactions that facilitated open-ended conversations as well as reflection and recall in children. The act of journaling recognizes that children's interactions with museums do not begin and end with the original visit. Presenting children with the opportunity to journal acknowledges that they possess a wealth of knowledge along with their own unique perspectives, and it creates a tangible record of those as well as their growth as artists and writers (Brenneman & Louro, 2008; Dockett, Main & Kelly, 2011).

### **Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum Journal**

The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum will soon offer gallery activities for preschool, pre-literate learners in addition to the scavenger hunts designed for late elementary and middle school visitors. This journal will provide interactive learning opportunities to the underserved audience of 5 and 6-year-old learners. It pays special attention to the developmental milestones of children at this age to provide learners with the space to construct their own knowledge. The activities included are designed to fall within the zone of proximal development of the target audience. While certain activities may require scaffolding from adults, children will

be active participants in their gallery experience at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

As a way to begin documenting their experience in the museum, the first activity in the journal presents learners with the background of the museum lobby and asks them to draw a picture of themselves and the people with them (Appendix B). This exercise builds on many motor skills including grasping a pencil, drawing lines and basic shapes, and drawing a person with a body. Cognitively, it allows children to demonstrate their understanding of space, size of objects, and distance in pictures. It is also an opportunity for young museum guests to create a reference point for the later retelling of their visit.

Independent dressing is a benchmark of this age group. The “My Stage Costume” sticker activity (Appendix C) embraces social interests in performance by allowing children to design an outfit and place themselves on stage. Their emerging ability to dress and undress themselves creates a base of understanding for matching costume items to the appropriate body parts. They are provided a number of options and the freedom to match or mismatch their fantasy designs.

The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum gallery displays two elaborately outfitted cars. A third journal activity (Appendix D) invites learners to choose their favorite and tell a story about a trip they might take in that car. The activity acknowledges that not all participants have developed writing skills and provides space for either a written story or a drawing. Examining and comparing the two cars employs knowledge of the concepts of “same” and “different” and inventing a story involves distinguishing fantasy from reality as well as story sequencing. Learners are again given the opportunity to practice grasping a pencil and drawing shapes, and some may also attempt printing words.

Songwriting is another avenue for storytelling as well as performance. The invitation to write a song of their own (Appendix E) walks learners through a series of steps including choosing a theme and a tune. This activity also utilizes children's increasing vocabulary and their abilities to produce rhyming words.

In combination with facilitating the active construction of knowledge, the creation of a museum journal works to transform new information and experiences into long-term memories. The activities described above aid in encoding by activating schema about cars and getting dressed or providing opportunities for elaboration such as writing a song about a subject that is meaningful to the learner. The physical journal itself then acts as a cue for retrieval when telling stories about a trip to the museum.

## **Discussion**

With the current landscape of education and its emphasis on high stakes testing, museums are more important than ever in providing challenging learning experiences in a low stress environment. Introducing activities like museum journals affords children the opportunity to explore at their own pace and practice skills in writing and language without the pressure and anxiety that comes with the expected outcomes in formal education. These kinds of opportunities also allow young learners to be creative in a time when arts and culture are being pushed out of curriculum in favor of narrow testing standards.

While the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum is working to create these kinds of learning environments for all ages, there is still more work to be done. This learning tool is a step toward offering meaningful museum experiences to 5 and 6-year-old visitors, but in order for it to have more profound impact, changes would need to occur in the physical design of the

museum. Such changes include markers on display cases indicating artifacts which are relevant to journal activities. It is also important to consider where children would stop to complete journal activities. Because the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum was not designed with children in mind, there are no child-friendly spaces for sitting or working. In the future, this tool could be used as journals were in Dockett, Main, and Kelly (2011), to evaluate the museum from the standpoint of designing for young visitors. By adding pages to the journal that ask visitors about what they found most memorable, enjoyable, or funny, museum designers can identify those parts of the museum that attract young learners and design exhibit space to improve their museum experience.

The creation of this journal for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum would afford 5 and 6-year-old visitors the freedom to actively construct their own knowledge in a challenging environment that was designed without consideration to how young children learn.

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Appendix A

# SCAVENGER HUNT

## INSTRUMENTS

### DIRECTIONS

**Find** these unique instruments on display in the galleries, and:

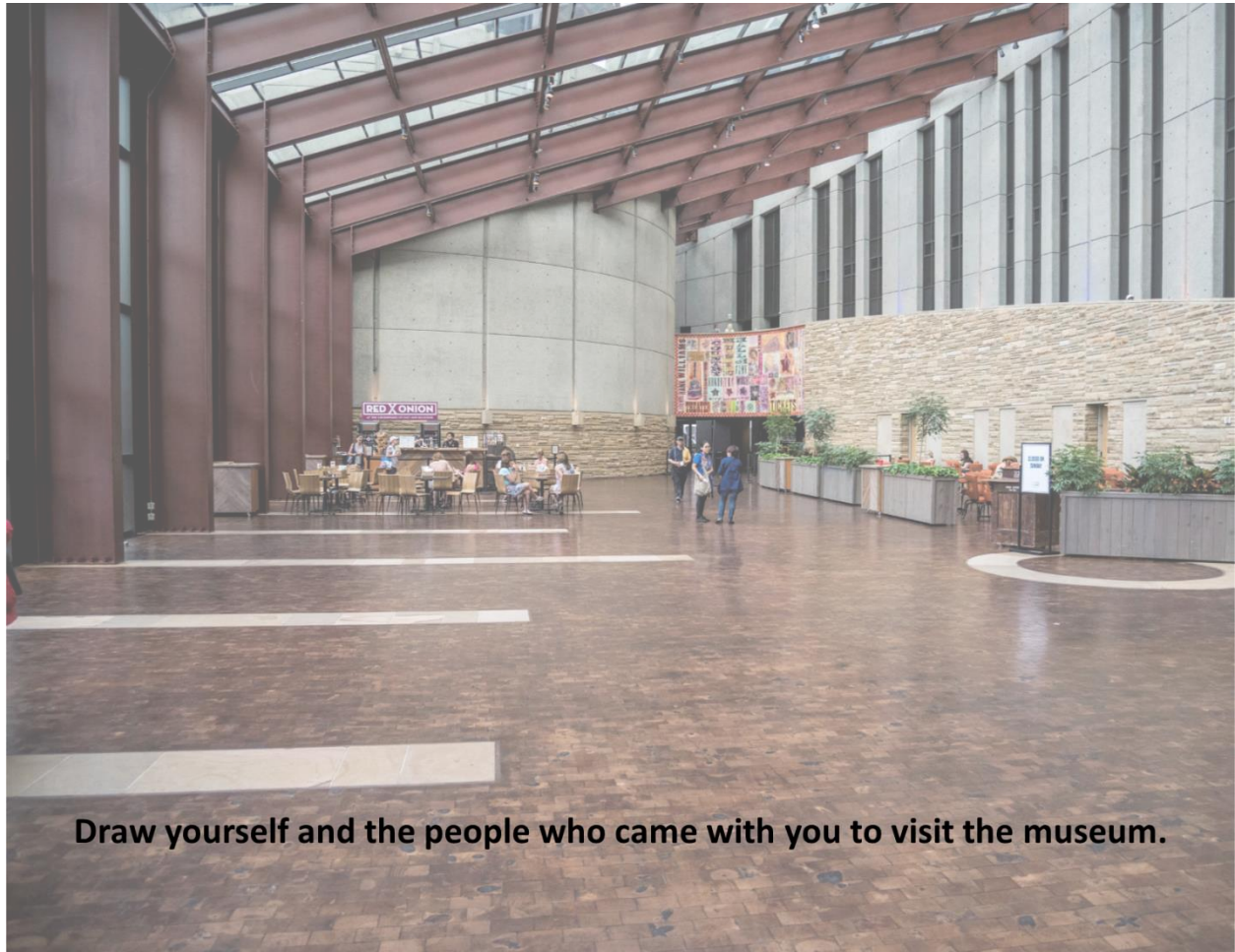
-  each one as you find it.
- **write** down the date on the label.
- **draw** an  by the oldest.
- **double underline** the one you would want to play on stage to express your personality.
- **write #1** next to your favorite.
-  the newest.
- **draw** a  around the most worn out.

### THIRD FLOOR:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Artist Unknown: Victory Crawford fretless banjo
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bonnie Dodd: Steel-bodied National resonator guitar
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sara Carter: Zimmerman autoharp
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bob Dunn: Handmade lap steel guitar
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chick Hurt: Kay tenor banjo
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bob Wills: Fiddle
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ira Louvin: 1922 Gibson F-4 mandolin
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chet Atkins: Gretsch Streamliner
- \_\_\_\_\_ Earl Scruggs: Gibson RB-Granada Mastertone banjo
- \_\_\_\_\_ Charlie McCoy: Hohner Special 20 Marine Band harmonica

(CONTINUED ON BACK)

**Appendix B**



**Draw yourself and the people who came with you to visit the museum.**

Appendix C

**What will you wear on stage? Use the stickers to create your costume.**

The image displays a variety of clothing and instrument stickers arranged around a central line drawing of a person. The items include:

- A light green, strapless, tiered dress with a beaded waist.
- A black long-sleeved shirt with floral embroidery.
- A brown leather vest with fringe.
- A red long-sleeved dress with fringe and circular patterns.
- A pair of brown leather pants with fringe.
- A gold sequined top.
- A light blue long-sleeved shirt.
- A pair of black pants.
- A silver long-sleeved shirt.
- A black cowboy hat.
- A brown cowboy hat.
- A red cowboy hat.
- A pair of red cowboy boots.
- A pair of black cowboy boots.
- A pair of brown and green patterned cowboy boots.
- A pair of white cowboy boots with intricate patterns.
- An acoustic guitar.
- A violin and bow.
- A harmonica.



### Appendix D

Which car would you like to drive? Draw yourself in your favorite car.

Now, draw or write about a trip you would take.



## Appendix E

### Write a Song

Find the Dolly Parton song exhibit. Her first song was about her corn cob doll, *Little Tiny Tasseltop*. Listen to the song Dolly wrote when she was 5 and then write your own song.

1. Choose what you will sing about.
2. What rhyming words can you use in your song?
3. Choose a tune for your song like *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* or make up your own tune.



