

“There is a Reason Why Children Should Be Taken To a Museum”

The Teachers’ Opinion about the Necessity of Museum Visits

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Abstract

This empirical research presents the relationship between museum visits and schools. This study intends to examine to what extent the teachers use the learning opportunities provided by museums, how they link teaching in the museums and the schools, and what was their attitudes toward these cultural institutions. The research was based on interviews. According to the results, teachers, in general, take their students to museums in connection with the curriculum and in order to help their students to gain experience, develop the class community, and increase students’ knowledge of their homeland. Museum visit has a significant role in talent management and further learning as well.

Keywords: museum learning; the relationship between museums and schools; memorable occasions

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Introduction

The increase of the popularity of museums can be detected recently, as well as the fact that the relationship between the museum and the educational institutions is getting more and more intensive. It is not accidental because the museum visit and the participation in different museum pedagogical programs improve personality from several points of view and contribute to general education, the improvement of skills, as well as the development of mental health and well-being. The opening to external learning spots has been insisted mostly by famous reform pedagogues. For example, Mária Montessori and Peter Petersen preferred experimental and life-related tasks, as well as the openness to the places of out-of-school education.

Mária Montessori was convinced that children should be educated by tools that improve the sense organs in a prepared environment. The action and the activity play an important role in her work. In Fridrich Fröbel’s opinion, the play and the “donations” had an educational effect. Nowadays, they can be found in the mu-

seum's pedagogical programs too. The organizers of interactive events utilize the broad heritage of the reform pedagogues, namely, the play, the free movement, the children's active participation, the creative activities, and actions. Children can take and touch the objects not just have a look at them through the display windows (Torgyik, 2018). It is especially applicable for the museums established for children from infants to the age of about 12. There have been museums, especially for children providing developing programs based on the skills of pedagogy and developmental psychology in the USA and Western Europe for decades. Similar to the children's museums, the interactive exhibitions are also based on the reform pedagogy.

Several studies have already proved the positive effects of the museum programs and that it is worth being used within the frame of the school education, as well as the organisation of free time activities. A museum is supposed to be a place that has several values and, at the same time, it contributes to the friendship of nations, the learning and better understanding of national culture, as well as it supports the peace among the different nations, the acceptance of the folk groups, the openness and the sustainable goals of development.

Falk (2013) underlines the values of museum education. The parents visiting the Science Centre in Los Angeles were interviewed about what their children had learnt during the visit. 90% of the interviewed parents said that their children's interest in science and technology had increased and three-quarters of them mentioned that the visit had encouraged their children to understand the world of science much better. Thus, the museum pedagogy had a great contribution to developing the children's skills, improving their school results, and deepening their interests. 95% of the adults mentioned that they had learnt at least one new thing during the visit. The families of low income or minority felt that the participation in the given program had been especially useful for their children.

The museum programs provide different values, make the children like science, enlarge their perspective, complete the school schedule, improve the sense of aesthetics and their contents can match all the subjects making the acquired knowledge more vivid. (Hein, 2005, Dühlmeier, 2008)

The beautiful paintings and sculptures in museums and their unique exhibitions provide learning opportunities and experiences, which are necessary for both the children and schools. The interactive programs of museums provide various and cheerful experiences, make the children happy, and, at the same time, teach and educate unnoticeably by providing good feelings and joy for the visitors. In addition, the linking of learning to positive emotions encourages further learning and curiosity. Moreover, the experiences gained in the museum can be detected in the children's speech later: the child remembers what he/she had seen in the museum and is ready to speak about it. Some museums rely on children's curiosity when tickets are given to the children arriving in a group to encourage them to return with their parents (Torgyik, 2006).

The child can try out the exhibited items and gain tactile experience in the authentic environment of the museum and integrates them into his/her life during the school years. Due to its nature, the museum pedagogy provides an opportunity

to learn the cultural values, the norms, the habits, and traditions, to explore and understand better and more deeply the past, the historical and literary heritage. In addition, it helps to understand the complex context and connecting point of phenomena. Furthermore, facts and topics could be explained for which there is no or not much time to discuss in school. For example, tiny details of our ancestors' everyday life, work, way of life, and history can be understood. Finally, out-of-school places play an important role in keeping traditions, exploring and maintaining our background, and understanding, as well as shaping our identity (Talboys, 2010). Therefore, museums can contribute to self-understanding, as well as the knowledge of human beings.

A specific feature of museum pedagogic programs is that it involves emotions intensively; both the cognitive sphere and the approach to and stimulation of emotions play an important role during the activities. The child is happy to speak and draw about the things he/she has seen in the museum. The museum intends to shape the whole personality in a holistic way following Pestalozzi's principles by affecting the hands, the head, and the heart in order to multiply its improving effect and results. The museum programs give chance to experience a lot of positive emotions, such as joy, pride, empathy, tolerance, and sympathy. The culture transmission realized in this way develops the child's emotion and contributes to the understanding of harmony and beauty, the experiencing of emotions, as well as the understanding, the perception, the reflection, and the correct management of some emotions. The museum's pedagogical programs improve the demand for aesthetics and spread the need for harmony. The guided observation during the museum visits refines the human feelings and perception, as well as improves and deepens the understanding.

The personality gets richer and the memories can be recalled exactly any time in life. During my search for experience gained in museums, several adults have been interviewed and many were able to recall some visits with a positive outcome in detail, as well as the related emotions even though they had happened 20-40 years ago in their childhood (Torgyik, 2018). All of it proves that the museum provides an everlasting experience for the visitors and can establish their scientific and professional interest, as well as their intention to go on learning and their attitude toward science.

The arts and creative activities contribute to the maintenance of mental health for good feelings, relaxation, joy, and inspiration are generated for the participants of museum pedagogical programs (Chatterjee and Noble, 2013). Culture can support the improvement of children's emotions. Since the pandemic (COVID-19), art has played a key role in healing and recreation. The recreating function of museums is important as well. The concentrated activity of creation decreases anxiety and fear, eliminates general stress effects of the environment, and improves the feeling of satisfaction with life among the visitors. The art is relaxing, gives power, recharges, and provides new impulses, that is, its recreating function is fairly important. Finally, it broadens the horizon and provides new points of view.

Nowadays, we can observe the renewal of museums all over the world for a variety of interactive activities and modern ways of methodology can be seen in

practice. This process was inspired by the reform pedagogy, the new and children-friendly methods in schools, as well as the democratization of the access to culture. The teachers shall be open to the museums’ pedagogical activities for their different benefits.

The investigation of museum visits among teachers

The museum is an excellent out-of-school learning spot, and, at the same time, it provides great teaching opportunities. I wanted to learn to what extent teachers use the learning opportunities provided by museums and how they link teaching in museums and in schools, and what was their attitudes toward the cultural institution.

Teachers of public education were interviewed during our empirical research in 2020 by the method of a half-structured interview. The total number of the interviewed teachers was 45: 38 of them were ladies and 7 were men. The selection was made randomly. The youngest respondent was 22 and the oldest one 77. 31 of them had university and 14 had college degrees. As for their specialties, 7 of them were primary school teachers, 33 were secondary school teachers and 5 did not provide information. Most of them (12) had the majors of Hungarian language and literature and history (9), foreign language (6), biology (3), geography (3), PE (3), chemistry (2), mathematics (2), physics (2), informatics (1), violin (1), visual culture (1), household economics and life-style (1) and sociology (1). 21 of them live in Budapest, 4 in a county town, 17 in a small town, and 3 in a village, so most of them live in a city or town. The respondents are experienced teachers with many years of practice. Most of them (43) are active, and two are retired.

The teachers’ motivations to visit a museum

Most of the interviewed teachers told that they organise museum visits regularly, while some of them take their students to museums rarely. There were only two teachers who did not use this opportunity, for the museum visit can hardly be linked to their areas of teaching. The most common purposes and motivations of museum visits can be divided into the following main categories: 1) to link to and complete the subject 2) to establish the need for general education 3) to improve community 4) to relax and recreate 5) to deepen the knowledge about the country.

The respondents selected museums in connection with their subjects and school schedule to improve or complete their students’ knowledge, as well as to make the subject even more interesting. It proved to support teaching because the direct experience could call the students’ attention more effectively: *“the subject comes alive”, “I can make a topic much more interesting for the students”, “it can be integrated into the subject”* and *“it is a direct learning of the background of events”, “things can be observed personally that could have been read only in the book earlier”, “it supports their education”, “their knowledge can be completed”, “I think, it is important to show this way of research”, “their motivations can be improved.”*

The complex approach of museum pedagogy provides interdisciplinary connecting points among the different subjects and areas of science to support the understanding, the deeper setting, and the better maintenance. The most important for the respondents was to gain and improve knowledge, while the development of skills and the need for competency-based development in the out-of-school programs were less important although they admitted that there are a lot of opportunities available during a museum visit. Some of them underlined experiential pedagogy as the part of the visit as follows: *“It is very important for me that the subject I teach is not only acquirable but experiential as well.”* The joy, the good feeling, and the positive emotions generated during the museum visit were supposed to be the most important because they can make the learning process much easier.

Many teachers linked the museum visit to their role as headmaster or organised it for having this job. Some teachers mentioned the out-of-school teaching opportunity to teach *“how to behave in a museum.”* Not only the completion of the school subject was important during the organisation of out-of-school programs but to teach the culture, education, and art, as well as to establish the *need for general education* and the interest in culture and museum visits. Further purposes were to *improve the community* in general, to improve the community of the classroom, as well as to establish group cohesion. Furthermore, the importance of relaxation, amusement, and free-time activities was underlined in order to leave the daily routine and make the teaching more exciting: *“it takes me out of the everyday routine”, “its big benefit is that we can slow down and focus on a given topic.”*

“Anyway, it has always been a joy for both children and teachers, for it provided variety, the children were more interested, and it could be linked to the subject.”

Added to the most important reasons mentioned above, the importance of the knowledge of the country, the local history, as well as the knowledge of the past, our history, the writers’ and poets’ lives and places of birth, and the importance of local patriotism were mentioned clearly as well, as follows: *“the past of the city shall be learnt, ... we are living here and were born here, we have to teach them to rely on their roots.”* They noted that national holidays can always be an opportunity to visit a museum or participate in interactive programs.

The rich curriculum, geographical distances, and financial difficulties are the most common reasons to make the teachers consider if students should be taken to the museums. They mentioned the *“tight schedule”* expressing clearly that the exaggerated requirements and the overload make the organisation of out-of-school programs rather difficult. Furthermore, many teachers think that it is the headmaster’s responsibility to organise such programs.

“I haven’t ever been a headmaster, everyone has a lot to do... it is rather difficult to activate them, the students are overloaded.”

The respondents have said that in the case of small village schools the geographical location, the distance, the difficulties of travelling, as well as the families’ financial conditions make it difficult to get a museum experience.

“It is a country school, the opportunities are limited and it is not so easy to visit a museum. There is no museum in Kapuvár, so we have to travel by bus

or train ... There are a lot of children who visit the capital for the first time when they are taken to visit the museum.”

Others mentioned that there were families where the museum visit was not supposed to be the part of family's free-time culture and that is why the educating and sampling functions of the school were much more important in this field. *“A lot of children can get to museums with the help of the school,”* said one of the respondents.

As far as the connection to the frequency of museum visits is concerned, most of the interviewed teachers said that they were able to visit an exhibition organised by the school once or twice a year; most of the respondents mentioned two occasions. It takes place once in a term or spring and in June, at the end of the school year. This visit is usually the result of conscious planning combined with the excursion or connected to a holiday or in the frame of a project day on the basis of the school schedule. The organisers take into account the travelling opportunities, the distance, the possible applications, and the financial conditions. Some of the respondents also take into account the seasonal, the occasional, and special exhibitions, and events during their planning.

The opportunities to link the museum visit to the subject

The idea to link the museum visit and the subject is often characteristic of history and literature teachers, as well as the teachers of history of art. Moreover, some respondents teaching biology, and physics said that they have already considered this opportunity whilst planning the curriculum:

“The history of art can be successfully linked to the different paintings and sculpture styles. Many teaching materials cover the building styles as well. The students have the opportunity to see the connection between the information learnt in school and the things found in the museum and that is why it is more probable that they can learn the information much easier and remember them much longer.”

The museums' pedagogical activities provide extra information or complete the curriculum, especially for those who want to get more details in a given area. They are also very useful to prepare for study competitions, facultative and university studies:

“For example, we visited the exhibition “Bodies” with the students of the eleventh class and facultative studies some years ago. It meant great support for us during the preparation for the final exam. I remember, a lot of students brought their notebooks and made notes or drew at the exhibition.”

“Children can learn this field of physics more interactively. The only thing I was sorry for was the fact that only a few museums cover the topic of physics. Anyway, I think it is a good idea that children can get their knowledge through experience, for they can remember it much longer, and it seems to be a positive way of understanding. The so-called CSOPA Science Centre is the best exhibition to learn physics because children can observe different experiments

there, or even they can participate in them. I know how exciting it can be for a child of 14-15.”

Many respondents said that they have prepared their students for the museum visit carefully. They visited the exhibition first, looked for related teaching opportunities, and then visited the museum with their students.

“I went there and checked the exhibition first, thought it over ... I ‘used’ the exhibitions consciously. I was familiar with the important sections and items. I made the students look for certain objects and phenomena that were important and related to our actual topic. The purpose was not just to see millions of things when the important and irrelevant ones were at the same level but to highlight and learn the important ones. I tried to guide them.”

The teachers underlined that the museum is an authentic spot where students can get direct experience, touch, feel and examine the objects of the past to make the teaching materials of textbooks live and learn them more effectively. The teaching material comes alive and the participation in the playful and interactive activities makes a better impression on the students. The museum pedagogy is supposed to be an important part of experimental learning. Due to its special methods and new approaches, it is a beneficial way of learning.

There were some teachers among the respondents who – surprisingly – felt that their subjects cannot be linked to the museum visit, or they did not consider this opportunity in their works. The PE teachers have often used this point although an exhibition about the Olympic Games or the personal belongings of famous sportsmen and world champions could be linked to the teaching material. Creativity and openness can help any field of science to use the programs offered by museums.

The most beautiful memories

It was one of the purposes of the study to recall the most beautiful experience of museum visits. A lot of memories of joy, satisfaction, admiration, and time spent together with classmates were recalled. The memories were filled with emotions and positive feelings and quite often reflected the feeling of immersion and flow. Their contribution to the students’ and teachers’ well-being as well as their satisfaction with learning was mentioned. The positive experience gained in museums encouraged learning and school education, called intellectual interest and attention, stimulated the students, and generated enthusiasm. Furthermore, the teachers were also happy about their students’ joy and the success of out-of-school programs. The students’ whole-hearted reactions were positive feedback for the respondents.

The museums play a great role in promoting science, especially the natural sciences. Nowadays, it is especially important because a lot of people have doubts about certain scientific findings (e.g., many people refuse vaccination during the pandemic), taking science closer to people and highlighting interesting facts can promote the acceptance and the authenticity of scientific findings.

“We have visited a museum in Gemenc to check the domestic animals and plants of Gemenc area. The children were mostly interested in animals becau-

se they felt much closer to them, and they followed the lecture with interest and wonder."

"The best memory about the museum visit was when we visited the Natural History Museum with my fourth-class pupils. When we approached dinosaurs, everybody was surprised and even those who were doing other activities got silent and admired the models."

"The shocking thing was that I had to warn the children to go home."

The museum as an out-of-school learning spot has one more benefit, namely, the *talent management and the orientation for further education*. There was a museum visit that inspired the student's further education:

"We have visited the Museum of Science, Technology and Transport. There was a boy – whose name I do not remember, but I clearly remember his face – who was admiring the vehicles. From that time on, he kept asking his parents to take him to Budapest to visit the museum again. After finishing school, he went to Budapest to study at BUTE (Budapest University of Technology and Economics) and got a degree in electrical engineering. He has returned home recently and thanked us for taking him there and giving him aims to learn. It is the reason why children should be taken to museums."

Childhood memories

33 teachers of the interviewed 45 could recall museum visits from his/her childhood; 10 had no chance to visit museums when he/she was a child, and two did not answer. The rate of them who have no museum visit experience from their childhood either with their parents or with their school is rather high. The following reasons were mentioned: *"the primary school did not arrange such a program", "my parents did not think it was important", "it was not a tradition", "we could not afford it", "I did not visit museums with my teachers when I was a child. Its reason might have been that I attended a small town-school and travelling was not easy.", "I grew up in a small village and had no chance to visit museums at that time."* It shall be mentioned that being a teacher is often a first-generation intellectual career and the families of parents having no degree practically never visited museums.

Those, who have memories, quite often remember the feeling of the visit. The answers are bi-directional including either positive or negative stories. The positive remarks were the followings: *"it was fascinating", "the exhibition was catching", "we laughed a lot", "it was exciting", "I still remember that nice walk", "I liked watching the beautiful paintings", "it was surprising", "it was the first time I saw a plane."* So, the respondents remember mainly emotions. The negative remarks were the followings: *"I was deadly bored", "the museums were not exciting at all at that time", "I felt it dead, there were too many immobile objects with a lot of labels."*

“What has been a great change since my childhood is the fact that there are much more interactive, touchable, and moving exhibited items, which is important. Most of the museums have museum educators trained especially for children groups” – summarised one of the respondents on the difference between ‘old’ and modern museums. As opposed to the previous static activities, the modern programs based on interactivity are much more attractive for the teachers as well.

The sources of cooperation for the museum and school

Most of the interviewed teachers think that there are many opportunities for the school and the museum to cooperate. The following points were mentioned: organisation of project days, museum visits during the excursions, activities during the extra and facultative lessons. The out-of-school lessons, the museum educators’ visits to the school, as well as the interactive celebration of holidays in the museums provide a chance for cooperation. The cheap tickets, the seasonal tickets for schools, the agreements on cooperation between the museum and the school, as well as the search for partnership increase the number of visits to museum pedagogical programs. The secondary school students’ voluntary works in museums provide an opportunity for cooperation. It is an important point that both parties shall be open to the other to be able to cooperate.

“Of course, the museums can establish exhibitions that can be adjusted to a subject easily and can communicate them to students in an interactive, easily understandable and playful way.”

“The mutual partnership is absolutely worthy, I think. The museum gets visitors, money, and reputation through the children, while they get this value back through knowledge, cultural development, and basic education.”

Conclusion

School and teaching activities of the museum complete each other from many points of view. The knowledge and skills acquired at out-of-school spots complete the knowledge acquired in the school, extend the students’ perspectives, enrich them, and provide connections among the fields of science. The gained knowledge, skills, and attitudes can be transferred to the other areas of life as well. Most of the interviewed teachers are willing to take their students to museums not just for the subject but to provide experience and improve the community.

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