

# Conducting qualitative research with families in informal learning environments

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What do you know about families  
in museums?

How do we know that  
(methodology)

# Context

- Visitor studies is a young field
- The number of credible systematic studies has been increasing over the last 20 years
- Now, tend to be theory-driven & examine visitor experience & meaning-making
- Has become a well recognised & respected field of research

# Visitors do learn in museums

- Research studies of the 80's & 90's demonstrated the power of museums to affect learning
- Family research contributed to our understanding of museum visiting as a social phenomenon
- Currently, studying museum visiting within the larger socio-cultural context of the family

# Key views about (family) learning in museums

- A social activity
- Has many different attributes (not just facts and concepts)
- Is mediated by visitors' socio-cultural ID
- Continues to develop long after the visit



BUT it's not all about learning!

# Agendas for the visit

- Family agendas influence museum experience
- Why they visit:
  - Education/participation - political/participation
  - 'home'/personal/community history
  - Entertainment
  - Social event
  - Place
  - Life-cycle
  - Practical issues

# Motivation

- More than one motivation for visiting
- They are prioritised differently - museum type & visitor group
- Having a social experience
- Education &/or entertainment motivation leads to greater learning
- Museum offer a learning-oriented entertainment experience

# Families in hands-on museums

- PhD research: Xperiment!, Eureka! & ARC
- Aim: how family agendas affect the visit
- Constructivism & Vygotsky
- Family observations & interviews, drawings, family summaries

# Geffrye Museum study: WIFR

- Study funded by London Museums Hub
- Aim: how visitors make meaning and the role ID plays in meaning-making
- Target audience: African-Caribbean
- Socio-cultural learning theory
- Conversation analysis
- Conversations recorded using wireless mics
- Group interviews

# Questions/Statements for discussion

- Contexts afford & privilege certain practices & interactions & help structure sanctioned social dynamics
- What do we know about what family members do with whom in which settings and for what purposes?
- How can we measure outcomes & impact across different settings? How/where can we use the results? – discuss in relation to Generic Learning Outcomes (optional!)