Running and Learning in the Museum: a Study of Young Children’s Behaviour in the Museum, and their Parents’ Discursive Positioning of That Behaviour
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Introduction
This paper is informed by the findings of a year-long ethnographic study of eight families with young children, aged two and three years old, visiting a local museum. The research explored the question ‘how do families with young children make meaning in a museum?’, and I was interested in understanding the experience of visiting the museum from the perspectives of the children and families themselves. This paper explores the behaviour of the children during visits to the museum and the ways in which the parents conceptualised and made sense of the behaviour of their children.

During our visits to the museum, sometimes the children ran around the museum to visit different locations in quick succession. At other times, the children took part in more ‘schooled’ (Street and Street, 1991) learning activities in the museum, such as mark making and looking at books. I argue for the importance of understanding this behaviour as an emplaced experience (Pink, 2009); behaviour ranging from running around to mark making are all embodied responses to the places the children encountered during their visits to the museum. Adults, including myself, the parents and the adults who are in charge of the museum, constrained and enabled the social competence of the children (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998) during these emplaced encounters in a number of ways.

In the main part of the paper, I focus on the ways in which parents discursively positioned the different sorts of behaviours of the children during interviews about their visits to the museum. In my analysis, I reflect on the ways in which wider discourses of the ‘good’ parent and the developing child have informed
parents’ sense-making about their children’s behaviour in the museum. Powerful discourses have constructed children as ‘future adults’ (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Walkerdine, 1993), and the role of parents is strongly implicated by policy as the solution to the ‘not-yet-ready’ child (Nichols et al. 2009). Therefore, I argue that for the parents in my study, identities as ‘good’ parents were bound up in their role in supporting the development of their children towards ‘school readiness’. These attitudes guided the way in which parents identified learning in the museum during their talk, and also informed parents’ ambivalent attitudes towards their children’s running around in the museum.

Pre-school children in the museum
During the research I made monthly visits with small groups of families to one of two local museums. Park Museum, situated in an industrial northern city, was visited by five families of affluent socio-economic status. House Museum, situated in a neighbouring industrial town, was visited by three families who lived in an economically deprived area. In total, I made eight visits to House Museum with the families and 12 visits to Park Museum. At all of the museum visits, I was also accompanied by my own daughter, who was also two years old. Table 1 summarises the parent and child participants and which museum they visited.

Table 1: Research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Park Museum</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie and Russell. In their mid thirties¹, Susie works in sales and Russell in IT.</td>
<td>Liam, 37 months and Olivia, 11 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare and Ivan. Clare, in her thirties works in health and Ivan, age 40, in accountancy.</td>
<td>Bryan, 36 months. Bryan’s baby brother was born a month after the research ended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina and Joe. In their thirties, Joe works in local government, while Tina</td>
<td>Millie 38 months and Sienna, 16 months.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ All ages are given for December 2011, when the field visits ended.
Both the museums contained mainly social history, natural history and archaeological artefacts, displayed in ways intended to appeal to both adults and children, encourage learning and enable some level of active interaction with exhibits. During each museum visit, I allowed the action to unfold in as naturalistic way as possible, with the children often leading the way through the museum, and the parents also involved in negotiating the route and trying to keep together as a group. I took part in the visits as a participant observer, and wrote field notes following each visit. Both myself, and the other parent participants, also took turns using a small hand-held FLIP video camera during the visits, producing a large quantity of video over the course of the study. In addition, I interviewed the parents about their perceptions of the museum visits, and I give more detail about the nature of these interviews below. The data set for the research is summarised in table 2.
Table 2: Data set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant observation:</th>
<th>20 visits to museum and park with the families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sets of field notes:</td>
<td>20 sets of field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video recording in the museum:</td>
<td>117 video recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent participant interviews:</td>
<td>6 interviews, audio recorded then transcribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 interview through a translator, notes taken</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 interview done in writing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes
Museum visits all lasted between 45 minutes and two hours.
Field notes were written from memory within 48 hours of the visit, and tended to be 1000-2000 words long.
Video recordings ranged from a few seconds long to 20 minutes.
Adult participant interviews were between 15 and 90 minutes long.

My sense-making of the data
I worked with the field notes, video recordings and audio transcriptions I collected during the research in an intuitive way, making an effort not to ‘other’ the data, but to accept both my presence in the data and the impact of my own memories and subjectivities of ‘being there’ on the analytic process (Pink, 2009). Therefore, my interest in walking and running of the children was drawn equally from both its strong presence in the field notes and on video, but also my own lived experience of being with the children in the museum, tracking them, following them, running after them, losing them and finding them again. I coded the field notes and video for all instances of running, walking and other forms of moving through space, and began to think about the meaning and significance of these practices (see Hackett, in press).

Parents’ talk and sense making
In addition to my own analysis, I wanted to share my data and gather reflections with the parents after the museum visits. The purpose of including child-free parental interviews in my research was in order to understand more about parents’ sense-making about their children’s behaviour. I suggested that an easy and informal way to do this would for me to visit them at home in the evening, bringing the video we had made of the museum visit to watch, and to record our subsequent discussions
and reflections with an audio recorder. However, I found a marked difference in the extent to which the parent participants felt that this research method would be ‘easy’ or ‘informal’. For the five affluent families who had visited Park Museum, this seemed to be a suggestion they welcomed, and I recorded long discussions with either one or both parents from each of these families, often more than an hour long. For the families who had visited House Museum, this proposal seemed much more problematic. Janice, the only degree educated participant from this group, was willing to do an audio interview. Denise spoke little English, so I carried out an interview with her through a translator during playgroup session, and wrote notes rather than audio recorded. Teresa was very nervous about being recorded, and of not knowing how to answer questions I might ask, therefore she asked me to write the questions I wanted to know down on paper, and she would write the answers down at home and bring them back.

While I feel it was positive that I managed to adapt my research approach to suit the preferences of the different families in the research, I am also aware of the shortcomings with my original research design. Only the parents who were degree educated wanted to be audio recorded. Although I have the words and the views of all the parents in some form, there is a discrepancy; the longest transcribed interview with a family who visited Park Museum is nearly six thousand words, whilst the answers Teresa wrote down for me are less than one hundred words long. Never the less, all eight parental interviews covered the topics of children running around in the museum, and all parents talked about the ways in which they felt their children learnt in the museum.

In the next section, I situate the meaning making of children in the museum within the literature on children’s emplaced experience and social competence, before presenting a vignette of the sort of behaviours that occurred during the museum visits.

**Children’s meaning making as an emplaced experience within an ‘arena of action’**

Pink (2009) has argued that learning about the world is essentially an embodied experience, in that we experience the world through all of our sensory channels, and with our whole body. She also stresses the importance of emplaced experience, that
is, the body and mind being in a place (ibid: 25). Christensen (2003) argues for the importance of paying attention to children’s lived, embodied experience of place, in order to better understand their life worlds. In addition, Rasmussen (2004) has drawn a distinction between (adult assigned) places for children and children’s places, to which children themselves attach significance and meaning. Different social identities and possibilities for action may be available to children in different places. For example, Christensen and O’Brien (2003: 6) argue that the possibilities for social competence and autonomy are different for children in the streets of their neighbourhood than within their homes. Therefore, the experience for children visiting a museum is likewise an embodied and emplaced one. In paying attention to the children’s emplaced experience, and the meaning they attach to places, we can seek to better understand their perspectives and the meaning of their behaviour in that place.

Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998) argue that the social competences of young children are enacted within social contexts, or ‘arenas of action’ which both enable and constrain who children can be and what they can do. The family is identified as one such ‘arena of action’, where children learn, interact and enact their identities within certain structures and constraints, both material and ideological. Children’s position in society is constructed socially and culturally by adults (Fog Olwin and Gullov 2003). For example, Ring (2006) has shown that the minutiae of children’s daily life at home, such as the organisation of time and space, tolerance to mess and availability of cultural resources, impact on the construction of children’s identity, and their affordances in terms of meaning making. There are also, however, possibilities within this ‘arena of action’ for resistance (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998). For example, in Danby’s (2002) account of debate and conflict between three year old children in a nursery, the chorus of inaudible noise they directed at their teacher, interpreted at the time as communicative incompetence, could also be read as a sophisticated way of wrestling back peer control over negotiations, by avoiding adult intervention.

Therefore, within the context that meaning making of young children is enacted, emplaced experience and social context both play a role, and are constructed and understood differently by the child concerned, and the adults and institutions which are implicated in that child’s ‘arena of action’ (Hutchby and Moran-
Ellis, 1998). In the next section, I present an example from my research of the way in which emplaced experience and social context were played out in the action during a visit to House Museum.

**Children’s meaning making at the museum**

Over the course of the visits, the children became markedly more confident and familiar with the museum they were visiting, and tended to have specific things they liked to see and activities they liked to do each time they visited. The parents tended to see the museum as a fairly safe and ‘child friendly’ space, where they were happy for their children to do as they wished (within reason), and run quite far away from them as they explored the museum. The following vignette is drawn from field notes and presents some of the different forms of behaviour of the children during one visit to House museum.

**Vignette 24th September 2011**

**In the ‘dining room’ at House Museum**

Each of the rooms in this part of the museum are similarly historic and traditional, with wooden floors, pale pastel coloured walls, white covings and large windows with wooden shutters. The rooms would originally have been flooded with light, but roller blinds screen off the rooms now to protect the interiors from sunlight. The dining room is a grand room dominated by a huge dining table. The dining table is laid with a full dinner service, covered with a glass dome so people cannot actually touch it. There are big windows, fireplace and portraits in this room. In the dining room, Izzy and Anna ran round and round the dining room table – faster and faster they ran in circles, giggling and maintaining eye contact with each other. They were getting a little manic and I tried to calm them down. Natasha was quite different; she was trying to do the museum trail on the worksheet, and walked slowly into the room, holding her clipboard and pencil, looking for the painting with a dog. She then looked closely at the plates on the dining table, and asked why they were under glass. She ran her fingers slowly along the glass case, peering inside.

In the above vignette, being in the grand and unfamiliar environment of the dining room at House Museum was an emplaced experience for Anna, Izzy and Natasha. It was a large space, with a circular piece of furniture in its centre. It was a
mysterious place, with surprising discoveries such as a glass dome covering the objects on the table. It was also an adult dominated space, and these children were significantly younger than anyone else visiting that place that day. Adults also constrained and enabled different forms of meaning making. The museum trail worksheet, which involved looking for detailed information in each room and writing it down, was provided by the museum staff as a recommended activity for children in the museum. Therefore, it was specifically adult endorsed. I myself stepped in to constrain the abandon with which Anna and Izzy were running around the room. This activity was a child-led response to the emplaced experience of the room, and I was aware that it may only be tolerated by museum staff and other visitors to a certain extent. Within this emplaced social arena of action, Anna, Izzy and Natasha made meaning in this instance through gaze, gesture, touch, fast running, slow walking, writing on a worksheet and speaking. Children responded to the experiences they encountered in the museum, and adults responded to the behaviour of children, including to constrain their actions or to encourage their behaviour. Therefore, there is a need to think a little deeper about the forces and processes whereby adults perceive their children, make sense of their behaviour and offer a response. This sense-making of parents is an important constitutive element of the ‘arena of action’ for children when in the museum with their families.

Parenting within the discourse of the ‘good’ parent and the developing child
As James, Jenks and Prout (1998) point out within the Western world childhood is frequently understood not as an experience in its own right, but as a linear path to future adulthood. Walkerdine (1993) has described developmentalism as a powerful metanarrative, within which children are positioned as characters in a plot. Within early childhood learning, the paradigm of children as future adults is expressed in the concept of the ‘not-yet ready’ child (Nichols et al, 2009); children are portrayed as being on a developmental path to social and communicative competence and school readiness, which is the purpose of their day-to-day learning and experience. Nichols et al (2009) have shown how strongly the vision of the ‘not-yet ready’ child is reflected in both commercial and government literature for new parents, both of which offer differing solutions to the ‘lack’ of appropriate communication skills of young children.
The role of parents is strongly implicated in the notion of the ‘not-yet ready’ child (Compton-Lilley et al, 2011; Nichols et al, 2009; Sikes, 1997). Compton–Lilley et al (2011) argue that within modernist notions of cause and effect, dominant in much of current thinking on family learning, particular types of parenting behaviour will produce particular types of school ready child, following a reliable and repeatable model. However, Kukla (2008) has argued that measures of success in motherhood reference culturally specific Western values, and Clarke’s (2006) examination of the Sure Start initiative in the UK shows how the result has been pathologizing of parents living in poorer areas as a threat to their children’s health, safety and school readiness. Therefore, parenting within the discourse of the ‘good’ parent and the developing child can be a task of negotiation and compromise by parents, as their lived experience does not seem to fit with visions of good parenting created by policy makers (Lomax, 2012; Nichols, 2002; Nichols et al, 2009). As a result of this conflict between discourse and lived experience, certain parenting practices become strongly related to parenting identity, as parents work to create family identity of “the ‘proper’ parent and the healthy and happy developing child” (Nichols et al, 2009: 70). Parenting practices become publically performed acts, as parents are aware that others are evaluating them and their effectiveness as a parent (Blackford, 2004; Nichols, 2002).

While the discourse of the good parent is strongly related to parents’ personal identity and sense of being judged, it also draws on specific conceptions of the child, namely developmentalism, the importance of school readiness and the requirements of parents to direct children’s learning.

“I’m sure he would run all day if he could!” (Interview with Clare, 24th August 2011)

In my analysis of the parental interviews, I coded all interview transcripts for references to running and walking, and references to learning, and sorted these responses thematically in order to identify different types of talk about running and learning. This analysis highlighted the way in which running and learning seemed to be falling into oppositional categories. In order to interrogate these phenomena in more detail, I carried out critical discourse analysis (Gee, 1999) of all the instances of parents’ talk about running and learning. Specifically I was looking for the topics, words and emotions the parents associated with running and with learning, in order
to understand more about the cultural models (ibid.) within which these two types of behaviour were situated. The findings of the critical discourse analysis of parents’ talk about running and learning illustrate the way in which they were discursively positioned as binaries of each other. These findings are reflected in the words of all the families, whether in long elaborated sentences of audio interview or short written answers. This is an interesting finding in itself given the socio economic range of the parent participants in the research.

Parents frequently talked about running around and being energetic as a natural and instinctive aspect of their children’s nature. For example, when talking to Clare, I commented that her son Bryan ran more in the art gallery than in the natural history gallery. She immediately answered “I’m sure he would run all day if he could!” Parents also related running in the museum to a number of other factors; children’s familiarity with the location (as the children became familiar with the place, they felt confident to run more), having fun with their friends, and children being able to lead the visit and influencing what the visit encompassed. Parents described the way in which the children used movement to assert their will and have an impact on the way in which the museum visit unfolded:

But it’s definitely him deciding where to go and leading us, although I might suggest going somewhere else ‘cos that’s where the other kids are. But if he doesn’t want to go there, then he won’t go. He’ll tell me where he wants to go (Interview with Clare, 24th August 2011)!

This sense of joy, familiarity, confidence, safety and fun which parents tended to associate with running in the museum was related to the more general sense that running around was a natural and innate desire for their children.

When I asked parents about learning, all stated that they were convinced that learning was taking place during the museum visits. However, the examples parents gave of learning in the museum were in marked contrast to children’s running around in the museum, and usually referred to stationery activities such as mark making, reading or looking at things in close detail. Speaking and using vocabulary was also related to learning. Table 3 below provides an overview drawn from the critical discourse analysis of the key words and associations which parents connected with running and learning in their talk.
Table 3: summary of the key words and message identified from critical discourse analysis of parents’ talk about running and learning in the museum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Running in the museum</th>
<th>Learning in the museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling safe, confident, comfortable</td>
<td>Taking it in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Letters, words, vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends, peer support, showing off to friends</td>
<td>Attention to detail, looking closely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity, repeat visits, remembering the way</td>
<td>Talk, discuss, remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing, doing, interactive, energetic, active</td>
<td>Knowing facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited, enjoy, anticipate</td>
<td>Drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in charge, proprietary, I know this place</td>
<td>Cause and effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch, fiddle, jump up and down, dance, spin, zoom</td>
<td>Challenging, hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative side: can’t concentrate, limited attention</td>
<td>Attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binary: when they are nervous, they are clingy, want to stay near me, hold my hand</td>
<td>Need to slow down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Processing, focussing, engrossed, methodical, fascinated, constructive, purposeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental responsibility: I want to know how my child learns, I want to know how I can best help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above summarises the key themes running through the parents’ talk about running and learning. Of course there were many variations in parents’ conceptions of these themes in their child's behaviour, partially driven by personal experiences and the different personalities of parents and children. For example, Bernard, a science teacher, provided many examples of learning from a scientific perspective, such as cause and effect, while Tina, a former teacher now full time at home, saw herself particularly strongly in the role of educator of her children. In addition, the parents were socio economically diverse, and therefore occupied different positions in relation to discourses of both ‘good’ parent and schooled learning, which are dominated by middle class practices (Clarke, 2006; Kukla, 2008; Nichols, 2002). Therefore, while all parents involved in the research demonstrated the impact of the
‘good’ parent paradigm on their parenting, parents’ perceptions of how well equipped they were to meet the requirements of the ‘good’ parent and their interpretations of what this might mean, varied. It is likely that this also impacted on which parents (i.e. those with degree level education) were most comfortable to be interviewed about their parenting practices.

Below I provide two specific case studies of the way in which parents’ talk about children’s learning in the museum drew on discourses of the ‘good’ parent and the developing child.

Case study 1: national curriculum and learning at home
I interviewed Janice in October, after we had made six out of eight visits to the House Museum. Miriam, aged two, had been on all the visits to the museum, Natasha aged four, had been on several occasions, but was sometimes at pre-school during the time of the research visits. Janice had visited House Museum for the first time as part of my research; however, she had embraced this free resource close to her home, and had visited several times independently with both her daughters during the summer. When I asked Janice about learning in the museum, she was positive learning was happening for Natasha, though she felt Miriam was too young to get much from the visits yet. Natasha had recently started pre-school, and Janice’s references for learning seem to be drawn from the demands of the current school curriculum:

Me: Do you think N is learning [in the museum]?
Janice: Yes! ......Because at the minute in foundation they’re learning how to form the letters and stuff like that, so I’m trying to encourage her not just to write individual letters but to write to string them into words......So if we go and find Nelson, then we write, NELSON and she will write, she will go how do you spell, and I will go N for, E for egg, that kind of thing, and so she is learning.
Me: Would you say learning in the museum is different to other places for visiting and learning?
Janice: The other places that we generally go are like the park, once in a while we will go to a real zoo.... It’s difficult to
incorporate any learning if you go to the zoo. At the stage where she was still identifying animals it was good because you could go ‘ooo that’s that, that’s that’, but with the museum now, not only is she learning about different things that she wouldn’t have learnt about ordinarily, but she is able to write down......so it’s really good, it’s a really good experience (Interview with Janice, 11th October 2011).

In her talk, Janice gave examples of learning within a family setting that specifically support current aspects of the school literacy curriculum. In Janice’s talk, examples of learning change developmentally as the early years and school curriculums change. The zoo was fine for learning new vocabulary when Natasha was younger, but now at four years old, learning required pencil, paper, writing and letters, which Janice was able to access at the museum more readily than at the zoo. As Street and Street (1991) found, literacy is associated almost exclusively with school. In addition, learning is divided into developmental stages, and the task of the parent is to support this linear development by providing developmentally appropriate learning opportunities (Nichols, 2002).

Case study 2: the role of parents in learning

I also interviewed Mike and Samantha in October; they had made one research visit to Park Museum with their daughter Emily, aged three, and were due to make a second visit a couple of days later. However, the family were quite familiar with the museum, and had been visiting independently since Emily was a baby. In the discussion below, Mike and Samantha set up a striking binary between the ‘fun’ time Emily spent in the museum with her friends, and the ‘learning’ time she spent in the museum with them.

Me: yeah, I was going to ask you about learning – do you think it’s different and is it more or less, when she’s with other children or when she’s on her own?
Mike: Possibly learning more when she’s just with us two, isn’t she. I would have thought. More one to one or whatever.
Samantha: It’s more educational with us, more playtime with the others.
Mike: yeah, ‘cos we’re explaining...
Me: Oh, it's more facts?
Samantha: Yeah, I try not to, but I sort of turn into teacher, I don't mean to but I can't help myself. It's tempting isn't it to say, 'oh that's like that because of that, look at this, they live in here'. And I think should I just leave her alone, let her find things out for herself, or let her learn her own way, but then, you can't help it sometimes.
Mike: That's the thing actually, you read books to her don't you?
Samantha: Yeah, we've read the books in the Eskimo igloo [in the museum]. And we put the igloo together and all that kind of thing and she's done it with us. So I think she learns, like you say, I think she's learning quite a lot when she's with us. But then who's to say? But then she does yeah she does fun stuff with the others (Interview with Mike and Samantha, 5th October 2011).

For Emily's parents, Emily's time in the museum with adults was associated with learning, including looking, taking things in and talking about things, whilst time in the museum with friends was associated with fun, running around and playtime. In Mike and Samantha's talk, learning is very much an adult mediated activity, directly led by them through talk and interaction. Samantha and Mike give specific examples of their parenting practices, including reading books, explaining facts and modelling behaviour for Emily by doing activities as a family, such as 'building the igloo', behaviour which Samantha describes as 'turning into a teacher'. In Mike and Samantha's account, the solution to the 'not-yet-ready'"child is for Samantha to assume a new identity as teacher, and provide Emily with opportunities for practising schooled ways of being in the family context. This model of learning from more experienced adults, who hold the knowledge about socially appropriate ways of being (Vygotsky, 1978), is seen as more constructive than the interactions which take place between children and their peers. However, Mike and Samantha also problematize this scenario, when they show that the vision of schooled learning does not fit with the instances when Emily is most obviously joyfully engaged and absorbed at the museum. These instances are 'playtime' which she spends doing 'fun stuff' with her friends, with less adult direction.
“I think, oh god, he can’t concentrate on anything, he’s all over the place” (Interview with Juliette and Bernard, 9\textsuperscript{th} November 2011).

I have argued that children’s meaning making in the museum is an emplaced experience (Pink, 2009), which takes place in a social ‘arena of action’ (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998), in which the actions and attitudes of adults can constrain or enable children’s social competence. In my analysis of parents’ talk about their children’s behaviour and learning in the museum, binaries were created between the natural instinctive behaviours of the children, which were largely associated with running around with friends, and in which the action was directed by the children, and adult-valued learning behaviours, which were largely stationery and directed by adults. This negotiation between visions of a schooled learning to which their children must eventually comply in order to become successful learners, and an acute awareness of their children’s own tendencies to run around with friends, could be a cause of concern for the parents. Bernard’s first reaction to watching the video of his two year old son James in the museum was to comment ‘I think, oh god he can’t concentrate on anything, he’s all over the place!’.

I have argued that the sense-making of parents through their talk is of significance because it plays a large part in constituting the ‘arena of action’ for their children. If parents see certain behaviours in the museums as more valuable, and more closely related to learning and development, they may be likely to act in order to encourage or promote these types of behaviour. For example, Susie described just such a process of adult intervention when she acted to encourage Liam to draw a vase while in the museum. This took place at a certain location in the museum where children are specifically invited to draw a vase through a written sign, provision of mark making materials and a visual display of different vases to inspire them.

So to be fair, he’s very interactive and active, so he’s not really, so I kind of had to make him do that drawing of a vase, which obviously wasn’t a drawing of a vase in the slightest, it was a few scribbles, because that’s not something he would have done of his own accord (Interview with Susie, 7\textsuperscript{th} June 2011).
Parents also often talked about needing to slow their children down physically, in order for them to benefit more from learning in the museum.

Yeah, when it’s just us, she tends to want to go through things very quickly, and I try to slow her down, sort of like, using the trail and saying ‘let’s look for this, let’s look for that’, in an effort to keep her attention (Interview with Janice, 11th October 2011).

If ‘valued’ learning involved looking, talking, reading, and drawing, parents showed an awareness of the need for children to remain still for a period of time in order for them to be able to carry out these activities. In her study of a kindergarten classroom, Wohlwend (2011) described the schooled literacy discourse as ‘print centric, serious and silent seatwork’ (ibid: 69). Similarly, parents in my research sought at times to control their children’s bodies and movement, as well as direct their activities and interest. Such stationary behaviour did not necessarily come naturally to their children, and could be achieved only through effort on the part of their child, and negotiation between parents and child with the aim of creating a balance between ‘valued’ learning activities and the natural interests and behaviours of young children.

I suppose going to a museum is a bit more challenging for him, it makes him work a bit harder mentally, rather than just physically. Because I think when we go outside to places, he tends to be really active, so running and playing and just being really physical, whereas at the museum he’s thinking about things a lot more and taking things in and processing things (Interview with Clare, 24th August 2011).

**Conclusion**
Nichols (2002) argued that parents in her study set literacy within oppositional categories, so that a choice by their children for literacy was a choice against its opposite. For the parents in my research, a choice for schooled literacy practices, which are stationary and adult led, was set in opposition to running around with friends, which was seen as unstructured and child led. Parents’ talk about their children in the museum recognised and articulated the times when their children were most happy, confident and engaged, while at the same time showing an acute
awareness about the forms of learning and behaviour they needed to prepare their developing child to adopt and embrace. Parents drew on a modernist, schooled vision of literacy and learning (Compton-Lilly et al, 2011), even when this paradigm did not fit with their own lived experience and observations of what their child preferred to do in the museum (to run around and play with friends). Rather than the meaning making of the children participants in the museum existing in its own right, it was sometimes understood and categorised within a context in which certain types of parent and child practices were preferred. At two years old, the children were already positioned on a developmental path towards school readiness, where ‘print centric, serious and silent seatwork’ (Wohlwend, 2011: 69), not freely running around, is the preferred and valued means of engaging with experience.

At the end of my discussion with Emily’s parents, Samantha became very reflective and started to talk about the future direction of her daughter’s learning and ways of engaging with the museum.

I suppose the worry is at some point, they will feel, at the moment, they can freely enjoy it now, and when they get older the worry is they’ll just see it all as being educated and switch off, or feel that it’s connected to school. And not feel as free to just run around and press buttons and enjoy. Or connect writing and drawing pictures with being at school, but I don’t know maybe not when they’re younger. I don’t know, that will be interesting to see (Interview with Mike and Samantha, 5th October 2011).

Samantha’s comments here hint at her vision of school as being a serious pursuit, which would involve a more formal type of learning and less freedom to run around. Therefore, Samantha’s concern was that if the museum became firmly associated with experiences of schooled learning as the children got older, then certain types of fun, social, ‘non-school’ activities would no longer be considered possible or appropriate there. In her talk, Samantha reveals ambivalence about the experience of learning at school which she anticipates for Emily. At the same time, she does not make any move towards resisting this inevitable colonisation of Emily’s learning by the schooled approach to 'being educated'. If young children’s learning is discursively positioned as opposite to children’s natural tendency to run around, parents must therefore make a choice between their child’s natural ways of being
and the required processes of socialisation in preparation for success in the formal learning environment for which the child is destined. I argue that this choice is reflected in Samantha’s lack of resistance towards the possibility that school will eliminate Emily’s opportunities for certain sorts of free enjoyment.

Street and Street (1991) noted that even when parents felt ambivalent about school as an institution, they still emphasized particular visions of schooled literacy as being the most valued forms of literacy within the home. They called therefore for an understanding of the wider cultural influences which support the vision of schooled literacy and give it its power, even within the home (ibid). In this paper, I have argued that developmentalism, the intensification of parenting and the discourse of the ‘good’ parent are powerful constructs which ensured parental identities were invested in supporting and adopted a schooled literacy pedagogy in homes, even many years before their children are due to start at school. The notion of the ‘not-yet-ready’ child (Nichols et al, 2009) within the developmentalist paradigm (Walkerdine, 1993) is closely related to the adoption of schooled literacy practices as a gold standard for communication. Within this understanding, young children’s social competence is constrained, as they are automatically categorised as ‘illiterate’. The need for adult intervention and mediation in the learning process (both parents and later teachers) is therefore secured. Further consideration is therefore needed of the implications for both parents and children, parenting and being parented within the discourse of the ‘good’ parent and the developing child, where parental identity is staked on the privileging of particular sorts of communicative practices and behaviours, and the cultural influence of schooled ways of communicating and behaving shape the ‘arenas of action’ for children many years before they enter the formal schooling system.

References


