Cultural Spaces and Learning Identities: Can engagement with museums and galleries change how sixth form students view learning?

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Abstract

This paper builds on and contributes to work in the field of museums and galleries in Education. Although a number of studies within the past thirty years have examined the relationship between these spaces and learning, there has not been a strong focus on sixth form students and the role these spaces can have for them, and their subjectivity of themselves as learners. As such, this study provides additional insights into how engagement with museums and galleries can influence how sixth form students perceive both learning, and themselves as learners. Doing so, I explore students' experiences of visiting three cultural spaces - a combination of two museums and one gallery. This research differs from previous studies in that its preoccupation with sixth form students in this area has not been looked at previously, and through the gathering of qualitative data in an area of Education that is heavily quantitative. Moreover, in doing this it draws strongly on the work of poststructuralist thinkers: Bourdieu, Foucault and Lefebvre in bringing to light the discourses of power which (de)construct identity and subjectivities of self, as a response to experiencing museums and galleries. I argue that engaging with these spaces can impact on how students perceive learning and thus, themselves as learners.

Cultural Spaces: Space, Place and the Subject of Identity

> There is no way out of the culture game; and one's only chance of objectifying the true nature of the games of culture are protected against objectification by all the partial objectification which the actors involved in the game perform on each other.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1984: 4)

> Everywhere there is restriction on freedom. Which restriction is an obstacle to enlightenment, and which is not an obstacle but a promoter of it?
>
> (Foucault, 1997: 10)

Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault both critique the relationship between culture, power and politics as a palimpsest of: doing and undoing; constructing and deconstructing; resistance and compliance but most significantly they claim that culture is inescapable. This not only frames the importance of developing our understanding of culture's role in education but frames and focuses this investigation into learner identity and its relationship to cultural spaces. If we are to acknowledge that a substantial body of research, from inside (Adams et al., 2012; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Phillips, Finkelstein, & Wever-Frerichs, 2007; Selwood, 2010) and outside (Arts Council England, 2004, 2014; DCMS, 2005) of the academy, has confirmed the correlation between engagement with cultural spaces and positive educational or ontological outcomes, then we must question to what extent these spaces do something different to what a school does. How does engaging with these spaces impacts on the learner sense of self, and how are the complex formations of culture and power politics constructing and deconstructing learning and the learner?

In order to define what is meant by 'cultural spaces', we first need to define what is meant by culture. While the concept of culture has been the focus of significant theoretical consideration from all areas of the academy, it continues to be notoriously difficult and ambiguous to define. A useful perception of culture is 'the ideas, customs and social behaviours of a particular people' (OED 'Culture'). While one could argue its ephemeral and contingent nature makes it a difficult focus for a study of this kind, Raud argues the opposite:

> As in many soft social sciences in general, the object of research does not necessarily exist independently of the research, but comes into being, in a Heisenbergian way, only in and through the language with which it is spoke about. Thus, in the paradigmatic case, it is not a discrete object or category of objects, but rather a group of similar, though no necessarily

> connected, things, relations, activities, or of all these linked together, either on a more or less prominent basis or just for a brief moment.
>
> (2016: 12)

As such, the ambiguity of culture makes it no less real than physical objects as it too can influence the experience and lives of human beings. Thus, cultural spaces, for this study, can be broadly defined as: museums, libraries, archives, galleries, cinemas, and any other space which is open to a public body and, as Foucault posits, accumulates social practices as being layered in that particular space (Foucault, 1969). While schools would fall into the category of cultural spaces, I have not included them as they are not a space which is open to 'all' in the same way that those listed are; one can choose to visit a cultural space when one wishes to but visiting a school is often not a choice. While, culture is not limited to those named spaces and is ubiquitous in all areas of human experience, it is these named spaces which consciously promote a certain type of culture to the public. To narrow the focus of this study, I will focus on museums and galleries as cultural spaces, or as socioculturalists would term them 'cultural tools'. Museums are defined as 'a building in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are stored and exhibited' (OED 'Museum') and galleries as 'a room or building for the display of works of art' (OED 'Gallery'). As such, both are connected on the grounds that a gallery is a type of museum, but to this end, the study will follow the self-identification (museum or gallery) which the institutions choose to use.

Moreover, it is worth clarifying at this stage that 'cultural space' as a concept works - in part - to critique our understanding of the space/place paradigm. Tuan argues that a space can be described as an area without any social connections for a human being, whereas place is a location created by human experiences (1977, 4). Clearly, museums and galleries present themselves as places within this taxonomy but as Seamon and Sowers argue 'space and place are dialectically structured in human environmental experience, since our understanding of space is related to the places we inhabit, which in turn derive meaning from their spatial context' (2008, p.44). As such, while this goes someway to explaining how place helps construct space, I will argue that within place, space too constructs how we view and experience place. Within places there are spaces, and it is these gaps

where notions of freedom and individuality allow identity to be problematised and different subjectivities can manifest.

Returning to the epigraph that opened this study, there are two distinct and significant claims regarding how we understand and critically address the role of cultural spaces in education. Firstly, Bourdieu raises the notion that these spaces are inescapably 'performative' (to borrow a term from Butler, 1990); that learners and objects all play in the labyrinth of the culture space and I would argue that the experiences of these spaces are more insightful than the space itself. Secondly, Foucault emphasises the philosophical deliberation over how we access these spaces and to what extent we are stopped from accessing it - physically and intellectually. It is within these arguments that the complex power relationship between museums and galleries, and their relationship to and with the learner become entrenched.

Significantly, the accessibility of space and place came about as a by-product of my Part 2 assignment; while this study had a different focus (teachers' perceptions of poverty), it did raise how some schools – typically located within rural areas - are disadvantaged by not having access to the rich cultural sites that those in more urbanised locations do. While the perceived dichotomy of urban to rural is in theory more of a complex spectrum, this study defines rural as a town to isolated dwelling and urban as a town to major conurbation (Bibby and Brindley, 2013). With that in mind, there are estimated to be over 2500 museums and galleries in England (Smithies, 2011, 5), the majority of these are located in major conurbations: London has over 250, Birmingham has 26 and Manchester has 20, whereas Banbury (a large market town) has just one museum and one gallery. Having worked in an inner city London school I was aware of the free bus service and reduced price tube transport available to young people (TFL), which enabled students to visit these spaces. Additionally, there was a variety of outreach work coming from museums and galleries with schools and colleges. However, since moving to a rural school it was noticeably lacking and while it would be wrong to say, having a museum or gallery nearby means that people will visit it, it is right to say that it can be curtailed by their inexistence. At this point, I acknowledged how marginalised the school appeared in regards to its access to cultural sites and wondered to what extent this impacted on the young people in the school.

To place this within my educational setting, I am currently working as a teacher in a comprehensive secondary state school with 1095 students on roll. Norham School, is located in a small village in north Oxfordshire. The majority of students are transported by school bus from a variety of villages, and there is a public bus which brings students from the local market town. Historically the school has serviced a large rural catchment area with low levels of economic poverty, as indicated by Pupil Premium and Free School Meals measures. With the low levels of economic poverty, students are often considered 'fortunate' compared to a national context but are immobilised in marginalised, and sometimes isolated, communities with little access to cultural spaces outside of school. Thus, this is arguably the case for many schools in the UK and as such, this study offers further insight into discourses regarding forms of 'geographical exclusion' (Sibley, 1995) and their impacts.

Collaboratively, I worked with the Deputy Head of English in the same school named Charlotte (a pseudonym) to organise the school trips, as well as collect and evaluate the data. We identified that we would make this intervention available to a group of sixth form students because of the more undirected time available to them in the school day. For this intervention to work, we actively did not want it to seem like a burden as we anticipated that there might be some disinterest. As such, the principle behind this intervention were: to encourage and enable students to access museums and galleries; to see in what ways this would impact their understanding of learning, and how they consider what a 'good' learner is. To do so, we took the students to the following cultural spaces:

1. Ashmolean, Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford.
2. The Pitts Rivers Museum, Oxford.
3. Modern Art Oxford, Oxford.

We chose these sites because they accumulated a variety of interests inside and outside of the curriculum and were within a 30-mile radius of the school. We wanted the experience to be 'different' to school and to open them up to the experience of an alternative curriculum to see how, if at all, it changed their conception of what learning is, and how this has changed how they view themselves as learners.

The purpose of this study is to establish the impact that sixth form students involvement with cultural spaces may have on their identity as learners. As such, to what extent would it benefit students to engage more with cultural spaces and whether there would be value in making them an important part of curriculum planning. If we are to agree that culture is inescapable than to what extent do educators have a role in supporting students to *act* within its *game*? Doing so, I will focus and interrogate the manifestations of power through the cultural space and what identities, actions and practices are made (im)possible as a result of this experience.

Based on this focus, I will frame my literature review around these key questions:

1. Can engagement with 'cultural spaces' change how students conceptualise their identity as learners?
2. What is the relationship between learning place(s) and students view of their learning identities?
3. How has this relationship been formed?
4. What role can engagement with 'cultural spaces' have in changing students' view of their learning identity?

Literature Review

1. Can engagement with 'cultural spaces' change how students conceptualise their identity as learners?

Both culture and space/place, as separated entities, have been subject to considerable attention from researchers in deciphering whether they impact on how we view ourselves, and others around us; both concepts can be seen in an array of papers in various spheres and disciplines across the academy. Whereas 'cultural space', a site which identifies and promotes itself as a public place of cultural value, or as the government suggest 'preserve, promote and protect our national heritage' (DCMS, 2016), have received less attention. Much of this attention has come from the museology field within cultural studies, but it has also appeared on the peripheries of education.

Within the literature, there are a plethora of positive comments regarding the influence that museums and galleries have on those who use these spaces in government documents (Mendoza, 2017; Arts Council England, 2004, 2014; DCMS, 2005) and professional association reports (Museum Association, 2016, 2017). For example, the Mendoza Review states these places, 'offer spaces where we can experience beauty and understand our place in the world' (2017: 5). While on one hand statements such as this seem to proffer the impact these places can have on people who engage with them, on the other, it can be seen as a vision as to what governments and professional associations - or at least researchers on their behalf - want museums and galleries to offer people. These reports fundamentally draw on papers and reports from government bodies and professional organisations but fail to engage with the body of literature that comes from universities. For example, in the Mendoza report there are 95 references to other sources, of which none are a publication from the academy and almost all are professional or government reports. With a vast array of literature missed out it brings into questions the accuracy and validity of such reports while raising the question as to why does this happen? In the answer we find ourselves having to understand power and the role of different stakeholder perspectives within the report. What I would argue here is that the literature suggests there are clear anxieties between different stakeholders and their consideration as to why museums are important. In other words, much of the professional and governmental rhetoric around museums and galleries seemingly talks, in a liberal humanist way,

about how important they are to society while making significant cuts to their funding. Lynch, a researcher preoccupied with the ethics of museums, goes as far as to suggest that professionals in museums believe in the 'assumptions about the worth of the work they do on behalf of others' (2013: 218), and Wong argues that they are concerned and cautious about collecting the views and opinions of the public because of what it may reveal (Wong, 2012). It is clear that there are a variety of discourses which are made possible and impossible by the creators of these spaces.

In recognition of these pluralistic voices, Holden (2006) proposes that they are entrenched in the values which originate from the perspective of the stakeholder: government, cultural institutions and the public. Governments are aligned with the instrumental value of these places as having 'aspirations to contribute to a wider agenda of social change' (Davies, 2008: 260). While the museums and galleries themselves are associated with institutional value (Holden, 2006: 17) – in other words, the value of what an institution considers important - for users, Holden attributes intrinsic values, that '... set of values that relate to the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally and spiritually' (2006: 14).

With this in mind, it is the user's experience which is rarely accounted for in any empirical data by government or professional institutions. As such, there appears to be a(n) (un)conscious bias in which these spaces are able to self-identify, through their position of power as government or professional association, what is true and what is rational. In other words, they determine what they consider worthy of presentation and how it is to be understood, positioning the visitor as someone who has the experience 'done' to them and are not seen as doing. Arguably, such preoccupations reflect a widely accepted assumption that these places do influence how people view their own identity. This anxiety, I think, is best presented through an example from the Marxist theorist, Henri Lefebvre who argues '(social) space is a (social) product. […] the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action' (1991: 26). The analogy of space working as a tool for the mind is a significant one, and one which Lefebvre argues social constructivists in the USSR in the 1920s and 30s failed to recognise. For socialism to have worked, the social spaces, needed to reflect the culture and values of socialism, would have need to have been built (59). It is from ideologies like this, that we see the formation of these spaces as points of both liberation and control, and therefore

museums and galleries as politicised places that are instruments of a particular social and cultural hegemony.

Now, to address the indeterminacy of identity and questions over how it is formed: Sören Kierkegaard, widely considered the first existentialist philosopher, states that 'life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards'. Here Kierkegaard outlines the main reason it is difficult to discuss identity in terms of cause and effect. Thus, we make intelligible who we are to ourselves, using our actions as evidence. You cannot know who you are until you see what you do (Weick, 1979). A later existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Satre echoes this sentiment when he explains the performativity of identity through the example of a waiter: 'the waiter in the café plays with his condition in order to realise it' (1943). By which Satre argues that the waiter needs the café to be able to achieve his transition as the customers in the café give his performance consequence. It is the customer that validates the waiter's identity being performed. As such, we see the significance of place in the role of identity as being the major thrust in Vygotsky's work which is dedicated to the notion that all human mental functioning is socioculturally, historically and institutionally situated (Vygotsky, 1960, 1978, 1981a, 1981b, 1987). Therefore, identity is abstract and transient yet somehow entangled with something permanent and immobile. Arguably, both museum and galleries offer opportunities to engage with this indeterminacy to both confirm our existing identity, and to explore the capacity of others.

Significantly, for Vygotsky identity is viewed as a, 'transition from a social influence external to the individual to a social influence internal to the individual' (Vygotsky, 1960: 116). As such it is through the learners action, or 'mediation', that sociocultural researchers capture identity as being more 'a sense of inner identity' (Erikson, 1968: 87) as opposed to something fixed and assured. Here, Erikson recognises how identity is not fixed but is something felt by the individuals within themselves, and as an experience which never finds completion. The proposition stands that both culture and place are cultural tools which can influence the formation of identity, and therefore can influence how learners can view themselves as learners. While Erikson and Vygotsky have similar perspectives, an important difference is that Vygotsky considers human development as originating in social activity, whereas Erikson's finds analytic primacy in individual mental functioning as the

origin of human development (Peneul and Wertsch, 1995: 84). This argument between both poles of identity research, which follow in the vein of existing arguments between existentialism and essentialism, are still prevalent in research today.

However, what both arguments can agree on is that a sociocultural approach uses human action – what people *do* - as the focus for data collection. This allows a reasoned account of identity not as a fixed and monolithic structure but something dynamic and changing. This is useful in that it focuses on what is 'performed' and when looking to see if engagement with cultural space can change students' perceptions of being a learner, what a researcher should focus on is what the learners are *doing* in these spaces and why they think they are *doing* it. Asking someone 'who are you?' is a particularly difficult question and in response to such a question, the subject will leave out more than what they are. If we are to agree that identity is best understood through the actions which people *do* then this is an important consideration for capturing data; what we are wanting to ask more precisely is, 'what are your thoughts about the way you function in your surroundings?'

In line with this, Hooper-Greenhill's qualitative study uses both teachers' perspectives and pupils' perspectives on the outcomes of visiting museums but does not ask directly participants about their identity but analyses the discourses that present themselves when discussing their experiences. This builds on her earlier pilot report 'Inspiration, Identity, Learning: The Value of Museums', and as a result, captures some areas which influence the users sense of self. Museums were seen to promote:

1. Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity
2. Knowledge and Understanding
3. Social Skills
4. Attitudes and Values
5. Action and Behaviour

Through a questionnaire focusing on the *doing* of participants of which there were 56,810 pupils and 3,113 teachers in England, Hooper-Greenhill's large study recognised a positive outcome in regards to all areas, concluding that it 'was clear that what was learnt worked to shape the views about themselves. We are what we learn' (2007: 166). Another large-scale study was done in America which conducted randomised control trials involving 3,811 students varying from 8 to 16 years old.

They focused on the impact the museum visit had on: critical thinking, historical empathy, likelihood to visit museums in the future and tolerance. They discovered that students who participated in the visit were significantly stronger critical thinkers and were able to retain more factual information (Bowen et al., 2014). This is supported by research which goes on to state that one of the positive effects is that students hold onto visit memories long after the experience of it (Dewitt and Storksdieck, 2008). And if memories are what help to (re)form our sense of self then it is easy to see the powerful impact visits to museums and galleries can have on a learner.

While these studies demonstrate how the spaces can impact how learners view their identity, it does not argue that this identity has any link to positive educational attainment. Hattie argues this point in his influential publication *Visible Learning,* when he calculates that visiting these sites has an effect size of 0.26, which is low considering the 'hinge point' is 0.4 (2018). However, Hattie is using an average across what he calls a 'meta-meta-study' (Hattie, 2011: 3) and there are three questions that this score raises: firstly, to what extent do these studies capture effectiveness in the area of identity? As previously discussed, it is an area which is often difficult to qualify and capture due to its momentary and abstract existence. Secondly, if these spaces do influence how people view themselves as learners, does this in fact always result in academic attainment? The literature raises two multi-year studies which do challenge Hattie by arguing that inquiry based museum education does have positive impact on standardised tests (Housen, 2001; Curva et al, 2005). Thirdly, to who is this impact most or least effective? Some argue that it is experiences such as visiting museums and galleries which have higher impact on low-income students comparatively to their wealthier counterparts (Alexander et al., 2001) and therefore one could argue that this is where attempts at diminishing the attainment difference could be focused. Additionally, it has been argued that the benefits are more impactful for younger people than older (Bowen et al., 2004).

Here it is worth asking, what is it that museums and galleries *do* which schools *do not*? If the 'important' cultural objects they hold can define museums and galleries, then perhaps it is these objects which have the influence on learners. Snow proposes that objects are 'good to think with' (2002,3), Corum states that these objects are 'part of a highly coded social language (2002: 1-2) and Mason views objects as carrying 'the authority of this witness ' (2002: 13). All of the above argue

that there is a 'symbolic third' (Froggett, 2011: 67) mediating the meaning of the objects with personal experience and memory which triggers the visitor in ways which other materials do not (McManus, 1993). While one could argue that within this experience there is mediation present in the form of labels and notices, this is notably less so than in a school setting. Students are given more independence, as a result of their being very few guiding authority figures. As such, it is the sensory qualities of these objects which can be seen to influence and change how students perceive themselves arguably more so than a classroom (Spector et al 2001 in Chatterjee and Noble 2013: 45) and I would argue, this is also influenced by the independence they experience.

Clearly the experience of museums and galleries is a social one which visitors share with others (Falk and Dierking, 1992). The importance of a cultural space as a social space is a significant one, and arguably it is within this social space that a mediation of cultural tools occurs. Sociocultural theorists (Moll, 1990; Wertsch, 1985a, 1985b) and activity theorists (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 2001) would argue that the mediation between cultural tools and learner plays a significant role in the development of the learner's intellectual capability. Moreover, it can be perceived that the object-rich environments of museums play a crucial role in our understanding of how museums and galleries help inform and conceptualise learners' learning identities.

Albeit, there is a caveat to the influence of these objects on the human psyche which postcolonial theorists present most clearly through their decentralised view of western theocracy which offers a useful perspective into what these spaces *do* to people who come into contact with them.

Homi Bhabha defines cultural spaces as fitting more broadly into his term of 'third space'. These are spaces which 'challenge our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People" (1994, 37). Thus Bhabha argues, in the same moment these spaces seemingly construct and deconstruct parts of our identity based on the historical objects. Here Bhabha raises the significant question of: what do these places *chose* for us to learn about and what do they keep in exile? As such, he perceives identity as brought into being as a reaction (or 'mediation' to use a Vygotskian term) to 'cultural tools'. It is worth considering what 'kind' of identities these spaces construct and within these identities what kind of thoughts and action do we bring into being. For example, do we

(re)produce stereotypes; notions of sameness and otherness; notions of whiteness and maleness, and various other social and cultural constructs. While the literature argues that these spaces can influence people's sense of self, Bhabha reminds us that we can not assume they are always positive and they may in fact bring about views and identities which some may deem negative.

Overall, while there are questions about the relationship between the research methods used to capture identity and identity itself, there are strong correlations in the literature between engaging with these cultural spaces as a cultural tool and the positive impact that this can have on the formation of identity, or how identity impacts on that formation. That said, one must also question whether there are also negative impacts that this type of experience can have on views of the self, and others.

2. What is the relationship between museums and galleries, and students view of their learning identities?

If we are to accept that learning is a result of interactions with the world and those who live in it (Piaget, 1952; Dewey, 1953, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978; Ginsberg & Opper, 1998; Hein, 1998; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Tishman et al., 2007), then we must consider environment as a fundamental factor for learning to take place. As a cultural tool, sociocultural researchers, such as Harry Daniels, argue that social spaces for learning are of the highest priority for learners and are often overlooked (2017: 93).

In regards to museums and art galleries, these environments combine issues of social, pedagogical and physical space within one place. Falk argues that a driving principle behind why field trips, a category museums and galleries so often fall into within educational research, benefit students is due to the realisation that place does have an impact on learning (1983), and therefore the identity of the learner. As such, the argument is that the place where learning happens should be given as much credit as other pedagogical considerations made by an educator.

Some have suggested that it is the 'exhibition' part of museums and galleries where the impact on the visitors' identities is at most likely to change (O'Doherty, 1999: 45). A vanguard volume titled *Thinking About Exhibitions* provided a series of case studies that demonstrated that exhibitions

works as a communicative medium where objects and texts are arranged to construct meaning were linked to changing peoples' views (Ferguson, Greenberg and Naire, 1996). What is argued is that through engagement with broader philosophical, cultural and political ideas, outside of one's ordinary *everyday* experience, peoples' sense of self is challenged. Thus, we can see museums and galleries as places which house 'the extraordinary', which allows for visitors to engage with the views they hold and how they perceive their self (McCarthy et al., 2004).

Alas, museums and galleries include far more than exhibitions though: "Like traditional temples and palaces they so often emulate, art museums are complex entities in which both art and architecture are parts of a larger whole" (Duncan, 1995: 1). It is the conditions which these built environments construct that influences how visitors act out particular behaviours, beliefs and attitudes – in a similar way to the Satre example previously mentioned. Hein goes as far as to argue that 'light levels, wall colours, placements of exits and entrances, noise, crowds' (1998: 137) directly influences visitors view of learning. Therefore, some people perceive that museums and galleries cannot be effective sites for learning due to the inconsistencies and high-risk nature of factors outside of the learner's control. That said, it does bring to light the significance of the learning space (objects and architecture) as a core context which constructs a space for meaning to be mediated. Moreover, physical and contextual characteristic of space powerfully influence the conditions visitors experience both perceptually and affectively (Tishman et al., 2007), to which theorists like Bourdieu through his conception of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) would criticise as purposefully constructed by those in power to encourage conservation of social inequality.

While spatial factors can cause challenges, for other they can be part of a positive response, for example, improving concentration or allowing users to converse. This site of dualistic purpose is part of a broader context which is shaped by curators, designers and organisations to position the objects within an intellectual framework which is seen as a display. As Mayer argues, such arrangements can compromise learning by creating distance, physically and psychologically, between the objects as well as by dictating cultural viewpoints. Within Mayer's argument are parallels with the Focauldian argument of surveillance being a medium for control (See Foucault, 1991). She proposes that the surveillance systems which act to protect both visitors and art, also

elicit negative emotional responses from visitors (Mayer, 2012, 2014). Moreover, it is arguably these structures in place that are there to create the learning experience are also on some levels, detracting from it. Consequently, Mayer argues visitors bring and act out their own behavioural assumptions in response to this prior 'knowledge', such as through the myth that one must be quiet inside museums (Mayer, 2012).

The concept of museums and galleries as spaces for meaning-making is powerful, and if we are to agree that it is through ones actions that identity is influenced then these sites are associated with being able to influence learning identities. How they are influenced is unpicked by Pallasmaa in the study *The Multisensory Museu*m, in which he questions the domination of vision as the prominent modality in how museums are designed, and significantly in galleries, most acutely, declaring museum spaces that will 'enhance and focus perception, activate and sensitise the senses of the visitor, and facilitate an intense dialogue between exhibits and the viewer' (2014: 240) Another factor which influences learning identities is the access of information - physically and intellectually- which impacts cognitive outcomes (Tishman et al., 2007) and I would argue perceptions of ones self as a learner.

There have been arguments within the past five years from an expanding field of neuroscience which proffers that contextual cues influence learning. Zisch, Gage and Spiers (2014) propose a framework for how the mind represents and remembers space. Their research contends that the mind constructs mental images of architecture to help navigate and construct memories. This falls in line with other researchers who have found that viewing art in a museum is more: stimulating, engaging and enjoyable than viewing images of art on a computer. Moreover, students who visited the art gallery were able to recall more information, which the researchers argue, is a result of the spatial cues assisting their retrieval. To conclude the research claims visiting works of art in a museum improves cognitive and affective processes (Brieber et al., 2014).

Hubard (2015) also distinguished between seeing works of art in a gallery or museum and that of a reproduction. While Hubbard argues that her small-scale study found that students use the same mental processes to interpret the images regardless of the format, she states that being exposed to the original affords students heightened visual detail which resulted in more complex

interpretations. Fundamentally, there is a clear argument for direct engagement with objects as they seem to enable students to gain deeper understanding, higher critical thinking and encodes this within their long-term memory. Additionally, these objects offer platforms for creative works which also inspire creativity in their visitors (Foley, 2014; Norris, 2013; Rasmussen, 2012; Vergeront, 2014).

As a result, it is clear that the relationship between museums and galleries with the people who visit them are engaged in politics of power, knowledge and control. That said, within this relationship there are key cognitive advantages to learning in such a space. If we are to follow the Vygotskian line of argument that what they do informs their identity, then it is clear these places offer students an experience which can positively influence what they do as learners, and therefore how they perceive themselves as learners.

3. How has this relationship been formed?

Hooper-Greenhill contends in her essay 'The Museum in the Disciplinary Society' that the public museum was created in reaction to the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. She argues that it 'created the conditions of emergence for a new "truth", a new rationality, out of which came a new functionality for a new institution' (1989:63). Constructed as a medium for sharing what had been held privately, the public museum was a site where what had previously been concealed could now be exposed. Hooper-Greenhill states that they 'exposed both the decadence and tyranny of the old forms of control, the ancient regime, and the democracy and utility of the new, the Republic' (1989: 68). As a result the new republic appropriated aristocratic and church collections and arranged for these to be displayed in line with rationalist principles of classification. As Bennett states, 'the Revolution transformed the museum from a symbol of arbitrary power into an instrument which […], was to serve the collective good of the state' (1995, 89).

'The collective good of the state' was part of a radical ambition democratising access to these cultural objects, and for people such as Henry Pitt Rivers, this means constructing a museum environment 'in which the visitors may instruct themselves' (1891: 115). However, within a site which was characterised by a fundamental division: on one hand, state and on the other the people,

came the creation of new cultural markets (academies, galleries, salons). This allowed more access to high art by a broader public and as Habermas states, it was this which allowed for new institutions to form new ways of critiquing and thinking about art (1989). This was paramount for the creation of museums and galleries as works of culture previously derived their meaning from their place within tradition, typically from the monarch or church. Now, with both removed from state power, the process of arriving at a meaning and deciding the value for an object, for the first time, came from debate between a new emerging bourgeoisie - to borrow the Marxist term -whose values were a reaction to those of the republic.

I offer this brief historical genealogy to help build a picture of where public museums started to help us understand where they are now. I would argue that the main issue which concerned museums then concerns museums now; created as a site for a *new* type of audience, these places engendered a palpable class divide.

Significantly, Bourdieu (1987) picks up this divide through the relationship between art displays in galleries through patterns in their social usage. As a result he argues that galleries remain the least publically accessible of all public institutions because of their commitment to displaying art which alienates those without the appropriate cultural skills to access it. As such, Bourdieu concludes the critical viewpoint that while galleries, and arguably too, museums, are open to the public, they are in reality open more so to the bourgeoisie – a middle-class who are able to engage with the cultural tools because of their own prior knowledge. This agenda of 'social inclusion' has been prevalent since the terms inception in the 1970s. Since then a focus on those who are socially excluded has been synonymous with the term 'poverty'. Walker defines poverty as 'a lack of material resources, especially income, necessary to participate in British society", while defining social exclusion as "a more comprehensive formulation which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society' (1997: 8). With the 1997 election of New Labour in the United Kingdom there came a new vigour in policies to combat social exclusion and promote social inclusion. As a result, museums and galleries became subject to a wider access agenda, mainly through the creation of educational programmes (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

Currently the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport publish monthly accounts for the visitors attending ten of England's largest museums and galleries (2018). Albeit showing a general increase in visitor numbers there is no useful data gathered on whom these visitors are. As such, there is no evidence existing which convincingly argues that the relationship between these cultural spaces and what kind of audience they serve, have changed in England. Sandell proposes that while there have been movements towards change from: government, strategic bodies, funding agendas and research, there are still inhibitors counteracting these, such as: entrenched attitudes within the sector, society's perceptions and a lack of workforce diversity (2003: 51).

To focus on the society's perceptions it is worthwhile considering Foucault's 1967 essay 'Different Spaces', in which he claims that the museum are a heterotopia. A heterotopia is a space of difference; a space that is held at the centre of culture but where elements of that culture are suspended or removed from their original context or reversed. While Foucault's examples of heterotopias are the cemetery and the ship. The former as Adorno claims, are connected more than just by linguistic association – museum and mausoleum (1981: 175) - and therefore it is arguably easy to see how as a cultural site Foucault can be perceived to take a dim view of their use; for some, the museum represents a 'meditative necropolis' and 'the historicity of death' (Merleau-Ponty, 1993: 99-100). Therefore museums and galleries clearly are preoccupied with the past in what they present and display. In other words, all objects by their very existence were made in the past (near or far) and suspended out of context so that visitors can considered the museum experience in terms of nostalgia (Lowenthal, 1985) and memory (Kavanagh, 2000). It is this preoccupation with looking back which some research argues creates cultural barriers for some potential users.

To return to Sandell, what is significant to me is that his thinking does not correlate social exclusion with economic poverty - as does government rhetoric - but as Bennett also argues - through a lens of Bourdieu - that level of educational attainment and occupational status have more direct correlations with whether people visit museums and galleries, than their income (1999: 243). Bennett's study proposes that the category of occupation that visits these spaces the most are 'professionals' and those who visit them the least are the 'unemployed' and 'students' (1999: 245). With free admission to museums introduced in 2001 in England, it becomes clear that the cost of

accessing these sites are not inhibiting use of museums and galleries, but other cultural factors are. A Bourdieuian critic would argue, that this divide is still in place as a systematic way of institutions of high art and intellectual culture controlling, and selectively transmitting, knowledge to a professional middle class so as to reinforce a distinction between them and the rest of the population.

While it is the educated professionals accessing museums, galleries are argued to be even more polarised in the audience that they attract; many studies have shown gallery audiences to be more affluent with higher educational outcomes than the rest of the general population (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). Additionally, others claim that 'surveys have repeatedly demonstrated that museum visiting in the UK remains primarily a white upper/middle class pastime' (Eckstein and Feist, 1992: 77). While this comes out of research prior to the millennium it still remains a prominent concern for the twenty first century (Longhurst et al., 2004; Golding and Modest, 2013).

This is not solely a British trend, in that Schuster has compared data across various European and North American countries with a plethora of management and administration styles, but finds that the audience remains consistent: a small group of educated, wealthier, middle and upper class elite (1995). While much work has been done since the 1990s to improve perceptions of museums and galleries, both are held as accountable for some of the success London schools have had in improving outcomes (Social Mobility Commission, 2017: 25) in comparison to other areas in the country. Those who access them are argued to have improved educational outcomes and the impact is most significant at early years level (Burgess, 2017; Sibieta, 2014). While London has shown signs of overcoming the historical audience dilemma – arguably in reaction to their diverse population – other areas in England still fall short.

Fundamentally, the relationship between museums and galleries is one that is entrenched in historical, social and cultural influences that originated with intentions to usurp the ruling classes and liberate the people but has in many respects continued with the same regime. Class remains at the centre of discourses on the relationship between audience and place.

4. What role can engagement with 'cultural spaces' have in changing students' view of their learning identity?

At this stage I would like to address the notion of 'cultural spaces' as singular buildings, in as much as we refer to a museum or a gallery as a single and static site. Cultural spaces are in fact pluralistic in their identity. A useful analogy would be that of a house; we consider a house to signify one particular building but within that building there are sub-spaces (kitchen, dining room, bathroom), and similarly this is how museums and galleries work. When I pose the question 'what role can engagement with "cultural spaces" have in changing students' view of their learning identity?' we must first engage with the pluralistic nature of the site. Similarly, at any one time, these cultural spaces will represent the coexistence of a range of different beliefs and value systems.

If we are to contend that place influences identity - as previously discussed - then we must consider the array of cultural tools - objects, artefacts and paintings - which are constructed and suspended in these spaces which allow for a learner to engage with an experience which could offer them scope for change. What happens when learners encounter one of these cultural tools and try to understand it? How do learners attempt to make meaning?

Appropriating a hermeneutic approach into museum learning, Hooper-Greenhill argues that the first thing the learner tries to do when presented with an unknown object is to try and find something which we recognise or grasp. If this connection is made the learner is likely to continue to use their prior knowledge to decode the object, although if the learner is unable to connect they are likely to give up and move on (1994: 46). The latter can result in a negative learning experience which could negatively affect the identity of a learner by reducing their self-confidence. While Hooper-Greenhill does not reference Vygotsky, there are clear parallels with his theoretical concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. This can be defined as:

> The distance between a child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined though problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers
>
> (Vygotsky, 1978: 86)

If a person is working outside of this zone then it will not necessarily result in development but if they can work within it then it can. While the guidance in museums can come from an adult in

person, in most cases it comes through the decision making that has taken part in the selection and presentation of the cultural tools. While the learner is alone, they are part of a wider collaborative community, sometimes physical and social, at other times, cultural.

If we are to assume that a connection is made between the object and the learner, Hooper-Greenhill states that the learner will continue to process the object and construct it's meaning (1994, 46). At all stages the mind is in a question and answer mode, until a continuous bank of answers builds up enough parts to help one construct an interpretation of the whole. This is likely to result from the prior knowledge and experience of the learner and this will shape perceptions and experiences of the object(s) (Falk et al., 1998).

As such, each person's prior knowledge is different and the methods of understanding they bring varies so no two people are necessarily influenced the same by the same object. That said, being able to create a connection with the object is a cause of motivation for learners. Looking at motivation more broadly, findings have demonstrated that 'visitors' motivations significantly affect how and what they learned from exhibitions' with the two main motivations being described as education and entertainment (Falk et al., 1998: 112). It is from these experiences that enjoyment and curiosity of objects can lead to desire to learn about them. It is through that 'intrinsic' desire and motivation that museums and galleries can be seen as important sites which can influence peoples' view of learning identities. Moreover, it is often what prior knowledge groups of people hold at a particular time and place that enables people to take their 'place' within a particular societal group which can affirm or challenge how we view ourselves as learners.

A socioconstructivist view of identity allows the learner to 'come to know [his/her] place in the varied contexts' (MacLure, 1993: 377). Colden and Smith further this argument by stating that we learn our identity through questioning where we are and who we are in relation to other people (1999: 713). Retuning to Bourdieu it is worth introducing his concept of habitus: for Bourdieu, it is the totality of learned habits, this can include style, taste and other non-discursive knowledges for a particular group of people (1990: 66-67). Habitus gives a person a sense of place in relation to other people. As such, cultural spaces have the scope to make one 'fit in' but equally feel out of place. Part of the process of fitting in involves the (re)construction of fragmented identities as learners face

unfamiliar discourses which can both offer opportunity and intimidation. Reay et al. pick up on this sense of threat and claim 'when habitus enters a field with which it is not familiar however, the resulting disjuncture can generate change and transformation but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty' (2005: 28). Thus, the influencing power of institutions such as museums and galleries pivot and offer learners potentially positive experiences but also equally negative experiences which can go on to form how they view themselves as learners.

Moreover, these places are argued to improve feelings of 'wellbeing' with visitors describing feelings of happiness and satisfaction (Scott et al. 2013: 53). Holden states that these experiences address our needs to experience 'the religious, the numinous and the sublime' (2004: 34). Others contend that the benefit of this enjoyment can translate into the persons public life, extending their 'capacity for empathy' through exposing them to experiences of people and cultures 'vastly different from their own' (McCarthy at al., 2004: 47). As such, the enjoyment of learning within a social context reinforces a sense of belonging and place. Through spaces which contain objects of mystery and intrigue it allows people to create social bonds which reinforces 'a sense of unity and identity' (Holden, 2004: 34). Therefore, museums and galleries can encourage visitors to consider themselves as part of a learning community, and therefore consider themselves as learners.

As such, museums and galleries hold a pivotal role in engaging people as learners outside of other educational institutions. They offer spaces and tools in which they can engage with the thought processes of learning and feel the enjoyment of learning, which can - if done well - motivate visitors to consider their identity as a learner.

What does visiting cultural spaces *do* and how can this benefit Sixth Form students?

While the literature makes various claims that cultural spaces as sites can offer visitors experiences, which can influence their identity through understanding of themselves and others around them. It is much less obvious as to what museums and galleries offer learners that schools do not.

One of the responses which comes powerfully through the research is the significance of how accessing these spaces allows learning to be more memorable. There is something about the experience of these spaces which attaches the learning to a person's long-term memory (Kavanagh, 2000; Foley, 2014; Norris, 2013; Rasmussen, 2012; Vergeront, 2014). As such, these spaces offer the opportunity for fruitful learning experiences which can stay with learners for a prolonged period of time, but arguably so too can those in school. Therefore, the nuances of education outside of the classroom, and potential ways that schools can include the features of museum and gallery education within a school setting become areas of particular interest.

If we are to view the learning experience as different to that of a school, then it is arguable that how they view themselves as learners in this environment may also be different. While the museum visitor is not an 'empty vessel, waiting to be filled with our wisdom' (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 7) but an active participant in a process of thinking (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994), it seems that much of the learning in these cultural spaces is the same as that of a school.

That said, the question of who has access to these sites remains at the center of this study. If museums and galleries are argued to service a particular group of professionals in society (Eckstein and Feist, 1992; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Golding and Modest, 2013), then where do sixth form students fit into this? Many studies focus on early years (Burgess, 2017; Sibieta, 2014) but there is little research on these spaces on the learning identities of sixth form students.

My interest here lies in how the use of museums and galleries can change how sixth form students shape how they view learning, and the characteristics of what a 'good' learner is, to see if cultural spaces can work as a catalysts to a learning identity which suits the behavioural characteristics of sixth form studies.

Following this research, I have decided to explore these following research questions:

1. Do visits to cultural spaces positively impact sixth form students' identity as learners?

2. To what extent can visits to cultural spaces be considered an effective academic activity for students?

3. What are the barriers to student engagement with cultural spaces?

Methodology

This study is a qualitative evaluation of single visit trips to museums and galleries as an extracurricular activity for sixth form students. While the activity was planned to happen during the school day, the activity in fact took place at weekends at the request of the Head teacher. Students were asked to meet Charlotte and I at the cultural space at a certain time. When the students arrived we would spend some time to enjoy refreshments and to socialise prior to entering the cultural space 'proper'. Students were informed that they could explore the space as they wished. Students were informed that they could leave the space at any point and what they decided to do was their choice.

The intervention involved eight sixth form students in total. Of these participants I collected a variety of data: prior to the visits this included a questionnaire followed by a group interview to help clarify and develop some of their comments. Then, after each visit students were involved in a group interview to reflect on their experience.

Practitioner research

> A process whereby teachers are looking critically not only at their own practice but at broader educational questions. (Burton and Bartlett, 2004: 2).

Practitioner research is an attempt to bring together the two binaries: Academic Educational Research and the practice within the context of a teacher's classroom. In the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) Annual Lecture of 1996, Hargreaves questioned the impact of the research in Education, suggesting it was a poor investment because teachers were not engaging with it. As a result he called for teacher to develop their research literacy by actively engaging with it to inform their practice. While Hargreaves advocated a quantitative research approach, others (Hammersley, 2002; Elliot, 2001) were critical of this approach claiming it was a positivist approach appropriated from medical research that was not appropriate for research in Education. Furthermore, they argued that the importance of values in education is some of what this methodology fails to recognise.

It is the importance of values and value systems which makes the qualitative data in this study significant, and appropriate. That said, a criticism which often finds its way to the door of qualitative

practitioner research, is that it is subjective by nature. Many researchers contend that subjectivity amounts to being 'woolly and simplistic' and a 'massive waste of taxpayers' money' (cited by Wellington, 2000: 167). Alas, I would counter this by suggesting that qualitative data can offer more useful insight into relationships, as quantitative data does not generate this kind of information, thus when conducted with self-awareness and honesty, it can reveal the subtle nuances of a real-world setting more effectively.

As such, with practitioner research being closely linked to my own professional development, I believe this form of research to be most appropriate for this study. As my research group consists of eight students, it would be too small a pool of subjects for a quantitative study to produce data, as the data would be misleading.

Additionally, as this study is concerned with human behaviour within a dynamic and negotiated reality a qualitative approach is most appropriate. It will enable me to engage with students' perceptions of their experiences and the impact this has on their identity. Fundamentally, practitioner research presents itself to be the most effective approach to use in this case, because it provides the capacity to collaborate with other professionals (Charlotte) within my school and proposes to develop a greater understanding of the role cultural spaces can play in the lives of sixth form learners.

Participants

At first, Catherine and I thought it would be a productive and useful project for Year Seven and Eight students at Norham School. This came about during a discussion of the 'diet' students receive in Key Stage Three and how trips are often what people remember from their time at school. Moreover, we thought that activities like this would help students to transition from primary learning behaviours to those more conducive of a secondary school (namely, independence and critical thinking). We thought these students would be more open to it without the pressures of GCSE's which started in this school in Year Nine.

However, there were several barriers we came across in dealing with this. Firstly, the Head teacher was not supportive of students attending museums and galleries in school time; she would

only support such an initiative if it was not during our timetabled teaching time or in students timetabled lessons. As a result, this made it very difficult as a lot of the students who attend this school go home using the school bus. Moreover, the financial implication of getting students to and from these spaces was unsupported by the school. As a result, we decided to target this intervention at Year 12 students who were also experiencing transition having completed their GCSE's in the summer prior.

To identify the students we decided to find a Year Twelve class who were studying a humanities or arts subject which had ten or less students in the class. The reason we wanted them to study humanities or arts is because we wanted them to have some interest already in what cultural spaces could offer. Moreover, it was so that the students were not selected by us but also not opting into the study. We thought that this would give us a better indication of how museums and galleries are perceived by a range of students, rather than those who opt in and hold typically positive views prior to starting. In many ways, we wanted students who would not have otherwise taken place unless they had been selected. As such, we identified a year 12 class of English literature students and decided that we would target the project at them. While both Catherine and myself are English teachers at Norham School, that fact these students were selected on being part of an English class was coincidental and was not part of our criteria. In fact, neither of us had taught these students before and with Charlotte being Deputy Head of English allowed her to maintain her identity as teacher, while allowing me to perform as an independent researcher. Cohen at al. suggest that it would be 'unwise to think that threats to validity and reliability can ever be erased completely' but the can be reduced (2013: 105). As such, by positioning Charlotte in this role and introducing myself in mine, in part, it helped to reduce some of the possible contamination of my position in the data collection.

In the class of eight, eight students opted into the project of which two were male and six were female. Some researchers would claim that this sample size is too small to deliver any 'useful' data and does not represent an accurate cut of the sixth form population. While this is accurate, by the strength of the literature review it could be argued that this research is looking for 'modest' claims and therefore the number of participants will not have a significant impact on the data. In fact, it

avoids repetition with data that is superfluous, and arguably will ultimately lead the project being close to 'saturation' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It is worth pointing out that this study is concerned with meaning and not making generalised hypothetical statements (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006).

Another way that the data was kept reliable was through the focus on cultural spaces as a constructed site. We purposefully made sure that students were not given a tour or a guide at any of the sites to make sure that educator efficacy was not taken into account. As Henson argues, 'suggested powerful effects from the simple idea that a teacher's belief in his or her ability to positively impact student learning is critical to actual success or failure in a teacher's behaviour' (2011: 32). Moreover, by having this happen out of school, and at a place which the students would need to get to, we hoped that this would give enough over to the students to take ownership, removing the significance of us impacting the data. In that vein, we chose not to use an educator at either site, to remove the impact they may have on the data from the project.

That said, the small amount of participants in this group and the relationship the students had with Catherine and I, would make it difficult to generalise the data to be a reflection of all sixth form students' views.

A further important point to make, which will be discussed later in this assignment is that while eight students originally took part in the project by the last visit this was five students, and as such the participants numbers reduced.

Methods

I have included a Methods Timeline to clarify the trajectory of the data collection. As such, this demonstrates how the two data collection methods supplement each other by drawing out information from the participant's questionnaires through interviews. In regards to participants, every name of student, teacher and school have been anonymised intentionally to ensure their confidentiality (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992).

Methods Timeline

Student selection process complete

1. Ethical clearance letters submitted and returned.

Pre-visit

2. Students complete questionnaire
3. Students interviewed by myself and Catherine to gain deeper insight into their questionnaire responses

First visit: Ashmolean Museum

4. Student interviewed the next day by Catherine, and myself on their experience.

Second visit: Modern Art Oxford

5. Student interviewed the next day by Catherine, and myself on their experience.

Third visit: Pitts Rivers Museum

6. Student interviewed the next day by Catherine, and myself on their experience.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was split into two parts: firstly, 'Learning in the Sixth Form' followed by 'Learning in museums and/or galleries' so as to structure the questions in a logical and clear way to the participants. The first part is six questions on their experience of learning in Norham School's Sixth Form so to help students reflect on their 'everyday' learning experiences prior to thinking about museum and gallery spaces. There are a variety of open-ended questions because I wanted to gain information about the students' experiences and due to their diverse nature it is important that they are captured in their own words. Three of the questions were closed questions in which students were to select one option, and then the last question was not connected to either learning space but to the students themselves. In an attempt to gauge how they perceive the identity of a 'good' learner, I asked them to number six characteristics (independence, discipline, curiosity, collaboration, belonging and creativity) in order of most important to least important. These words originated from a discussion with Charlotte and from us mind-mapping characteristics which we perceived to be important. Moreover, by asking students to envisage a 'good' student we wanted to identify what they thought about being a learner, rather than identifying characteristics about themselves – by avoiding this intrusion which could be influenced by how these questions made them feel, we believed we would get more of an accurate depiction as to what they considered important by making it about an imagined concept (the 'good' learner). From the data collected in the questionnaires, the interview guide (Appendix B) was constructed so that both Catherine and myself could garner more information.

As it would have been impractical to pilot the questionnaire with the participants prior because of both: the time restrictions and the need to preserve the data's integrity. Instead, I shared the

questions with another member of the teaching staff at Norham School who was not involved but understood the nature of the research, to review the questions. When doing so, I asked him to check whether they were appropriate and accessible. While participants remain anonymous in this assignment, I asked students to write their names on the questionnaires so that we had the capacity to have individual interviews if there were any particular anomalies or trends that implicate individuals. While one could argue this could influence the validity of the data as students may not chose to be honest, I minimized the impact by emphasising to participants how this would only be seen by myself and Catherine and how we were relying on their honesty.

Interviews

In order to further my understanding of students' perspectives of this activity and how it influenced how they consider themselves as learners, and consequently how they viewed learning, we (myself and Catherine) conducted four interviews with participants in total. The interviews took place following the questionnaire and a day after each visit to a cultural site. These interviews were conducted as a group and they took about 20 minutes. Participants were asked to come to me at a time when they were not in lessons the following day, so that the memory and experience was still fresh in their memory but also there was time for them to contemplate what had happened.

We decided to use group interviews because it was time-efficient in that both Catherine and I wanted to be present in the interviews to help crosscheck what participants were saying. Both being full-time teachers it was difficult for us to find time together when we were free to do this so individual interviews would not have been viable. Moreover, as Arksey and Knight proffer having more than one person in the room who hold a shared experience can allow them to complement each other which leads to more reliable and complete data (1999: 76). A disadvantage of a group interview can be that certain students choose not to speak out because they may be 'apprehensive, self-conscious and stressed' (Leshem, 2012: 3). However, from the first meeting with the students and speaking to their class teacher it was clear that the students had been use to group discussions in class and were use to sharing opinions and viewpoints.

The purpose of the first interview was to unpick some of the quantitative questions and to form part of the qualitative study. Moreover, the purpose of the other interviews was to develop my understanding of how students experienced (or perceived their experience) after each visit, and then to see if these experiences influenced how they thought of learning. Each interview took place after each visit because I wanted to understand what it was about particular spaces that had particular impacts – it was the more subtle nuances between the different sites that were part of my preoccupation.

The interview approach used was a standardised open-ended interview. The interview questions were predetermined and the same question was aimed at all participants (Appendices B, C, D and E). This allowed us to reduce the bias which could have been prevalent with multiple interviewers being present. One criticism of this approach identified by Patton (1980) is that the minimal flexibility in sequencing and wording can produce very different responses from participants. I believed that this was combated through getting the questions checked prior to the interview but also as were interviewing on various different occasions we had the scope to review and change the wording for the next phase of interview(s).

During the interviews, I accepted students giving responses as a group; I accepted students declining to answer a question. Participants were informed that they would be recorded and the transcript typed up following and thus, they needed to talk one at a time so that it was picked up on the voice recorder. Furthermore, students were informed that I would be making notes during the interview. To keep participants engaged, Catherine used body language and eye contact to demonstrate that she was listening and I did when I could, following in line with what Arksey and Knight state are important behaviours for an interviewer (1999: 53).

Data analysis

The analysis of data falls into two areas: firstly, the analysis of the first questionnaire and secondly, the analysis of the interview data. The data collected from the questionnaire was used to inform the questions for the following interview, and as such, much of that data finds its way into the interview data. Of the three closed questions, the statistical data is presented in bar charts as to set the tone of the interview analysis, but making no significant claims due to the small pool of participants.

For the interviews, the process of data analysis epistemologically started from our understanding of identity and how it is perceived as constructed through social and cultural interactions (Vygotsky, 1960; Satre, 1943; Wertch, 1985a, 1985b). Therefore, when analysing the language from the interview transcripts, I was not solely concerned with the structure of language but also the *doing* of language, and thus a discourse analysis that embeds Foucauldian analytical principles became useful. In other words I needed an approach that allow for a discussion of 'real things' (Parker, 1992: 25), such as barriers and experiences in the context of wider power structures, going 'beyond attention to signs and meaning in language to embrace its effects in the social world' (Doherty, 2007: 194). It is important to note that this theoretically works on the principle that discourse does not simply translate reality into language but rather that discourse should be seen as a way in which we perceive reality. Foucault states:

> We must not imagine that the world turns towards us as a legible face, which we would not have to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour.
>
> (1981:67)

Significant for Foucauldian Discourse Analysis is that it does not limits itself to the semiotics of the words but wants to look at how that word, or statement(s) are brought into being.

At this point, it is worth unpicking some of the complexities in applying a Foucauldian-approach to discourse analysis to discourses of any kind. Fundamentally, there are no set rules for conducting Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. Foucault claims, 'I take care not to dictate how things should be' (1994, 288) as a response to their being no 'objective truth' in any method as they are all subject to a particular set of power relations which allow them to come into existence – what appears as 'truth' is in more accurately a manifestation of a particular power.

That said, there is one core principle which can be agreed as the foundations of a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. This is that it is preoccupied with how things have come into being and therefore it is a historicist approach that looks at how the subject - in this case, identity - has been produced (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008). As such, I approach these statements, 'not so much for what they say but what they *do.' (*Graham, 2011: 667). Therefore, the first part of this analysis was a matter of coding how identity appears in the doing of the responses. By which I mean, that I would need to focus on both what participants said were their views on identity as one layer of discourse but also - as sociocultural theorists propose that much of identity is shown in the 'things we do' – in what participants state they did in these cultural spaces.

At first the students' identity was grouped through shared values which I then considered what had brought these into *being,* what constructed them and deconstructed other views. This approach was then applied to each interview to try to determine the changes in how identity was informed and would allow me to consider what it was about the experience of visiting cultural sites which had evoked this change. Doing so, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, as opposed to content analysis, focuses on examining regimes of power through discourse. Doing so, I concentrate on how and why ways of: thinking, being and doing, are brought to the centre or placed in the margins. The discourses are identifiable in the forthcoming discussion of the findings.

While the intentions of this approach is to create an impersonal system of analysis which exceeds the individual and analyses the abstract systems and structures, it can be criticised as the 'analysis is always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint' (Wetherell, 2001: 384). As such, I concede that the discussion of my findings is only one interpretation of the data which seemed most useful to me. I would argue, that this interpretation is aligned with many of the issues raised in the literature review which suggests this approach has credibility. Moreover, my conscious awareness of this issue allowed me to consider my role, and reflect on the impact this could have on the research.

Ethics

In deliberation of the ethical issues that could present themselves as a result of conducting this educational research, I completed a CUREC form which outlined all of the ethical precautions I took in order to ensure that the participants were able to give consent from an informed position. Only after I had received ethical approval did I collect any data for this research.

Written consent was requested from the Head Teacher of Norham School to conduct this research with students (see Appendix F) and permission was requested from the participants and their parents (see Appendix G). To this end, I have both students and their parental guardians a full-written explanation of: the intended research methods, the purpose of the project and what would be required of participants. Students and parents were given an opt-out letter. None of the students or parents returned an opt out reply slip.

Furthermore, as the group of students was selected prior to the project taking part, I wanted to make sure that the students taking part wanted to and did not feel pressurised. I made it clear from the offset that this was optional, and there would be no issue with them choosing not to be involved. Furthermore, students could attend the visits to cultural sites and not be part of the data collection. I believe this was important as it assured that students had agreed and therefore were committed as this project would be taking place in their own time, and they would be required to get themselves to these sites. On top of this, I made it clear that students were welcome to withdraw from the research at any stage, if they so wished.

Arguably, an ethical issue that is bound to occur in this type of research is, the power imbalance between the interviewee and the interviewer. As I had created the project and the plan to carry out the research it is understandable that one would view me in a position of power. On top of this, one could conceive that there was a level of emotional attachment in the project (Kvale, 1996). However, I would posit that my interest was more 'exploratory' than part of a commitment to some prior knowledge that I believed this had impact. The research wanted to see what, if at all, impacted students and therefore my investment was not always in its success. In regards to students, I made it clear that I wanted them to be honest and my perception of them was that they were comfortable and honest during the interview process.

Moreover, the research project does not concede any of the fundamental ethical principles. This research holds *primum non nocere* (first of all, do no harm) as a guiding principle. Arguably all research projects at some stage do hold a level of risk, and harm cannot, theoretically, be completed removed (Hammersley and Traianou 2012: 57). As such, this research can be described as 'non-maleficent' (Cohen et al, 2013: 127) as it avoids doing harm to participants. The interviews took place within the school day at a time which suited participants. In completion, participants gave about one hour and ten minutes submitting data in the data collection process.

In light of the changes to post 16-education and the new forms of curriculum and assessment which were first taught in September 2015, and assessed as A levels in June 2017, educators are looking for curricular and extracurricular activities which develop both knowledge and skills appropriate for these new courses, and for 'life long' learning. Therefore, the intention is to see if engaging with cultural spaces could be beneficial academically to a variety of sixth form students. As such, this project has the potential to have great and far-reaching benefits.

As previously stated, all participants, collaborators and the school have remained anonymous. The data was kept on an encrypted memory drive that could only be accessed by a password. This data has only been shared with Charlotte, the teacher I collaborated with. Following this project, this paper will be made available to the Head teacher at Norham School, and students at the University of Oxford, following BERA guidelines (BERA, 2011).

Collaboration

An integral part of this project relied upon collaboration from the outset. This project originated from a two day workshop in August 2016 funded by the British Academy called 'Academics in the Classroom: English Language and Literature Outreach' held at Herford College, Oxford. During these two days, various speakers - of which I was one - spoke about collaboration with external organisations and outreach work. At this point, the collaboration with other academics, teachers and researchers came the genesis of the idea of running this type of intervention. At the time, I was working at an inner city London school and it was when I moved to Norham School within its village setting that I noticed the limited access to these spaces.

The collaboration from then came mainly through my work with Charlotte. Charlotte and I had discussed how these students were disadvantaged by their geographical location and how they lacked access to the rich, cultural world which is typically more accessible physically in urbanised areas. As such, Charlotte and I had a meeting in which we decided to see if we could develop visits to cultural sites. Charlotte had been at Norham School for longer than I, and had grown up in the local area which meant that she had tacit knowledge of the area and the school which I did not. This was incredibly useful in organising the trips but also in understanding the systems and structures within the school setting.

I found of great importance to have the opportunity to collaborate with Charlotte, and for the students to collaborate with a different learning institution. For the participants, the collaboration gave them the opportunity to visit places which they otherwise might not and that is arguably worthwhile. For staff, it allowed us to bring together our own teaching experiences to help construct the best ways to support students with their learning and post-16 education. It allowed me to use Charlotte as a critical friend who was able to put some of the more theoretically 'good' ideas into a more realistic framework. Moreover, Charlotte was involved not only in making the project go from an idea to an actual lived experience, but also in the collection of data and evaluating if students' learning identities had been impacted. While I benefited from the collaboration, I think this also helped to develop Charlotte's view of what is important to and for, sixth form learners.

Finding and Discussion

The data is divided into two methods of data collection: firstly, the questionnaire which focuses on students views of their identity as learners, and the spaces they learn in prior to the visits to cultural sites, and then secondly the interviews as a response to these experiences. From both of these data sources and with a focus on answering the 3 research questions stated at the end of the literature review, I have identified five main discourses within the data using the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis approach. These are: barriers to engagement; collaboration; agency; curiosity; and (in)dependence.

Barriers to Engagement

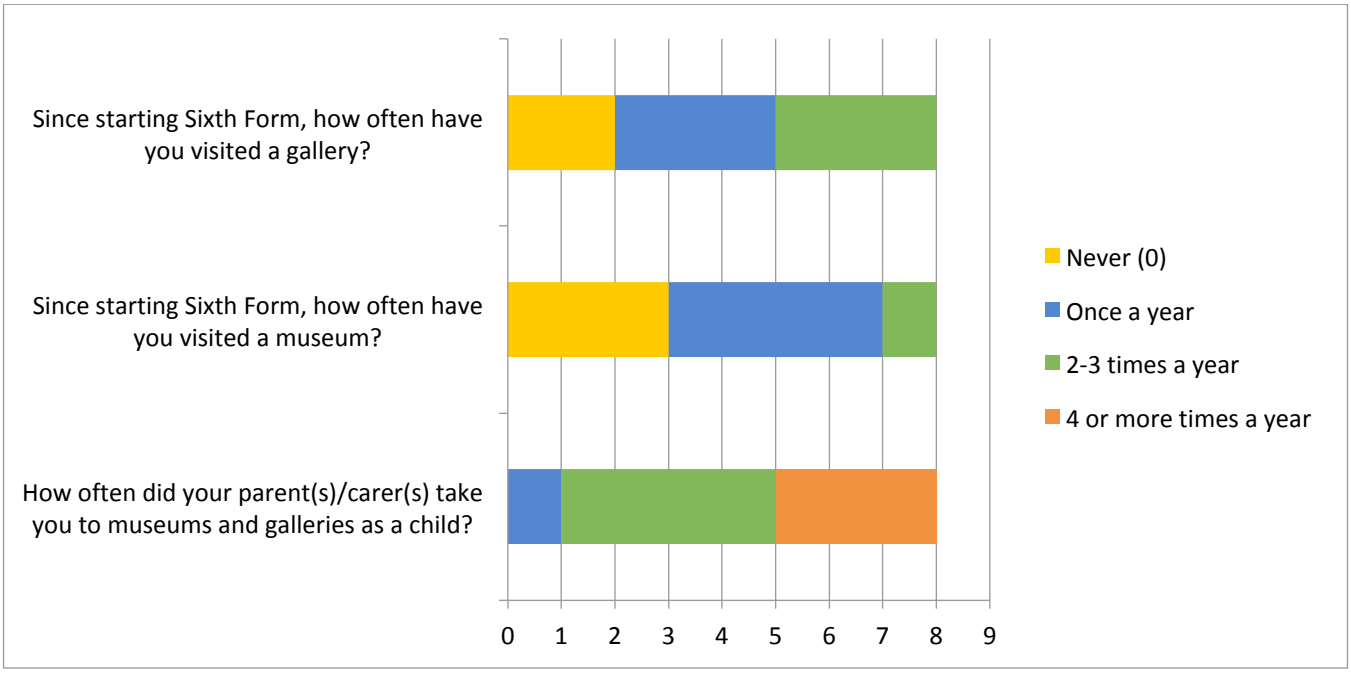

Fig 1. The responses of the 8 participants to three closed questions in the questionnaire regarding participants' attendance to cultural sites.

It is unsurprising that barriers to engagement was a main discourse in the study of identity and cultural spaces as the absence of something can be equally as impactful as the presence of something else. Thus, this discourse constructs an assemblage of otherness through: habitus, surveillance, geography and reductive pedagogical orthodoxy.

Of these responses, as presented in Fig 1., what is clear is that the participants were visiting museums and galleries less than any other time in their life. Previously they claim that their parents took them a minimum of once a year but since starting at Norham School's Sixth Form, attendance had fallen off significantly. The attendance to a gallery appeared more than a museum as the school had a gallery in-house which students could visit, but also students studying Art were expected to visit galleries, as part of their A-level course. As such, these results are arguably more favorable in this area then they otherwise would be. A parallel can be made here with Bourdieu's (1986) view that these spaces are open, but predominantly to a particular market of people, as a particular form of 'cultural capital'. For Lefebvre (1991), there would be questions raised whether the space itself is the space of a sixth form audience; to what extent are these spaces made by an elite for an elite (Schuster, 1995) and therefore, discourage participation by the participants. One could argue that these cultural spaces are not mobilising students' interests and position them as somewhere where it is not possible to be, or as I would argue, not possible to *do.*

Significantly, what this research recognises is that prior to attending the Sixth Form, participants were more likely to visit these spaces with parents and therefore there is an argument that during Sixth Form parents take a less active role. In regards to identity, and using Satre's analogy of a waiter, it could be argued that without the parental figure being present sixth form students do not receive the validation for the identity they perform in these spaces. As a result, these spaces become less attractive and participants feel more out of place as they feel *other* and their engagement with them becomes less. As Bowen et al. (2004) propose these sites benefit younger people more than older people and it becomes a question as to why would these spaces want to discourage sixth form students from accessing them? What is it about sixth form student which constructs these barriers; why deconstruct the access they had in their younger years?

When asked about how they feel entering these spaces, Katie responded with:

> When you are outside, [the Ashmolean Museum] looks so big like somewhere you can get lost and obviously when you come in it is quite grand and there is security so it's quite intimidating.

In line with Mayer (2012, 2014), Katie talks about security and how she has a negative response to this. The presence of security - albeit necessary for the safety of members of the public and to

protect valuable objects - seemingly omits a feeling of control over young people which arguably older people (myself and Catherine) did not feel. Young people's sense of 'being watched' is seemingly more sensitive and this aligns with notions of them feeling outside of the community of the cultural space, but also by being there, outside of their community, what Bourdieu defines as *habitus* (1990: 66-67). When asked, 'what would put off someone your age coming to a museum?' students stated the following:

> Sarah: Other people's opinions of the fact that they have spent their time in a museum…
> Beth: Yeah…
> Lauren: …Yeah.
> Harry: It's seen as very like, either, childish or [an] aged thing to do.

Participants recognise that they are highly sensitive to judgments from other people – they sense of self is constructed and deconstructed through how they see others seeing them. In museums participants feel that they do not belong, or are seen as a problem, and that the space caters for people who are younger or older than them. In this moment, participants are mediating between a space they do not feel welcome in, and a social identity which they are not accustomed to performing as – the regimes of power destabilise the participants by making them feel pathologised. This is evident when Beth says, 'you feel like you can't talk but you can talk but you don't want to disturb anyone'. This sense of being a burden is a manifestation of the anxiety participants felt; whether this comes at a time when sixth form students feel trapped between the artificial binary of childhood and adulthood or whether it reflects how young people perceive how they are positioned, or, as I would argue, as a manifestation of the cultural sites resistance to engaging with people their age. While participants are not passive (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 7; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994) sixth form student appears to be a difficult user for the sector to grasp and this is felt most strongly through how power makes possible their feelings about themselves. Yet, rather than power simplistically being a top-down phenomenon we can see how students act out discourses which bring with them; participants clearly hold assumptions (Mayer, 2012) and this informs how they behave in these spaces, but often these assumptions are not representative of a wider reality, albeit as Beth demonstrates above, it forms part of her reality.

In regards to galleries, participants felt they were being observed more: '[museums] are busier so we felt more like blended in. The gallery is smaller […] you felt more like you were being observed.' The power of looking and size of space has a direct impact on how students feel in the spaces. Albeit, by the final visit Lauren stated that she 'felt much more comfortable' suggesting that by attending regularly the anxiety and sense of otherness to the cultural space can be dispelled. The data suggests participants become more understanding of the space and adjust their sense of identity to align them with the behaviours of the cultural space so that it feels more *natural* and as such, if we are to perceive what they *do* as evidence of their identity – which is the basis of this research – students' barriers to engagement can only be changed perceptually once they have learnt to 'perform', which they do by attending these places.

Another barrier to engagement comes from larger social structures in place. During the project, we visited three sites and while all attended for the first two visits, by the last visit participation has reduced by three participants and therefore the final visit there were only five. While one clear barrier to this project is that we asked participants to make their way to the locations themselves. For some students they lived in small villages and the journey to the sites were described as 'an ordeal'. That said, Katie stated: 'I know most of them actually do have jobs, we literally don't have jobs' as an explanation as to why she could attend and the others could not. As such, and as a result of how the project was organised at weekends at the request of the Head Teacher, we see two different barriers appear: firstly, that some could not attend because of work commitments. While none of the participants in this research were classed as 'Pupil Premium' (the government measure for those living in economic poverty), it is possible that those who need to work and those who chose to work during their time at the Sixth Form were less likely to be able to commit to this kind of activity. Secondly, the Head Teacher's pedagogical orthodoxies of the project as being a good 'extracurricular' activity but not something that should be included in a student's school day shows how perceptions of these spaces are still not directly linked with learning regardless of the research which has come out of these learning environments in the past thirty years. One colleague referred to the school's view on education as being 'bums on seats', and as the Deputy Head stated, in a conversation about learning, 'lessons happens in classrooms'. What such comments and deficit

viewpoints demonstrate is personal sensitivities around the role of the teacher and the industry of learning. For some, this type of learning destabilises their ideologies of education and learning, and as a result, can be seen as a threat. I would argue these educators become vehicles for discourses of the Right in an attempt to assert them as having power. As a result, there are teachers' perceptions of learning in these spaces which have significantly impacted on the efficacy of this project, and as such, the engagement by participants.

Collaboration

One of the other main discourses that emerged from the data is the world of students' collaboration with each other; key features being: group work, debate and discussion.

The questionnaire prior to the visits raised one key disadvantage of these spaces being that you 'may not understand what it is you're looking at'. This appeared, worded differently, in the majority of the questionnaire responses and as such it is clear prior to these experiences that students were anxious about how they would gain knowledge without the support of an expert. Tishman et al. (2007) comments that access physically to these spaces does not always result in intellectual access to what these spaces exhibit, and as such, this discourse reflects these feelings of anxiety. In line with Bhabha's view that these spaces can illicit negative stereotypes or perpetrate untruths (1994) we can see how the objects inside these sites compose power through knowledge yet students are relatively reliant on mediation, as a way of communicating that power.

After the first visit we asked students 'what did you *do* in the museum?' To which participants gave us a description of the steps and thought processes they had as they navigated the space. All of the participants negotiated the space with at least one other person, and this was the case when we asked participants after each visit. The significance of this is that these spaces supported students working with another person to understand their environment, as Falk and Dierking (1992) argue. Interestingly, the importance of cultural spaces as being a social space reinforces much of what sociocultural theorists see as being how people learn. The cultural tools in cultural spaces allow participants to challenge their thinking and develop their intellect. This sense of challenge and personal development can be seen in Beth's comment; she states, 'there were lots of spoons and

rings, so we decided to think about which one we liked best'. While on one level this can be seen as a low-level way into understanding something; an attempt to gauge a personal opinion, it also shows how the students are creating tasks for themselves to develop their own thinking. It is worth thinking about what else Beth is *doing* when she gives this response. What she demonstrates is that when participants come across something which they find difficult to 'study', e.g. cutlery, they do not simply become disengaged and move on (as Hooper-Greenhill argues) but propose thoughts to help interrogate what they are looking at, reinforcing Bowen's view that these spaces developing processes of thought (2014). As such, the anxiety of these spaces not being communicative is backgrounded while the participants as self-reliant learner is brought to the fore. Moreover, we can see how these spaces allow students to demonstrate a learning identity that is not reliant on a teaching figure.

A similar response arose from a visit to the gallery in which Harry said, 'there was a board with some information but it was mainly your interpretations'. Harry recognises the plurality of interpretations, arguably within his own thoughts but also in collaboration with the people he visited the space with. As such, it is through the object-rich environments that we see these spaces as creating stimulus for conversations which cultivate learning. Bhabha (1994) would proffer at this point a question about what is being presented and what is being hidden? While the data suggests these spaces can be powerful sites for stimulating conversation, what these conversations are about is decided mainly by the visitor; of which, the other person, the objects, the space all work as a possible stimulus and as such, the notion that the museum holds the power in the relationship and the visitor is a passive consumer is too simplistic. In reality, what is demonstrated is that the visitor channels power through the conversation ('mainly your interpretation') and as such brings with them an array of knowledge from outside of the museum, which again, is outside of the control of the space to dictate.

Each person brings with them a different level of knowing prior to visiting these spaces which forms these conversations. These collaborative conversations appear more so in galleries than in museums according to the data; Lauren distinguishes between the two with; 'a museum […] where you are going to be told, like an art museum you can talk with someone else but if its like a dinosaur

then, well, there isn't like a lot to talk about'. As such, collaborative conversations appear to manifest more so in spaces where the objects are, as Beth states, 'interesting and thought provoking' rather than supressing conversation reflecting the notion that 'objects are good to think with' (Snow, 2002). What Beth demonstrates in this is the importance of discussion and working with another person in negotiating cultural tools. It is what she is able to talk about, through having the language and thought(s), which develops and extends her own learning. Therefore, what I would argue is that the visitor as the 'symbolic third' (Froggett, 2011: 67) between the object itself and previously held memories and experiences is developed through conversation, and not merely through witnessing the object, as McManus (1993) states.

Overall, no participant reported in any of the three interviews that took place post-visit that there was any object which they came across that they did not understand. This is significant bearing in mind the participants preconceptions before visiting the sites. There are two ways of reading this: firstly, through collaboration participants were able to access and apply interpretations to most of what they came across; that they were able to through the collaboration with another person overcome the barriers they felt these sites held. Secondly, those participants were only able to remember what they were able to interpret, and the objects they were not able to understand did not stay in their memory. While, it would be idealistic to believe that all of the items were accessible to all people, it is interesting to note how the experience is positivistic and leaves learners with memories of 'thing they have learnt' rather than of those they could not. As such, Holden's argument that the mystery in these spaces helps form social bonds and create 'a sense of unity and identity (Holden, 2004:34) can be seen through collaboration, and through collaboration and using object-rich cultural tools students were able to have a positive experience of mediating knowledge, and thus power.

Agency

The world this discourse constructs is one where students are able to make choices for themselves. An important concept within the view of identity, agency presents itself in the choices the participants make, the things they choose to *do*.

The interview data suggests that having agency has impacted on how they engaged with the spaces. Participants were asked to attend three cultural sites and given the option to opt out of if they did not want to. Significantly, all of the participants opted in, attending the first two visits, with three students not participating in the last visit. As such, the uptake was positive. Students were allowed to walk around the site 'freely' without any direction from any authoritarian figure (myself or Catherine, or any of the staff at the sites). Students rated this as a positive experience comparing it to school trips they had been on previously: 'usually schools have questionnaires or particular thing that they want you to find or make notes about… It is more restrictive.' In line with Foucault's view of power, it can be argued that these types of tasks are mechanisms of control and discipline (1991) which have gone some way to informing how they view learning in these spaces and the spaces themselves. One has to ask, whom do these types of learning strategies serve – teacher's anxieties or pupil's learning - and to what extent is agency synonymous with dissent. When we asked participants how long they spent at each cultural site after we left the times varied from 45 minutes to 2 hours. As such, participants did not find choice a barrier to their experience but an opportunity for engagement.

A caveat to this does fall into the question of the three participants, which did not attend the last visit. While in conversation with participants during the interview they stated that work was a reason for them not being able to attend. I do have to question my role as researcher and teacher, in that, while I perceive that participants were being honest with me, they could have been telling me what they thought would be acceptable for a teacher to hear, rather than the truth. As a teacher, a student would know that saying 'I can't be bothered' would not be well received, and possibly they perceived me as a teacher more than a researcher. Thus, one argument could be that students did not enjoy the experience, but if this is the case, it did allow them to use their own agency to make that decision. Choosing not to attend in many ways shows how this project has enabled students to make a choice, rather than being unable to attend because of work.

As an aside, there is a Foucauldian argument here as to whether the 'truth' of this answer really does matter. In that - for Foucault - discourse is a culturally constructed representation of reality and will never be an exact copy (1969). By which I would argue that whether employment existed or not,

they were choosing to construct it as their reality. The importance of this is that it shows how some participants view museums and galleries as less important than employment, or at least, this project less than employment. As such, this discourse presents how employment, for some, is seen as an alternative that mobilises and serves them in a way, which these places do not. I do not perceive that this is simply financial, but that these spaces offer them space to act as the identity they wish to be.

Significantly, in the questionnaire prior to the visits, participants claimed the following two disadvantages to learning in these spaces: 'no real directions' and 'not targeted towards the school curriculum'. Participants were concerned that they would not be able to negotiate the spaces in a meaningful way because of the numerous choices available to them were viewed as problematic, and the site not being tailored to their needs - as they prescribe them. In many ways, students identified a similar sentiment to the Foucauldian quotation I opened this paper with; how can we tell when freedom is an obstacle to learning and when freedom is a promoter of it? Nevertheless, in the interviews after the visits the notion of freedom seemingly correlates with enjoyment for the participants and was aligned with promoting learning. They enjoy the ability to chose for themselves and this agency motivates them to learn. One participant stated that in these spaces, 'it is hard not to learn'. As such, choices were deemed negatively prior to entering this project but afterwards are deemed to demonstrate a more positive position. Katie goes are far as to state:

> I do think if you get the time to walk around and make your own interpretation and not have to write everything down… I just think if it was left up to your own imagination then you would learn to draw things from other peoples' work which would help them like, if they were, in a lesson.

As such, the freedom for students to chose and move themselves around the site allows them to engage with objects at their own rate. Within the wider context of Sixth Form Education, other than choosing the subjects that they want to study, they have limited input into 'how' they learn it; timetabling, staffing, curriculum and assessment all sit outside of the students' control but have profound impacts. As such, I would argue that students enjoy the level of agency that museum and gallery education can offer as they are free from many of the constraints sixth form education embodies and in its current form cannot offer them this level of choice.

Curiosity

The field of education have been long aware of the importance of curiosity for learners and learning; what makes us curious, how it does and to whom all carry meanings and discourses about the identity of an individual.

In the questionnaire participants stated that curiosity was the most important characteristic of a 'good' learner and the interview data shows that cultural spaces were successful at eliciting it. In an interview, Harry stated, 'I feel like it makes you more curious as a person because… it is more interpretative and makes you think about what can I interpret this as, not necessarily factual things'. This view mirrors much of what Hooper-Greenhill argues when she states that visitors will make a connection with an object by identifying a feature they recognise and thus constructing its meaning. It is in the process of meaning-making that the learner's identity is (de)constructed as they process, in the Vygotskian sense, an external social influence which is made internal (1960). While Hooper-Greenhill also suggests that the double edge to this is that when a visitor does not recognise something they move on and therefore miss out on that learning and have a different type of experience (1994, 46). This was not evident in the data; this is not to say that participants did not experience these moments of disengagement with objects but that these experiences did not stay in their memory, or in the memories they drew on during the interviews.

That said, a critical question of the student's perception of their own subjectivity is: what identity are they constructing through this answer, and what identity are they leaving out? In response to this question, we must question the validity of the student's response here in regards to the audience listening. As teachers, Catherine, and myself hold a position of authority and one closely linked to the importance of learning. Therefore, it could be argued that the students are projecting an imagined self who they think would be 'acceptable' to both of us. They want to be seen as curious and explorative, and to an extent, these cultural spaces bring this identity into being/doing.

What participants were doing/being is represented in what students (re)present from their memories. What participants were able to remember are the objects that, through curiosity, garnered their attention. Participants noted objects from '1200BC', 'sculptures', and 'the end product' – the latter a comment on a piece of modern art – to which they found engaging through

curiosity – the kind of conversations that start with 'what is it?' Participants stated these spaces are 'quite interesting' and 'make you think a lot'. Here participants find the identity of 'a thinker' as desirable within these spaces; these sites position participants to prioritise the intellect as an important quality and one that is made possible.

It seems that participants can remember the cultural tools they mediated and learnt something from and this is the memory, which stays with them. The argument that these cultural spaces embed within visitors long-term memory seems to be prevalent here (Kavanagh, 2000; Foley, 2014; Norris, 2013; Rasmussen, 2012; Vergeront, 2014). How long it stays with participants is not captured by the data, but I would argue that the way these individual episodic memories from a wider visit experience presented themselves in the data, suggests that they have been isolated from the whole experience and would come up again if participants were asked in the future.

It is in these spaces which power manifests for participants through the enjoyment and curiosity of objects which leads to a desire to learn about them. As Beth stated, it 'gets you interested in topics that you don't really know about'. As such, it is through curiosity that museums and galleries motivate the participants to engage and learn. The impact of the discourses that these sites symbolise is reflected in how participants are considering their future. When asked: 'when you think about Universities, do you think about museums and galleries in that area?', Katie replied, '100%. There are three main things I think: the university, the course and the surroundings and I think they are way more equal than I thought they would be. [Museums and galleries] definitely do come into consideration'. As such, it is clear that engagement with museums and galleries can have profound impacts on sixth form students view of where learning can take place and whether they can get much out of these spaces. This data suggests that the power of these discourses continues to act upon the participant after the visit itself, and the discourse has the power to become central to the students view of themselves as learners. It is these sites which allow students to wonder as they wish and engage with what draws their attention, providing positive and fruitful experiences of social learning without an educator necessarily being present. As such, through the construction of the intellect as central to the experience of museum and gallery spaces, we can see how students

continue to benefit from this as the discourses act on and act from the learner, to help develop their identity.

(In)dependence

A discourse that presented itself in the data, and what goes against an assumption, Catherine and I made about sixth form student learning identities, is that of independence. For Catherine and I, independence featured highly on our perception of what is important for a 'good' sixth form student but in the questionnaire, students positioned it as their least important characteristic.

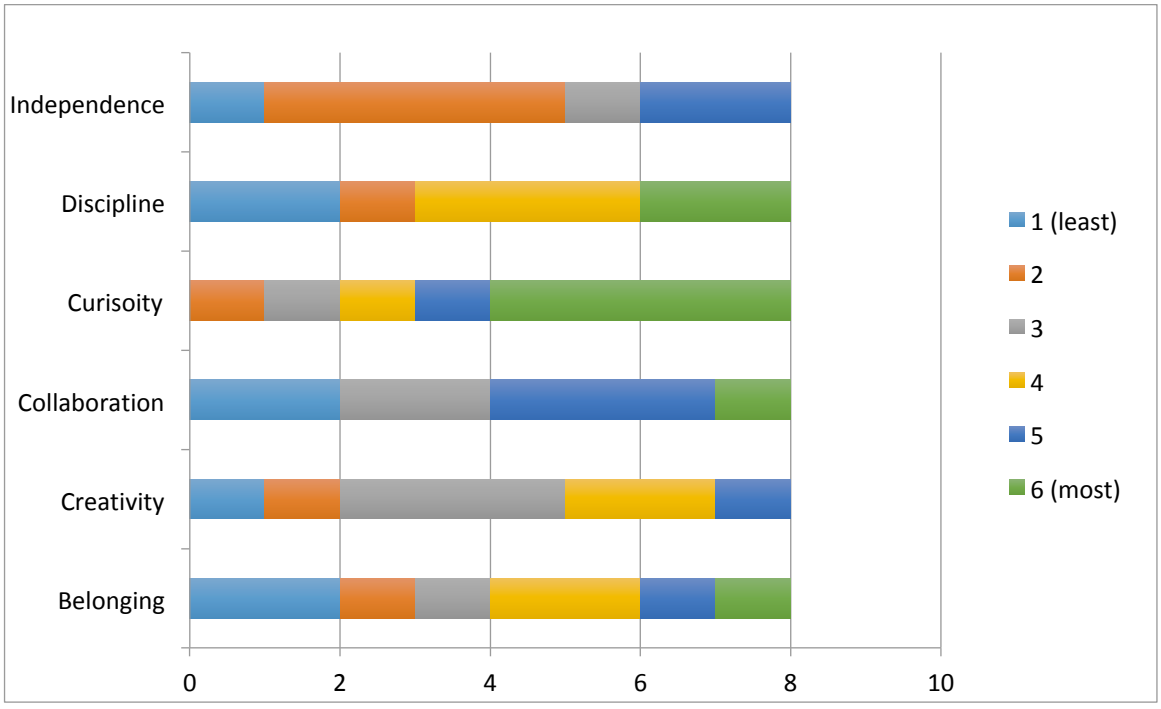

Fig 2. Responses to 'what makes a good learner? Rank these attributes from: 1 (least significant) to 6 (most significant).'

As such, the concept of independence and relying on someone or something became a common trope in the data. This discourse is represented in Sarah's comments when she states, 'I think it is a general stereotype that [cultural spaces] are boring and that no one needs to learn outside of school.' Significantly, Sarah implies the strength of dependency on learning inside of school, and Katie goes onto argue in regards to independence, 'at GCSE you don't need it'.

However, if we are to in a Foucauldian sense, which does not just look at the semiotics of the word but focuses on how they came into being then it is worth casting an eye at the GCSE curriculum and how it has been taught in schools. The participants in this group were the first students to have

experienced the reformed GCSE and as a result, their learning was assessed solely through exams. For this reason, it can be argued that this type of reformed assessment has developed students' dependency on their teachers and in-class learning – or at least this is how it has manifested at Norham School; for participants at Norham School, they did not feel that they needed to be independent, or at least being independent is made problematic and not made desirable. With this in mind, what we observed students do during the project were skills we would associate with independence: getting themselves to and from the site, walking around it by themselves without educators, and managing their own conversations about the objects. As such, these sites brought into being independence for students; the space constructed the students as having relatively more independence and they *acted* up to this. In line with Lefebvre's argument about socialist spaces (1991), there is a discourse coded into the function and culture of these spaces which brings this independent sense of learning identity into being.

Yet, this raises a question of independence as a learning behaviour – what is independence? For many, we perceive students who are independent as, 'those who get on with it'; free from control and not depending on any body. While, in this project many students on some level presented that they were independent through some of the actions they did, were they in actuality doing it freely? At this stage, I would like to return once again to Satre's analogy of the waiter. If the participants take the role of the waiter in the café, then who is it that gives them validation? Who is it that gives their identity credence, and therefore socially enforces this part of their performance as part of their identity? In this instance, Catherine and I, attended all sites and we would meet students prior to them visiting. While we did not instruct students are being present was something they depended on, and as such, it could be argued that this project in the form that it took, actually did little to push students to really experience the totality of independence within learning, but totality was not necessary for it to impact on their learning behaviour.

Moreover, the data suggests that participants consider independence as being closely associated with loneliness. One participant suggested independence was shown when 'you went on your own or if you were like, I want to go and see this and they were like no and you went anyway.' Here, independence is associated with working by yourself rather than working with other people, and it

is perceived to be incompatible with collaborative learning in these spaces. Therefore there becomes a site of resistance whereby students simultaneously show independence and resistance to independence within these spaces. While on one level this could be seen as problematic - either one cancelling out the other-, I would argue these discourses work to destabilise the students identity away from an authoritarian educating figure and allow for the existence of this indeterminacy to bring about a change in the being/doing of the learner.

Limitations, Conclusions and Implications

Limitations

At this point, I would like to engage with a criticism of the limitations that have presented themselves during the course, and result, of this project. In the early stages of the project, I intended to use time in the school day to visit these cultural spaces but due to a decision made by school management it was decided that this project would happen out of school hours. With museum and gallery opening time in mind, it was decided that this project would only be able to go ahead at weekends. As a consequence, this directly impacted on students' participation as their time was taken by other activities. Moreover, due to workload pressures and the fact I moved to a different school to work as of Easter 2018 there was not time for a second questionnaire to take place which may have improved the validity and reliability of the data. As such, by moving employer during the academic year, I was limited on how much data I could gather and there is little that can be done to counteract this.

Moreover, a core limitation to this study is the number of participants that were part of the research. The group was small and therefore this has prevented me from posing any generalised conclusions on the grounds that the participant group is too small to be representative of Norham Garden Sixth Forms' student population. As such, it prevents any further generalisation of any particular type of educational sites and the experiences of students. Since the students needed to be willing to commit we decided to keep the group smaller, but also to a group which did not opt in, as we did not wish to select a group with any personal bias.

Moreover, these visits only lasted from February until March and thus, it is possible that there are no lasting impacts as we only collected the data shortly after the intervention itself. As such, and often is the case with cultural spaces and education, impact can never fully be measured and therefore the lack of evidence for this does not impact on the validity of the data on participants' sense of self.

Finally, with a focus on identity there are many other areas of impact that this study did not touch upon. It did not address whether this impacted on scholastic attainment, critical thinking skills or mental health which could all hold significant influence over how ones views learning and

themselves as learner. As such, the focus on identity was lead through qualitative data and there are questions whether the method used for questioning was appropriate it capturing this data. In other words, are students views reliable enough to present their own view of identity, or are participants actually performing in these interviews what they want their identity to be perceived as. As such, triangulation with another data source, such as observations, may have been useful, as it would have allowed us to focus on the doing, which in identity studies is a more robust data than talk.

Conclusions and Implications

I started this paper by promising to discuss what cultural spaces offer that schools do not. Through a focus on how place influences identity and how museums and galleries shape how sixth form students think about learning, this paper has explored the impact cultural spaces can have on sixth form learner's view of themselves as learners through an analysis informed by poststructuralist thought. At this point, I would like to revisit the 3 questions this study aimed to address:

1. Do visits to cultural spaces positively impact sixth form students' identity as learners?

The paper suggests that these spaces do impact on how sixth form students view their own identity as learners. What I raise is how cultural spaces make possible a learning identity which other spaces do not. Power, formed through a variety of discourses, allows for a certain type of learner to be imagined and realised. However, the study identifies that there are barriers to these spaces which marginalises sixth form students, and in its most extreme, inhibits their existence. These spaces are complex, political and active in their construction and deconstruction of users and how users see themselves. In this project, it is argued that museums and galleries supported – or formed more actively through discourses of power -, most participants, to be: collaborative, agentic, curious and independent.

2. To what extent can visits to cultural spaces be considered an effective academic activity for students?

Cultural Spaces form an affective academic activity in helping to form students' perceptions of themselves as learners, and allowing them the skills to be active participants of these particular

cultures which the literature argues are more accessible by a particular elite. Thus, skilling students to *play* in the *game* which is culture (Bourdieu, 1984). However, this project did not prioritise any forms of knowledge, albeit the sites themselves did, and perhaps for this type of work to be considered effective - within a culture where schools are judged on exam grades - it would need to be linked to the curriculum. The discourses present in these spaces construct participants to hold identity characteristics which make for 'good learners' and therefore, engagement with these spaces holds significant educational value.

Furthermore, for this to be more impactful and reach those students who do not perceive themselves as 'existing' in these spaces, or those who have been geographically excluded – typically those in rural settings - I would argue there needs to be a commitment for this to happen within the school day itself. The school has the power to enable this experience and challenge the social structures in place which position this group of students as outsiders, and forms their identity as such.

3. What are the barriers to student engagement with cultural spaces?

Barriers present themselves in various ways, while I have intentionally not offered a definitive answer; I have suggested that there are many simultaneous discourses (re)acted and (re)acting to form sixth form students as marginal to museum and gallery education. In this study I presents it through: firstly, the lack of support from senior teaching staff whose views are entrenched within their own deficit ideology of this spaces, and their orthodoxies of what learning is; secondly, students themselves as bring anxieties with them because they are unsure of how their identity can exist within these spaces as they are coerced into mapping out who they are by visiting them; and thirdly, through a personal value system which positions, for example, employment - whether actual or fictional - above this type of experience. All three of these are barriers which can be counteracted, from: further training of teaching staff, to embedding these experiences within the curriculum map, to supporting students financially and timetabling it within the school day. As such, for this project to reoccur all of these factors would need to be taken into consideration for it to be successful for all.

In all, I would argue that this is an important type of learning activity which, as the research above

has highlighted, offers a significant learning experience for sixth form students and helps shape them into 'good' learners. Moreover, if supported well, I believe that the barriers could be reduced and students who would not otherwise visit these spaces, could be exposed to the discourses of power which help challenge their sense of self and make them imagine and realise themselves as different types of learners.

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Appendices

A: Pre-Questionnaire

Cultural Spaces and Learning Identities: Can engagement with museums and galleries change how sixth form students view learning?

Questionnaire

Name: ……..

Learning in a sixth form

1) How is learning in sixth form different to learning in school?

……
……
……
……

2) What are the advantages of learning in a sixth form?

……
……
……
……

3) What are the disadvantages of learning in a sixth form?

……
……
……
……

4) Since starting Sixth Form, how often have you visited a museum? (tick the most appropriate answer)

- Never (0 visits)
- Once
- 2-3 times
- 4 or more times

5) Since starting Sixth Form, how often have you visited a gallery? (tick the most appropriate answer)

- Never (0 visits)
- Once
- 2-3 times
- 4 or more times

6) How would you describe how you are taught in Sixth Form?

……
……
……
……

Learning in a museum and/or gallery

7) How often did you parent(s)/carer(s) take you to museums and galleries as a child?

(tick the most appropriate answer)

- Never (0 visits)
- Once a year
- 2-3 times a year
- 4 or more times a year

8) What do you think the advantages to learning in these spaces are?

……
……
……
……

9) What do you think the disadvantages to learning in these spaces are?

……
……
……
……

Other

10) What makes a 'good' learner? (List these attributes from **1** (*least significant)* to **6** (*most significant*))

Independent …..

Discipline …..

Curiosity …..

Collaboration …..

Belonging …..

Creativity …..

B: Interview Questions following the questionnaire

1. How did you get here today?
2. How did you feel coming into a museum like this?
3. What would put off someone your age coming to a museum?
4. Do you think as you came in, that this place is aimed at a certain type of person?
5. What are the disadvantages of learning in a sixth form?
6. What do you think about the school as a building?
7. Do you feel it would improve your school experience if you had somewhere that you felt you belonged?
8. Going back to how museums and how they make you feel, can you see any benefits to them making you feel the way you do?
9. Do you feel like you learn in a museum?
10. Lots of you commented on how important discussion is in the Sixth Form and how that is one of the benefits of sixth form learning; do you think that museums allow you to discuss?
11. Looking at your survey the majority of you went to museums and galleries more as a child than you have since being in the Sixth Form, why do you think this is?

C: Interview Questions following the visit to the Ashmolean Museum.

1. How did you get here today?
2. How long did you stay at the museum?
3. What did you do in the museum?
4. What do you think someone your age would find difficult in a museum?
5. What benefits do you think there are to learning in a museum?
6. Participants said in the survey that curiosity is really important, however, on the survey lots of participants said that independence is not an important skill; can you explain why they might think this?
7. Would you say that you learn more or less in a museum than you do in a classroom?
8. Do you think you are more likely to research something from a museum then you would from a lesson?
9. Do you think there is anything schools can learn from how museums present information?

D: Interview Questions following the visit to Modern Art, Oxford

1. How did you get here today?
2. How long did you stay at the gallery?
3. What did you do in the gallery?
4. What was good about the gallery?
5. How do you see visiting galleries as beneficial?
6. So far, have you preferred museums or galleries?
7. Do you feel more welcome at either one?
8. Why do you think that some young people do not visit galleries?
9. What would be the advantage of a sixth form student regularly visiting a gallery or galleries?
10. Which learning behaviour do you think galleries develop most?

E: Interview Questions following the visit to the Pitts Rivers Museum

1. How did you get here today?
2. How long did you stay at the museum?
3. What did you do in the museum?
4. What was good about the museum?
5. What benefits do you think there are to learning in a museum?
6. How does this compare to the first museum you went to?
7. Do you go to a space like this to learn or are you going because it's a nice thing to do?
8. What is the difference between coming here by yourselves and going somewhere like this on a school-organised trip?
9. When you think about universities, do you think about the cultural spaces in that area?

F: Letter of approval to the Head teacher

University of Oxford

Department of Education

15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY

Head Teacher
Norham Gardens School and Sixth Form
xxx
xxx

15th November 2017

Dear Mrs X

I am writing to enquire about conducting some research in your school during this academic year. I am a student at Oxford University, supervised by Dr. YYY (Curriculum tutor in English). In my research project, *Cultural Spaces and Learning Identities*, I will explore key stage five students conceptualisation of learning spaces.

The research will take place ideally with a Year 12 English Literature group. While the subject is not of focus, the group needs to be a small group of students to which this group is suitable as there are 8 of them. Students will be asked to visit three sites: the Ashmolean Museum; the Modern Art, Oxford and the Pitts Rivers Museum). These visits will involve students navigating the same space independently and engaging with the resources these sites have to offer. Catherine has agreed to collaborate with me on this project.

By participating in the research, Norham Gardens school would be contributing to a project that will deepen our understanding of how student perceive their identity as learners and how these identities are constructed by the learning spaces they engage with. By further understanding students perception, we hope to challenge learning behaviours by enabling them to become more independent and resilient.

The commitment from the school would be to allow me to take the students to the sites. I would audio-record students responses to interview questions, observe and take notes.

Oxford University has strict ethical procedures on conducting ethical research with teachers and young people, consistent with current British Educational Research Association guidelines. Before beginning the research, I would inform parents and guardians about the research and offer the students, parents and guardians the opportunity to refuse to participate. Throughout the research students, parents and guardians will be able to refuse to participate at any time.

All participants, including students, teacher and the school, would be made anonymous in all research reports. The data collected would be kept strictly confidential, available only to my supervisor and myself, and not used other than specified without the further consent of all involved being obtained. All tapes would be destroyed at the end of the research period, and kept in locked conditions until then. I have enclosed copies of the leaflets for parents and students with this letter.

If you feel you would like to take part in the study, or need more information about what is involved, please contact me. Whether or not you feel it would be appropriate for your school to participate, I would be grateful if you would complete the pro-forma below, and return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope enclosed in this letter.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Amess

G: Information Sheet for Young People

Cultural Spaces and Learning Identities: can engaging with Museums and Galleries change sixth form students' views of learning?

INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Ethics Approval Reference: ED-C1A-17-041

We are inviting you to join in a research study. My name is Michael Amess and I work at Norham Garden School in the English department, but am conducting this research as a student at the University of Oxford in the Department of Education.

Before you decide if you would like to join in, it's important to understand what the study is about, why we're doing it and what it would involve for you. Please read and think about this leaflet carefully. Please feel free to talk to your family, friends, or the researchers about it if you want. If anything isn't clear or you have more questions you can ask your parents/carer to give us a call and we can discuss it with you and your parents/carer.

Why are we doing this research?

I am trying to see whether visiting museums and galleries (defined here as 'cultural spaces') influence how students view learning and their role in learning.

Why have I been invited to take part?

We are inviting you to take part because you are a young person, aged between 16 and 18.

We are inviting 8 young people to take part.

Do I have to take part?

No - It is up to you. We will ask you to sign a form to say that you do not want to take part (an opt out form). We will give you a copy of this information sheet and your signed form to keep. You are free to stop taking part at any time during the research without giving a reason, by telling the researcher. If you decide to stop, we will use the information we have already collected from you.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you chose to take part, the research will start in January and last for the period of one month. During this month, you will visit the Ashmolean Museum, Modern Art, Oxford and the Pitts Rivers Museum. The visits will be self-guided. The time spent at these sites will be decided by yourself. Before the visits, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and take part in a group interview, and will then be asked to take part in a group interview after the visits. These interviews will be audio-recorded.

What happens to the results of the study?

Results for each young person taking part are kept strictly confidential. Only a number will be used to identify you, and all information and results are kept in a secure location in school.

If you agree to participate in this study, the research will be written up as part of a student's work.

We also aim to publish our findings in scientific journals, but this may be two to three years from the end of the study.

All research data and records will be stored for a minimum retention period of 3 year after publication or public release of the work of the research. Third parties may be given access to research data for monitoring and/or audit of the study, or for data storage purposes. [Note that the University require a minimum of 3 years, but certain funders may have other requirements – see http://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/university-of-oxford-policy-on-the-management-of-research-data-and-records/]

What are the advantages / disadvantages of taking part?

The advantages to this research are that you will get visit some important cultural sites.

Will anyone else know I'm doing this?

We will keep your information private. This means we will only tell those who have a need or right to know, such as the research team and your parents/carer. Wherever possible, we will only share information that has your name and address removed.

What if I don't want to take part in the research anymore?

Just tell your parents/carer and the people carrying out the research that you don't want to take part. You don't have to give a reason and no one will be annoyed with you. It is YOUR choice.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is organised by Michael Amess of Oxford University, who is a research student. The study is not being funded by any external body.

Who has reviewed the study?

Before any research involving people can start, it has to be checked by a Research Ethics Committee to make sure that it is OK for the research to go ahead. This study has been approved by the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem or something goes wrong?

Please tell us if you are worried about any part of this study, by contacting the researcher (michael.amess@education.ox.ac.uk). You may also talk to your teacher/parent/carer who will let the researcher know. If you are still unhappy or wish to make a complaint, either you or your teacher/parent(s)/carer(s) can contact the chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford (Chair, [Social Sciences and Humanities/Medical Sciences] Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk/ethics@medsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD).

Contact details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

Michael Amess
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford
OX2 6PY
Email: michael.amess@education.ox.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this – please ask any questions if you need to.

H: Student Opt Out form.

Cultural Spaces and Learning Identities: can engaging with Museums and Galleries change sixth form students' views of learning?

OPT-OUT FORM

Ethics Approval Reference: ED-C1A-17-041

If you **DO NOT** want your child to participate in the above-named research study please fill out the form below and return it to the school by 20/12/2017.

If we do not receive an opt-out form from you by this date, your child may be invited to take part in this study, as described in the accompanying information sheet.

I, the undersigned, hereby DO NOT give permission for my child to take part in the study titled: Cultural Spaces and Learning Identities.

Name of child: _____

Name of parent/guardian: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of researcher: _____