CHILDREN IN THE MUSEUM

Laura Clark Hunt
Assistant Professor, University of Southern Mississippi

Abstract
Developing comprehensive ways to measure impact becomes increasingly important when museum programming grows. Information from interviews with parents/caregivers of children attending archaeology museum programs reveals the impact of hands-on, age-appropriate activities for children. The interviews reveal that participation in archaeological learning influences how students perceive the past. Earlier research has focused on knowledge creation, but not on the creation of a sense of belonging and cultural identity through archaeology education, which helps establish the value of heritage resources. In the future, practitioners should prioritize intrinsic motivation in the discovery and instillation of respect for the past. To further this, future research is needed on best practices of fun and inclusive archaeology programs rooted in discovery that impact lifelong learning.

Introduction

In 2018, Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN) Coordinating Center staff in Pensacola, Florida, implemented a pilot program called "Archaeology Story Time." The program was held in the Destination Archaeology Resource Center. This public program was created specifically for a previously underserved age group (children aged 4 to 8) that had been left out of previous programming. Registration for many of these programs filled up within 48 hours of opening. The program took place monthly in a museum that contained a lecture room with video capacity, lab, and museum space. The activity-based programs focus on archaeological techniques used for discovery, which are rooted in science. Interviews were conducted with participants from three programs to help understand why parents and caregivers, as well as children, attended these programs. Appendix B has pictures from the sorting activity. Programs like this program and other archaeology education programs for children have experienced significant growth over the past few decades, aiming to foster cultural heritage stewardship, promote historical thinking skills, and engage youth with the scientific process. [1] By doing this and providing quality archaeology education programs for children, we hope to fuel lifelong learning and an appreciation for our cultural heritage resources.[2]

Archaeology Education

Archaeology education programs for children aim to increase public understanding of archaeology, raise awareness of local heritage, and encourage preservation of the past.[3] To accomplish the goal of raising awareness and encouraging preservation, museums employ various approaches, including classroom lessons, museum programs, field trips to sites, the use of current and new technologies such as smartphone apps, hands-on experiential learning, and more. Other common approaches include archaeology fairs and community events that showcase local resources, the classroom use of actual archaeological data and artifacts, and student involvement in authentic research.[4] This hands-on approach to inquiry offers an engaging activity that emphasizes doing rather than simply sitting and listening. This can take the form of summer camps and other activities that allow children and their parents to engage in limited archaeological work.

1. Ellick, 2016
2. Clark and Thomin, 2022
3. Kowalczyk, 2016
4. Sgouros and Stirn, 2016

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Museum Education
Place-based education, which immerses students in the exploration of their local community through hands-on learning, is particularly well-suited for archaeology.[5] This type of learning allows students the opportunity to explore the world around them, especially archaeological sites, and learn what these sites have to offer through first-hand experience. It enables people of all ages, and especially children, to experience the joys of discovery, whether they be large or small. Engaging with local historical and archaeological resources helps students develop a stronger connection to places and an appreciation for stewardship.

Overview of Research Design
For this study, the researcher deployed qualitative collection methods. Data was analyzed for perceptions, motivations, and impacts experienced. Phone interviews were relatively inexpensive and allowed the researcher to collect data from one point in time from any location, which gave a deeper understanding of perceptions in their own words. The semi-structured nature of the interviews stems from the ability to compare questions for major themes. The research utilizes interviews to provide more information on the course through the students' eyes.

RQ1: What factors motivate parents/caregivers to bring their child/children to the program?
RQ2: What are parents' or caregivers' perceptions of the program?
RQ3: What impact did the program have from the perspective of the parents/caregivers?

Population
The location used for gathering data consisted of three different museum programs at the Destination Archaeology Museum in Pensacola, Florida. The region was along the western part of the Florida Panhandle. All interview participants lived within 20 miles of the museum location and were noted as the parents of the children they brought to the museum. All children were registered for the program in advance. At the end of the program, parents/caregivers were asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview. Post-program interviews were conducted by phone and were collected over the following month.

Interview Findings
Three story-time programs were assessed at the Destination Archaeology Museum. A total of nine interviews were collected from the three programs. The programs averaged 14 children per program. The interviewees volunteered to participate in the survey, so they were contacted by phone to schedule an interview. Many of the interviews took place during the afternoon, between 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M. Nine participants volunteered to be interviewed. Major themes were mentioned four or more times in the interviews. Ancillary themes were comments that were not addressed in the structured questions. Ancillary themes appeared in the interviews that the researcher did not anticipate. The headings for the themes are as follows: benefits, favorite part of the program, program impact, program improvements, lessons learned, motivation for attending, and ancillary findings.

Interview Themes	Quotes
Program Elements	1. The story was just so well chosen. 2. Seeing the plantation and learning hands-on 3. It was interactive. It was a good span of time. 4. I liked that the group was small and manageable. 5. He's really good with the children. He keeps their attention.

K-12 Archaeology Story Time

5. Reetz, and Quackenbush, 2016

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Interview Themes	Quotes
Benefits	1. I think more knowledge; it was more information for my child. But I certainly enjoyed it. 2. It brought a lot of interest to my son with history and he didn't know anything about archaeology before. 3. They're just discovering, they're just having fun, and meanwhile they're learning. 4. I would say interacting with the kids and learning something new. I would say the content for sure. 5. The fact that it was an educational program that also provides us with some history of the area we live in. 6. My kids really enjoyed the part where they got to sift through the artifacts and find things. They learned a bit about what you guys do.
Program Impact	1. Well, he's been telling people about it and other kids. Telling them that he likes archaeology. 2. It definitely got him interested. I know he would like to read more about the things that he learned. There's a lot to be learned, history and things like that from archaeology. 3. It brought awareness to the Archaeology Institute. I had never been there; I didn't know there was a museum where I could take my daughter to. 4. She'll have a greater knowledge about the city she was born, and lived in.
Motivation	1. The history, archaeology aspect of it. 2. She loved learning about the Greeks, and the Egyptians. 3. I always try to find things around the community, especially things that are free or affordable and educational. 4. It was really kind of fun to come with my daughter, and learn, as well as some hands-on stuff for myself about the town that we live in. 5. I personally have an interest in archaeology. I thought it'd be something fun for the kids to do. 6. My kids, they like digging up stuff. They like science.
Favorite	1. Sorting through the artifacts. 2. He was making stone piles and pottery piles like bone piles, and he just was really getting into it and that's what made it the most fun activity for us, I think. And that it was hands-on. 3. I liked the story time because my girls like it, and the stories you guys picked were great choices. The next thing was the hands-on that you guys did was just amazing. Definitely when they were digging through the rocks and pulling out the artifacts, and um, pulling out the items.
Improvements	1. Sometimes these little guys can have a bit of trouble grappling with abstract things. 2. I would like to see y'all do more like this. More opportunity for more kids to be able to participate, and maybe things for the older kids as well. 3. We would just love to see it again. It'd be great to be able to do something once a month or especially during the summer.
Learned Lessons	1. He came away, um, with understanding the difference between archaeology, paleontology, and geology. 2. The words, archaeology and what that is, what it means, and the artifacts. 3. Conversations about clay is a form of earth and who would study that, a geologist or an archaeologist. 4. As an adult, I think you want to learn new things in life because now I'm not going to school anymore. 5. We learned about an artifact, a rock, and what's a fossil. Like all these little things, um, that you guys encountered to facilitate the learning process for us, and in order to learn about this area. To educate us and learn about what happened here in the past.
Ancillary Findings	Respondents reminisced about their own childhoods using metal detectors, etc. Children like to explore, dig, and collect things.

Practitioner Application

There is more substantive information about assessing historical programs for the public in history rather than archaeology. Of course, this is a needed research study. The methods applied to this study are rooted in program evaluation that has long been used for public programs, including library children's programming. The findings provide some focal points that museums and archaeology education programs can implement to help demonstrate the important work being accomplished. It is essential to note that the program was led by a responsive adult who adjusted the program components as needed to suit the children. None of the activities in the program would have been successful without a responsive adult who was vested in the experience each child had.

Motivations

The overall motivation for attendance at museum programming can directly impact the experience and learning of participants.[6] However, in this study, the elements of impact, benefit, and program elements were tied directly to the motivation. The knowledge about local history and the field of archaeology, along with hands-on applications, were found as themes. This creates a question of whether a natural interest in these elements already provided the needed motivation and, in turn, created the impact and benefit the parents/caregivers wanted within the program elements for their children. This information then helps program developers understand how to market these types of programs and the elements needed to create an ideal program for children.

Perceptions

Past research on the perceptions of museum visitors has yielded results that reveal improvements and expansions, facilitating relationships between interpretive content and visitor experiences.[7] The findings above correlate with the previous research on museum visitor motivations. The findings above clarify program elements that parents/caregivers desire for their children. A common theme in all the interviews was age-appropriate, hands-on activities for the children. Activities such as sorting lent themselves easily to the children's natural tendencies, allowing them to touch artifacts from the past. However, one of the parents referred to the sorting activity as "digging."

It is essential for museum professionals and archaeologists not to focus on language like this. Instead, the focus should be on the experience and how the child felt about cultural heritage after the program. This supports previous research that found motivation and learning in museums have different assessment criteria.[8] Feeding curiosity and fostering interest in cultural heritage should be priorities for all children's museum programs.

Learning

Helping children and parents understand basic concepts, such as what an artifact is, is still a great outcome for a program. A component of inclusivity is creating a sense of belonging, regardless of where people come from or their level of knowledge about the subject matter. However, prior knowledge can impact learning during the museum experience. Educational components in a program can directly relate to the learning that takes place within the program.[9] Creating opportunities for children to play, explore, and learn about things for which they have context, such as eating, is a great way to present a simple concept that inclusively demonstrates the relatability of diversity. Inclusivity in programming for children helps them feel like they are part of archaeologists' work. Ultimately, this sense of belonging and identity in cultural heritage will establish value for the past and hopefully grow into a desire to preserve cultural resources. The benefits the parents/caregivers note are not mutually exclusive from the learning process. The parents/caregivers gave the following as benefits: knowledge, historical information for my child, creating interest in history for my child, discovery and fun while learning, socialization, hands-on activity, the work of archaeology, and local history.

In the ancillary findings, historians and archaeologists see less-than-ideal behavior toward artifacts and cultural sites. Allowing children to learn about preserving the past and why this preservation is critical should be another underlying message at all archaeological programs for children. Additionally, presenters need to embrace that if you reach the child, you reach the parents with a message of preserving cultural heritage. This is evident in the quotes when parents/caregivers say they do not enjoy the fact that they are learning something with their child. Demonstrating to children how to interact with artifacts and elements from the past should also be an essential component in programs.

6. Gorman, 2008
7. Ballantyne, 2003
8. Gorman, 2008
9. Gorman, 2008

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Impact

Yalowitz (2004) determined impact based on the behavior of the museum visitors after they experienced the exhibit.[10] This research primarily focused on changes in behaviors and beliefs.[11] Adelman, Falk, and James (2000) noted the initial impact of the museum experience was high, but the long-term effect was not noticed.[12] The impact that parents/caregivers provided was not mutually exclusive from program elements, learning, or benefits. The following is a list of the impact themes parents/caregivers provided: appreciation of archaeology, interest in learning about archaeology, awareness of the museum, and local history. Gorman (2008) provided evidence of the complexities when assessing learning in a museum. While assessing learning is essential, the long-term feelings about belonging and creating interest that will help fuel learning after the program is over may be of greater value than remembering dates and names.

Most research indicates that museums, archives, and libraries have a positive impact.[13] Studies have yet to establish a descriptive indicator for what impact looks like within the context of social impact that can be measured quantifiably. This makes it difficult to identify the impact for further investigation. Museums and archives notably lack hard evidence that can be utilized to identify impact via collection of systematic, generalizable data.[14] Museums, archives, and libraries need to establish set areas of potential social impact that demonstrate a causal link to long-term behavior change and learning.

Future Research

Several articles in this literature review emphasize the need for future research to understand the outcomes and effectiveness of archaeology education programs. More interdisciplinary research in archaeology education in museums is needed from a psychological and social science perspective. Specifically, museums need to provide best practices on what constitutes a quality environment for children and how it can impact lifelong learning. The research should complement current findings and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and impact of archaeology education programs within the context of joyful discovery and exploration.

Museums need to demonstrate that these stories have power and how that power can be applied in our daily lives. This sense of belonging and cultural identity helps create value for the community's natural cultural heritage resources, and ensures the sustainability and protection of the past. Understanding stakeholders' motivation for participation in cultural heritage programs (no matter the age) is imperative to program success.

Conclusion

Archaeological education programs promote awareness of the past through archaeological research activities. The program elements, motivation, impact, and learning that parents/caregivers perceived as necessary for their children are not mutually exclusive. While further research is needed, studies suggest that participation in archaeological learning influences how children perceive and engage with the past. Archaeology educators should expand high-quality programming to focus on the past through learning activities that are fun and interactive. Evaluation and best practices for inquiry-based programming approaches are crucial for improving the quality, inclusivity, and sustainability of museum archaeology programs for children.

10. Yalowitz, 2004
11. Gorman, 2008
12. Adelman, Falk, and James, 2000.
13. Wavell, Baxter, Johnson, and Williams 2002
14. Wavell, Baxter, Johnson, and Williams 2002

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Appendix A

1. What impact do you feel your child experienced from attending this museum program?
2. What was your motivation for attending this program?
3. What are the benefits you received from attending this program?
4. What did your child learn from this museum program?
5. What improvements would you recommend for this program?
6. Do you believe the staff were responsive to your child?
7. What was your favorite part of the program?
8. What program elements did you like in this museum program?