

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

REPORT BY
RENE SUTHERLAND

2003 CHURCHILL FELLOW
(DEFERRED TO 2005)

To visit children's museums to see how children's picture book illustrations are or could be displayed and marketed in a way that invites children to interact with them in order to extend their learning experience.

Always look out for the obvious

Anonymous



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Cover image: The Fellows daughter, Grace, in the Bilderbuch Museum, Troisdorf, Germany. The couch is a replica of one depicted in the illustration on the wall behind her.

1 INTRODUCTION

This report details the findings from a 2005 Churchill Fellowship visit to museums in the United States, France, Germany and the United Kingdom investigating the methods used to engage children with picture book art in order to develop visual and verbal literary skills. Specific areas of study included:

- Using picture books characters and stories to engage audiences
- Museum location & fit out
- Display techniques of illustrations & objects
- Cross-curricular approach to enhancing the museum experience and learning opportunities – especially the relevance of the theatrical arts
- Use of visual and verbal language to interpret and promote displays
- Business partnerships to achieve desired outcomes
- Clearly defining the target markets and related strategies

I wish to thank the following organizations and individuals who ensured this Fellowship eventuated and was successful:

- The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia
- Bundanon Trust
- Dubbo City Council
- Meg Martin, Executive Officer (Fellowship), Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
- Nicholas Clark, Director, Eric Carl Museum of Picture Book Art & Trinket Clark
- Manuela Saudrais, Le Musée en Herbe, Paris, France
- Bernard Schmitz, Director, Bilderbuch Museum, Troisdorf, Germany
- Amanda Skoog, Visitor Services Manager, Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre, Great Missenden, UK
- Simone de Haan, Acting CEO and other Bundanon Trust staff who kept things running smoothly in my absence
- My family – especially my mother June

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Fellowship Objective

This project involved visiting children's museums to see how children's picture book illustrations are or could be displayed and marketed in a way that invites children to interact with them in order to extend their learning experience.

Fellowship Highlights

- (i) Disneyland, USA: A major theme park with roots in the film industry. Demonstrated activation of story themes and characters with high-end display and marketing strategies.
- (ii) Eric Carl Museum of Picture Book Art, USA: Dr Nick Clark, founding director provided insights into current museum practices with picture book art as well as contemporary museum education practices. The museum highlighted the importance of quiet zones, on-going workshop activities, and structured questioning techniques to draw on children's creativity and develop observation skills.
- (iii) Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, Massachusetts, USA: This 'living museum' demonstrated the value of role play as well as interpreters acting out parts of a story to inspire interest in displays.
- (iv) Children's Museum of Manhattan, USA: Rita London, Head of Public Programs discussed strategies behind the museum's interactive displays and cross-curricular programming as well as issues related to reaching the various segments within their target audience of 0 to 12 year olds.
- (v) Le Musée en Herbe, France: Manuela Saudrais discussed the unique history of the museum emerging out of the French cultural revolution of Mai 1968, the Museum's unique role in the formation of French children and its emphasis on the importance of play in learning.
- (vi) Bilderbuch Museum, Germany: Mr Bernard Schmitz, Director, provided access to the museum's rare book collection of German literature. The venue demonstrated how images in illustrations can be translated into furniture for use in the museum and the value of play equipment & outdoor sculptures that relate to stories and their characters.
- (vii) Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, UK: Val Young, Senior Development Manager, described in detail a series of programs she championed that successfully harnessed the power of children's picture book art to advance the museum's overall education and marketing aims with strategic business partnerships as central to their success.
- (viii) Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre, UK: Liz Whittingham elaborated on the thrust of the museum's strategies as well as some insights into the proposed Quentin Blake (Dahl's principal illustrator) museum.
- (ix) Roald Dahl Children's Gallery, Aylesbury, UK: Observed how Roald Dahl's stories and Quentin Blake's illustrations were used for cross-curricular programs through interactive displays to explore scientific phenomena.

Findings

There is a greater likelihood of children being successfully engaged with picture book art to extend visual and verbal literacy by attending to the following:

- (i) **Fun:** everything from promotions through to signage, displays and the activities of museums must evoke a sense of fun. Opportunities for play are essential. The visual and verbal language of relevant stories, colour, light, scaling of objects, stimulation of all senses, interactive displays etc aid in this objective;
- (ii) **Fantasy:** for the power of children's picture book art to be unleashed and used to greatest effect, museums should evoke the sense of fantasy in stories through tactics such as constructing displays that are themed with stories and by involving the theatrical arts in guiding and education programs.
- (iii) **Friendly:** museums must be 'child friendly' in everything from display policies and amenities provided to the attitude of staff. This includes allowing opportunities for objects to be touched, kinaesthetic learning, learning by doing and ensuring inclusion of the human element through guides, interpreters, visiting artists etc;
- (iv) **Focus:** museum layout and program development must provide opportunities for children to focus so they can explore their own creativity as well as develop their visual and verbal language skills. Structuring quiet zones in museum layouts, establishing places that invite parent and child to sit and read, and interpretation of images through structured questioning techniques and music were found to be successful strategies. For clarity of program development and marketing museums must focus on accurately defining their target markets and attending to their needs.

Seminars

Opportunities to share these findings will be sought for presentations at seminars conducted by peak industry organizations such as:

- Museums & Galleries NSW
- Museums Australia
- The Children's Book Council of Australia

Publications

Relevant aspects of this report will be published in industry related newsletters. In addition the report will be posted on Bundanon Trust's web site and opportunities will be sought to post it on those of other relevant industry bodies.

Program Development

In my current position as CEO of Bundanon Trust, I aim to use these research results to develop the artist in residence and education programs at Arthur Boyd's Bundanon. In particular I aim to build relationship with the Manchester Art Gallery and the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester to explore ways in which music can be used to understand & explore the visual language.

Consulting

Advice will be provided upon request to museums and exhibition developers on picture book art display and program development techniques. This service will be promoted by word-of-mouth.

3 PROGRAMME

VENUE & DATES	ADDRESS	CONTACTS
Disneyland Park 5 – 8 September	1313 Harbour Boulevard Amherst, California USA	James Minor Public Relations Officer James.minor@disney.com 0011 1 714 781 4609
The Eric Carl Museum of Picture Book Art 9 – 19 September Closed for maintenance 13-16 <u>Unscheduled venue:</u> Old Sturbridge Village http://www.osv.org	125 West Bay Road Amherst, 01002, Massachusetts USA	Nick Clark Director nickc@picturebookart.org Nora Maroulis, Director of Development & Marketing 0011 1 413 658 1100
Children's Museum of Manhattan 20–30 September Closed for maintenance 12-23	The Tish Building 212 West 83 rd Street New York, NY, 10024 USA	Rita London Head of Public Programs rlondon@cmom.org 0011 1 212 721 1234
Le Musee en Herbe 1 – 10 October	Jardin d' Acclatation 75116 Paris France	Manuela Saudrais Public Relations Officer musee-en-herbe@wanadoo.fr 0011 33 140 679 766
Bilderbuch Museum 11 – 18 October	Burg Wissem Troisdorf, Germany	Mr Bernhard Schmitz Director museum@troisdorf.de 0011 49 2241 884 111
Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre 21 October – 2 November <u>Unscheduled venues:</u> Manchester Art Gallery Contact: Val Young http://www.manchestergalleries.org Roald Dahl Children's Gallery Contact: Caroline Frith http://www.roalddahlmuseum.org	High Street, Great Missenden UK	Amanda Skoog Visitor Services Manager amandaskoog@roalddahlmuseum.org Liz Wittington Collections Manager 0011 44 1494 892192

4 MAIN BODY OF REPORT

4.1 BACKGROUND

Children's picture book illustrations are an easily accessible avenue into the visual language. Because they usually accompany text, they also assist with reading. Picture book illustration as an art form is well developed in this country, with Australian illustrators enjoying considerable international acclaim for the standard and level of innovation in their work. Despite this, as an art genre, the Australian museum services sector does not take full advantage of its education and marketing potential. From personal experience - as director of Dubbo Regional Gallery, which developed a collecting and exhibiting specialisation in this area - picture book art has proven itself to be a valuable medium through which visual and verbal literary skills can be developed and in a general sense help children and non-museum goer adults to have an easy means of access to the fine art experience. Display of children's picture book illustration is underdeveloped in Australia where exhibitions tend to be static and conforming to a traditional fine art display convention of 'the picture speaking for itself'. Given the ongoing challenges of engaging children and non-gallery goer adult audiences it was therefore expeditious to find out how much more could be achieved with this exciting art genre for the education of our youth and broader marketing aims of art museums.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research was to explore ways in which children's museums could use picture book illustrations to greatest effect to enhance the learning experience of young people. It is necessarily limited in scope as it was intended to merely be an exploratory exercise for later research and development.

Each venue was monitored to see how effective it was at engaging an upper primary audience through the direct experience of my 11 year old daughter Grace. Whilst the bias tended to be towards children's picture book illustration museums or museums that displayed picture book art, other museums were visited as a means of benchmarking programs and display techniques.

The venues ranged from traditional museums through to a theme park. This diversity provided an invaluable range of insights into how the unique features of children's picture book art can be used to engage children and motivate them to become more familiar with the visual and verbal language.

This report describes the observations made about each venue, the strengths and weaknesses of its strategies in terms of how well they engaged Grace in aspects of visual and verbal literacy, and the key finding or findings gleaned from that venue.

4.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & LIMITATIONS

The primary research methodology adopted for this project was to observe the response of my 11 year old daughter, Grace, to the environments and experience to which she was exposed at a range of venues. She kept a daily diary, which was of some use in gauging the level and nature of engagement with each venue. Literature provided by the venues or published material was also used to obtain further information.

Observing Grace as a primary research mechanism was, however, limited by the following factors:

- We attended the museums as casual visitors rather than as part of an organised group such as with a school – this necessarily ruled out assessing the museums’ effectiveness in guided programs;
- The time of the visit was a quiet period for museums in the United States. Whilst this was a benefit when visiting Disneyland because it was a quieter period – it was a disadvantage at the Eric Carl Museum and the Children’s Museum of Manhattan because during part of my time in each location, these museums were closed and there was fewer programs scheduled;
- The intensity of the trip was tiring for Grace, so the conditions surrounding her visits were abnormal and therefore results are skewed by her inability to engage fully on some occasions. I therefore relied on my own reactions when required;
- Grace was at an age that is just departing from engagement with children’s picture books as a major source of interest;
- Language barriers impeded full engagement with the European museums.

4.4 VENUE OBSERVATIONS

(i) **Disneyland** Anaheim, California, USA

Although Disneyland is known of as a theme park and not a museum, it shares many of the same features available to museums that show picture book art - the main one being concepts contained within children’s stories. A key difference however – and one that impacted on the direction Disneyland took and the strategies it adopted – is that the Disney stories have been made for motion pictures (film and later television). Whilst many children’s picture book stories eventually become films, the tradition of their display comes from libraries or museums with static displays. This has given Disneyland the advantage of being more theatrical in its approach.

Another interesting similarity between Disney stories and that of children’s books is the use of animals to carry the story. Both the motion picture cartoon and children’s picture book stories often have animals as characters that are personified. This adds an aspect to the child’s experience that helps them enter into the personality and message conveyed by the character concerned. For example, my daughter’s favourite character is Minnie Mouse, which she has as a soft toy.

The main idea that Walt Disney wanted to inject into Disneyland was to help families enter into the magical world of the stories he told through film and for it to be “the happiest place on earth”. With such a vision infused into every aspect of the guest experience – Disneyland has achieved unparalleled financial success.

To achieve these objectives the following tactics are adopted¹:

- Everything is built in a ‘forced storybook perspective’ of 5/8ths size plus buildings are constructed with first floor 90% normal, second floor 80% and third 60%;
- Telling of stories in all attractions and rides;

¹ Source: Hamilton, Richard (2003), *Disney Magic – business strategy you can use at work and at home*, Stillbetter Tools, Phoenix, USA.

- Attention to detail featuring creatures and characters that continue to tell the story in places surrounding a particular story zone (e.g. hidden Mickey's in unexpected places);
- Staff are referred to as 'cast' as if cast in a film. All cast members play a role in creating the illusion of fantasyland & visitors are referred to as 'guests' as if guests to a party;
- Actors play characters at all times in the park and hotel operations, which not only brings the characters to life but creates a very a personal experience of well known and loved identities for the guests;
- Cast are trained to absorb the 'big picture' of conveying the fantasyland experience where all guests are treated as VIPs and to adopt the service theme "we create happiness"
- Pin trading (cast happily trade collectable pins with guests)
- Emphasis on cleanliness & safety
- Accessibility – guests can touch attractions (necessarily coupled with rigorous maintenance regime)
- Appeals to all ages
- Adopting a principle of 'Disney means fun, excitement and quality'
- Cross promotion: with television and merchandise such as music & books

All of these tactics have contributed to Disneyland having a global audience - attracting millions of visitors a year.

Apart from some interest Grace took in the illustrations for films and the mock ups for characters in a museum display within the park (vis engaging with issues of visual literacy), she tended to be over stimulated and not focused on applying herself to diary entries. So while the park had tremendous 'pulling power', opportunities for learning and creative exploration were not apparent.

Strengths for target audience

- Ability to engage with story characters
- Presentation and display of attractions geared to tell a story, which pulls the child in

Weakness for target audience

- Excessive stimulus promotes hyperactivity and inability to focus
- Emphasis on entertainment inhibits creative expression

Key findings

- Carrying through theme of story in total presentation
- Animating characters in stories with actors
- Manner and language of staff to carry through story theme
- Deliberately catering for whole family (not just children)

(ii) **Eric Carl Museum of Picture Book Art**
Amherst, Massachusetts, USA

Located in a 7.5 acre apple orchard in a regional location, this museum specialises in displaying and highlighting the artistic merit of children's picture book art. It is heavily geared towards providing education into visual and verbal literacy. It positions itself as being a 'half way point' for museum goers between a children's discovery museum and fine art museum. It's layout, presentation and general rhythm reinforces this approach. Director, Dr Nick Clark, stresses that it is not a children's museum. A statement by the Museum reads:

(The Museum) strives to provide visitors of all ages with the confidence to appreciate and enjoy art of every kind through the exploration of familiar and beloved images. Excellence, originality and a wide range of opportunities for creative inquiry and appreciation of the visual world define the Museum's educational programming.

In this sense, it is not geared towards entertainment, as is the case with Disneyland, rather it places an emphasis on education. Its programming utilises the Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine's Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to engage visitors – particularly children – to ask *What is going on in this picture?; What do you see that makes you say that?; What more can you find?* This approach is necessarily supported and driven by professional education staff for visitors booked into a formal program. VTS is *a way of helping beginner and less experienced viewers grow in both confidence and the ability to derive meaning from art. It is based upon careful looking and facilitated group discussions in the galleries*².

VTS programs did not seem to be available for casual visitors during our weekend visits as it appeared that no education staff or gallery guides were rostered on. Some resources for self guided tours were available.

To support the Museum's educational objectives, there are a number of spaces that cater for various activities. These include:

- Galleries: featuring changing exhibitions in addition to work by Eric Carl
- Auditorium: provides a space for musical, theatrical and storytelling performances in addition to discussions and lectures
- Studio: Provides themed activities each month for self guided art activities. The goal is to *help visitors to experience the challenge and magic of the creative process while deepening their understanding and appreciation of how to look at art*
- Library: positioned as the "living room" of the museum, it provides visitors with an opportunity to have access to a collection of over 3,000 picture books. Storytelling is offered in this space.
- Bookshop: stocks comprehensive range of picture books for both children and adults as well as gifts and toys

The research was limited by the fact that the Museum was closed during the week days of our visit and only open on weekends (because of annual maintenance). In addition, being the beginning of the school year, there was minimal public and education programming.

² <http://aaa.mpls.k12.mn.us/VTS.html>, 7 January, 2006

Grace's initial enthusiasm towards this museum was dampened because of the combined effect of jet lag and the direct contrast of the colourful & fun looking Disneyland to the Museum's minimalist exterior. Once inside the building, however, the calming atmosphere and structured workshop activity focused her in a beneficial way. The activity – puppet making – was a welcome source of creative outlet (after all the stimulation of Disneyland) and resulted in Grace developing characters and stories. She enjoyed this immensely and was keen to return. The story telling in the library was of less interest because it was targeted to a younger audience and the exhibitions would have had more appeal if guided programs were available. The serious atmosphere in all gallery spaces - through the necessary observance to preventative conservation measures (low lighting and no touching) - and the absence of guides or interpreters appeared to lessen the appeal of viewing the exhibitions.

Strengths for target audience

- Workshop provides opportunity to make objects and make up stories
- Quiet atmosphere had a calming and focusing effect
- The bookshop offered an opportunity to touch and play with characters
- The staff child friendly
- Art displayed at good height for children

Weaknesses for target audience

- Minimalist façade and exterior of building not engaging
- Foyer sparse and not 'child friendly'
- Story time in library geared to younger children
- Lack of personalised guidance in gallery for casual visitors
- Need for items outside the workshop, library and shop that can be touched
- All gallery spaces with dimmed light and no items being able to be touched

Key Findings

- Use of VTS pedagogical method
- Structuring of 'quiet' spaces to aid reflection and creativity
- Works hung at height suitable for children

(iii) **Old Sturbridge Village** Sturbridge, Massachusetts

This is a 'living museum' that recreates an 1830's New England village and is developed and maintained on sound archaeological and historical evidence. A key feature is interpreters who dress in period costume and are knowledgeable about the crafts of the day. They occupy themselves with carrying out the day-to-day activities of an 1830's village person. Guests are invited, where possible, to participate in the craft being practiced. For example, Grace was invited to comb wool, which was to be spun and woven according to traditional methods.

In addition to engagement of guests by interpreters, there were hands-on activities that children could easily participate in. For example, there was children's interactive gallery called 'Kidstory' where they could dress up and pretend to be one of the historical characters depicted by the museum thus inviting *children to use their*

*imaginations and exercise their thinking skills*³. It encouraged role-playing that brought to life the historical stories told by the museum.

Grace was deeply engaged with this museum because the interpreters were 'friendly' and were able to tell her how day-to-day activities were undertaken in the 1830's. This personal one-on-one approach underscored the importance of the human element in presentation through guides, interpreters and/or visiting artists.

Strengths for target audience

- Children's imagination is easily engaged with hands-on activities
- Opportunities for children to pretend (role play)
- Personal engagement with interpreters

Weaknesses for target audience

- None observed

Key Findings

- Benefits of role play (dressing up and pretending)
- Importance of human element in engagement through guides/interpreters and/or artists in residence

(iv) **Children's Museum of Manhattan** Manhattan, New York, USA

Unlike the Eric Carl Museum, which is located in a rural setting, this museum is situated in the high-density urban environment of a major metropolis. Whilst the building's land surface area is relatively small and has no surrounding parkland, it occupies five floors.

Operating since the 1973, it has evolved to cater for the 0-12 year old market. Its potential audience is New York City and surrounding regions and attracts 350,000 visitors per year. In attendance terms, it is considered very successful and because of this continues to enjoy considerable private and public financial support. The target audiences vary according to the time of day and include 0-4 during the week and 0-10 on the weekends – with the majority on weekends being 0-8 year olds.

Exhibitions during our visit were *Alice in Wonderland*, *Dora the Explorer* and *Art Inside-out*. Both covered many subject areas from literacy and science to animal husbandry.

The museum's printed material provides the following profile of its aims:

Exhibitions ... are created and built by a team of education specialists and designers. Based on the idea that students learn by doing, each theme-based exhibition uses hand-on activities. Interactive components and larger than life environments to encourage students to explore in new ways and make learning fun.

³ www.osv.org; For Kids; Kidstory

(Programs provide) applied learning using direct experiments ... exhibition exploration (and) open-ended art projects. Activities support learning in the areas of science, math, language and the creative arts ... Programs conform to the New York State and City learning standards, are adapted to each grade level and can be tailored to classes with special needs. (Promotional booklet on the School Programs, CMOM, October 2005).

One of the key objectives is literacy and language development with the aim to encourage the exploration and discovery of language and books while motivating children to read. A cross-curricular approach references the learning experience within the life context of children. For example an *Alice in Wonderland* related workshop was conducted by nutritionists who guided participants in making healthy snacks for a 'Mad Hatter's Tea Party'.

Both my observation and information provided by the museum confirms that the 10 – 12 age group is less well catered for as casual visits – rather is addressed either by programmed activities in-house or by outreach programs in schools. Even though Grace enjoyed the displays and found herself fully engaged by them, the presence of younger children created conflicts that resulted in her play being interrupted. Anecdotal evidence and my own observation is that during week days, the museum is frequented by nannies who spend time there with the toddlers in their care. Whilst this is obviously a lucrative market for the museum, pre-school children appeared to impede the enjoyment of older children.

Display strategies adopted include:

- Playful and fun looking exterior
- Internal environment brightly coloured
- Allowing touch on displays
- Objects can be moved and react to touch
- Displaying copies of art in play/contact areas
- Use of characters well known to children (*Dora the Explorer, Alice in Wonderland*)
- Story telling in displays (*Alice in Wonderland*)
- Themed cross-curricular activities (preparing 'Mad Hatter' snack)
- Activities that encourage story telling (*Art Inside-out*)
- Themed activities that engage children in reading (*Dora's animal hospital*)
- Separate room for original illustration display allows for hands-on exhibits and brighter lighting elsewhere
- Books displayed through the museum thus encouraging parents to read to their children

The exhibitions encouraged role-playing and reading through games. In addition, some displays encouraged story telling. Structured workshops provided opportunities to create images and therefore to play with visual language skills. In these respects, the museum was very successful at engaging Grace, but the large audience of younger children was a considerable hindrance during our visits.

Strengths for target audience

- Brightly presented environment
- Hands-on activities allow satisfaction for tactile senses
- Well developed displays are both fun and thought provoking
- Use of well know story book characters in 2D & 3D displays

Weaknesses for target audience

- 10 – 12 age group competes with larger early childhood audience
- Visually stimulating environment may inhibit quiet time opportunities (as provided at the Eric Carl Museum)

Key Findings

- Allowing for separate display spaces for fragile works (thus allowing low lighting and no touching), whilst allocating spaces for play that are bright and hands-on
- Making allowances for displays that can be touched constantly (building maintenance into museum running costs)
- Having quiet rest zones between exhibits with books on display and comfortable seating to encourage reading
- Importance of 'learning by doing'

(v) **Le Musée en Herbe** Bois de Boulogne, Paris, France

This museum was selected for inclusion in the tour schedule because of its reputation for imaginative display techniques. Although it does not specifically display children's picture book art, it is a children's museum designed to provide education about a wide range of topics from art through to social issues.

Le Musée en Herbe came into existence in 1975 subsequent to the French social revolution called 'Mai 1968', which resulted in education reform with an emphasis on the psychology of children. Key to this is the importance of learning through play.

Because of this focus on play, the exhibits all have arrangements of objects that can be handled in the act of engaging with devised games. In addition, parts of the reproduced paintings were created into three dimensions – which brings the exhibits to life. For example, a display about the work of Giuseppe Arcimboldo, who constructs images of people using objects such as fruit, vegetables, sticks, books, fish and other everyday objects, was brought to life by sculptures that mimicked the artist's paintings. This provided an immediately engaging atmosphere in the exhibition area that invited Grace to enter it.

In this exhibit, there were activities that helped the children to understand the visual language of the paintings. These included reconstructing an image of a man's face made out of fish by getting children to create a similar construction using plastic fish.

The museum is located in a garden that is also a fun park for children. During our visits, Grace enjoyed playing on the equipment in this park. It became apparent, that physical activity was an important part of the learning experience, as it allowed the body to be fully active. It seemed to counterbalance the mental activity required in the museum itself.

Strengths for target audience

- Three dimensional objects that can be touched
- Colourful environment
- Game playing
- Play equipment & surrounding park for physical engagement and exercise

Weaknesses for target audience

- Lack of guides (expectation that parents guide)
- Activities for audience only up to 9 years

Key Findings

- The role of play in processing ideas and having fun
- Need for physical activity & fresh air for 'whole body' engagement and rest from mental fatigue and kinaesthetic learning
- Location of museums in park environments give them immediate appeal

(vi) **Bilderbuch Museum** Troisdorf, Germany

Like the Eric Carl Museum of Picture Book Art, this is a picture book museum and not specifically a children's museum. It holds and displays a broad collection of picture book illustrations, old and modern picture books and artists books.

Situated in a 'quiet' city between Cologne and Bonn it is the only museum in Europe collecting and regularly exhibiting picture book art for children and adults. It is in a building called Burg Wissem, that was erected between 1500 and 1850. It is painted red and therefore stands out from the surrounding buildings in Troisdorf. In addition, it is located on the edge of a forest and within a park. It has a sculpture out the front based on a children's story and there is an interactive sculpture trail through the park and children's playground with sculpted animals for play equipment nearby.

The exhibition spaces are spacious and well lit with large windows looking out to views of the forest. Pictures are hung at a height suitable for children and a humorous character is used as the outline of signage throughout the museum. To encourage reading of the books on display and to engage with the large library holdings, there were a number of places interspersed between exhibiting areas for sitting and reading. In some spaces there were couches created to look like those in illustrations from the museum's collection. Included also are play spaces with toys for younger children.

Whilst there are no museum guides (tours are self guided), there is a program of activities for children including workshops of one hour's length. The first half of the workshop is about how picture books are made and the second half is an activity of some sort that relates to making pictures or books. In addition, there is an activity room that allows children to spontaneously draw or undertake a similar creative activity.

The museum attracts approximately 40,000 people per year and its target markets were clearly defined to include children from infants to 9 years of age, upper high school, and interested adults which include collectors and scholars.

Grace's full enjoyment of this museum was limited by the language barrier – however the overall atmosphere was inviting and the various spaces through three stories of an old building created intrigue. My childhood memories of a German story 'Straw-headed Peter' focused her on related books and images. This underscored the importance of the human element in engaging children. The sculpture in the

forecourt, the sculpture trail and the playground equipment were the most engaging features and encouraged role-play and learning by doing. This suggested that the museum experience need not be limited to indoor activities and that there are benefits to be gained by commissioning sculptors to create life-size picture book characters for play equipment and/or 'discovery' trails.

Strengths for target audience

- Fun exterior and location of building
- Story book characters used as features on web site, signage etc
- Spaces throughout museum with playful furniture and games
- Illustrations hung at suitable height for children
- Allowance for natural light and exterior views in exhibiting spaces
- Sculptures and park environment outside allow physical activity and for the tactile sense to be stimulated
- Promotions and images on display utilise playful depictions of the exterior of the building as created by various book illustrators – this conveys a sense of fun

Weaknesses for target audience

- No personalised attention from guides/interpreters
- Traditional museum display environment with limited support material and activities to engage audience

Key Findings

- Importance of areas of natural light and external views
- Outdoor sculptures that invite physical engagement
- Creating mascot characters from illustrations owned by museum and/or have local relevance

(vii) **Manchester Art Gallery** Manchester, UK

This museum is one of the Manchester City Galleries. It positions itself as “one of the UK's finest art collections in spectacular surroundings”⁴. The Gallery has recently benefited from a £35m transformation and has a thriving café, museum shop and other visitor facilities. The museum displays a wide range of fine art & craft as well as children's picture book illustrations. An extensive education program is designed to extend the visitor experience. Items are displayed in a manner that is immediately engaging. The variety of exhibition and thoughtful titles create intrigue: *Make me C*; *Button World*; *Partners in Art Crime Scenes* and *Imagine*. An attractively 'cluttered' look to the exhibitions is immediately engaging and well developed and worded signage and text panels have strong pulling power for visitors.

The aspect of the museum that caught my attention (Grace was not with me on the visit to this museum) was the large amount of 'gallery cat' merchandise in the shop. It eventuated that this is all part of an extensive program of interrelated activities that utilize children's picture book illustrations as a deliberate strategy to engage children with the displays in the museum as well as picture book art itself. These included:

⁴ This and other references from information sheets & promotional material provided by the museum

- Inviting internationally acclaimed and locally resident illustrator **Tony Ross** to create illustrations that give a humorous interpretation of selected fine art paintings in the museum. These were then reproduced on board the size of labels that were placed along side the paintings' text panels – thus providing a fun and child friendly 'reading' of the painting and encouraging children (and no doubt adults) to look closely at the actual painting to understand the illustrators comical allusions;
- Taking those illustrations and inviting author **Stella Blackstone** (and founder and publisher of *Barefoot Books*) to write the text for a children's book that is a self-guide devise for the museum. This involved creating a character called *Valette*⁵ the 'gallery cat', that shows the book characters, Adam and Katy around the museum;
- Working in partnership with illustrated book publisher *Barefoot Books* to present the exhibition *Imagine* – 24 original illustrations. The exhibition featured themed hands-on displays that related to selected images;
- Illustrated picture book with themed workshops including an event with Tony Ross creating illustrations on an overhead projector for large audience access;
- Developing a cross-curricular teaching resource using *Valette* the gallery cat and Tony Ross images to bring to life art works within the museum.

These projects have been an unparalleled commercial and educational success for the museum. They all started with a simple, yet brilliant idea of getting a well-known illustrator (whose visual language would be very familiar to young viewers) to create interpretive 'image panels' (as distinct from text panels that use words to describe a work of art) to help children look more closely at fine art images. The concept has been successfully built upon with a mascot character being introduced – *Valette* the gallery cat now used as a feature in the museum to entice young visitors.

A key feature of the success of the projects has been a partnership with *Barefoot Books*, which created a synergy that has had both educational and commercial outcomes. It resulted in two major sponsorship awards: the Arts, Business and SME Award at the 27th National Arts & Business Awards at the Barbican, London. This was followed by the Arts Sponsorship award at the 2005 Hollis Sponsorship Awards. The significance of this is that the partnership itself is a key plank in the marketing strategy to engage children with images displayed in museums, because the publisher provides access to illustrators as well as funds to provide engaging activities.

Additional programs to be offered as a direct outcome of this partnership include illustration workshops, training days in literacy for primary school teachers and a summer drawing competition in conjunction with Manchester City Council's Libraries service.

Another approach to engaging with the images on display was music. In this instance, a music teacher from the Royal Northern College of Music developed a method of engaging young viewers with images through the use of musical concepts.

⁵ Named after the acclaimed Manchester artist, the late Adolphe Valette (1876 – 1942), who is well represented in the Manchester Art Gallery collection

Strengths for target audience

- Fun, engaging, hands-on displays
- Mascot character (*Valette* the gallery cat)
- Themed shop merchandise provide a tactile experience and 'gallery take-aways' (toy cat, book and other themed merchandise)
- Engaging activities with illustrators
- Competition in partnership with library
- Musical language used to interpret visual language

Weaknesses for target audience

- None observed

Key Findings

- Use of well know illustrator to create interpretative images
- On-going relationship of illustrator with museum to provide continuity of images and concepts in development of projects
- Creating relevant partnerships to extend theme & scope of projects
- Use of music to engage viewers

(viii) **Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre** Great Missenden, UK

This museum has as its central theme the life and work of acclaimed author, Roald Dahl – creator of, amongst many other popular titles, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Opened by Johnny Depp⁶ in June 2005, the event was timed to coincide with the premier of the feature film of the same name. It thus gained maximum impact on an international scale and within the context of the popular motion picture genre.

Designed to “encourage visitors of all ages to get creative ... often using techniques devised by Dahl himself”⁷, the hallmark of this museum experience is ‘fun’. Though not displaying children’s picture book art, it promotes an interest in illustration through its relevance to the written word. One of its key aims is to *continue Roald Dahl’s commitment to getting children reading and writing*.

Three main galleries cover Roald Dahl’s life history, his research and writing techniques and a ‘Story Time Centre’ that focuses on the writing techniques of other authors. A variety of hands-on activities help children to explore methods of story making. Workshops in the ‘Inventing Room’ avail children and adults of an opportunity for activities with education staff or visiting authors and illustrators.

Enlarged Quentin Blake (Dahl’s principal illustrator) images, giant pencils and blocks of chocolate (complete with smell!) are ‘theatrical sets’ that create a colourful and lively atmosphere. Images – both still and moving – interactive devices, sound scapes and other sensory features fully engage both children and adults. A key aim is to present reading, writing and creativity in a fun way – to “spark imaginations and enthusiasm for word play, stories and creative writing”.

⁶ Lead actor in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

⁷ This and other references from information sheets & promotional material provided by the museum

The physical context of the museum is crucial. It is located in Great Missenden - the village in which Dahl lived and wrote many of his best-loved works. Indeed it is located directly opposite a building that was the inspiration for the *Big Friendly Giant*. The experience of this museum, therefore, is about a total environment beyond the confines of the building itself. By choosing this location, it therefore encourages a sense of curiosity in children to discover what inspired the author and to then look carefully at the visual and literary images that have been the result.

A feature of this museum that distinguishes it from others in this research project is the writer and illustrator in residence program (although artist in residence programs are not unusual in museums per se). We attended a workshop with acclaimed author/illustrator James Mayhew. Given that we had just purchased one of Mayhew's books the week before in Manchester, meeting him engaged Grace with his work immediately. Significantly, seeing him develop an illustration as part of a story telling session – followed by doing a drawing herself – had a direct impact on her registering the visual symbols and cues he uses in his work.

Of all the venues visited (aside from Disneyland), this museum had the most engaging web site, promotional material and brochures. From the perspective of gaining pre-visit attention of the target audience, these communication devices were the most successful – particularly in the case of the web site, which for internet-savvy youth the standards expected are high in terms of interactivity and fun. They use Blake's images and Dahl's language to great effect. Blake was able to create images especially for this project, whilst terminology from Dahl's works were used as descriptors for everything from the museum's workshop space being called *The Inventing Room* – to a teaser on the home page of the web site: "We hope you have a truly whizzpopping wondercrump time!".

The theatrical nature of this museum has echoes of Dahl's early years working with Walt Disney as a screen writer - and thus by sheer co-incidence brings this research tour full circle given our initial experiences at Disneyland. Everything from the museum's location, fit-out and the launch in Hollywood style creates a fantasy world in much the same way as the celebrated theme park at Anaheim.

The net result was that Grace read three of Dahl's books during our visit. She was also captivated by the 'magic' of illustration as reflected in her travel diary.

Strengths for target audience

- Location of museum in village that inspired the author
- Use of principal illustrator and Dahl phrases to create theme and fun tone of museum in fit out and promotional material
- Stimulating all five senses
- Guided and un-guided hands-on activities
- Relationship with motion pictures
- Relatively small size is not overwhelming for children
- Integration with popular culture (through the film industry) motivates reading

Weaknesses for target audience

- Potential to be distracted by gimmickry
- Potential for lack of focus because of over-stimulation

Key findings:

- Value of locating museum in a place related to key theme or character
- Artists in residence program brings the art of illustration alive
- Use of key author phrases for naming and promotional texts

(ix) The Roald Dahl Children's Gallery Aylesbury, UK

An unscheduled venue that was an interesting extension to the Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre.

Opened in 1996, this museum is specifically designed to introduce children to a range of museum objects that explore scientific and natural phenomena. It very cleverly uses Roald Dahl's stories to introduce visitors to these objects. Designed by the same architectural firm that created the Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre, it also employs Quentin Blake images and is 'theatrical' in its fit out.

It's success is marked by having won two major awards for education, and being fully used by schools during term time.

The key concept here is the cross-curricular approach to this museum – using concepts and images from the literary arts to develop an understanding of science.

Although Grace was fully captivated by the displays, they tended to be more entertaining than educational. Structured activities and/or guided tours may have remedied this.

Strengths for target audience

- Hands-on activities and explore issues such as cause and effect & optical illusion (children engage in visual and verbal literacy through fun and intriguing topics)
- Colourful & fun fit out of museum

Weaknesses for target audience

- Potential to be distracted by gimmickry
- Potential for lack of focus because of over-stimulation

Key findings:

- Cross-curricular approach

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Major conclusions as a result of the fellowship

To capture the interest of children venues must, above all, be fun, involve fantasy, be 'child-friendly' and provide a means by which children can focus to have both structured and unstructured learning experiences. Museums must also be clear about the markets they are seeking to attract and be focused on servicing their needs. Children's picture books provide a rich source of material to achieve all of these aims. Each of the venues had a unique feature that highlighted how this can be achieved.

There is a greater likelihood of children being successfully engaged with picture book art to extend visual and verbal literacy by attending to the following:

- (i) **Fun:** everything from promotions through to signage, displays and the activities of museums must evoke a sense of fun. Opportunities for play are essential. The visual and verbal language of relevant stories, colour, light, scaling of objects, stimulation of all senses, interactive displays etc aid in this objective;

To this end, particular attention should be paid to:

- Use picture book visual and verbal language: An obvious source of words, visual images and ideas for colour are the story books. Take the Dahl words and phrases and Blake images used by the Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre as an example. Their wide use evoked an immediate sense of fun. Also, consider the Manchester Art Gallery using the visual language of Tony Ross to create 'image panels' to interpret fine art paintings and the Bilderbuch Museum reproducing couches depicted in illustrations. These brought a sense of fun into the museum experience.
- Scaling objects: Creating objects or spaces larger or smaller than life also creates a sense of fun. The giant chocolate blocks at the Roald Dahl Museum and the scaling down of buildings at Disneyland are examples of this.
- Provide opportunities for play: Play and role-playing were found to be a key learning strategy and add to the sense of fun. The Old Sturbridge Village Kidsplay space with its dress-up area encouraging children to pretend to be in the 1830's is a fine example of how this can be achieved. The importance of play is a primary focus as the Musee en Herbe. Not only are children invited to interact with the exhibits and 'play' structured games, but because the museum is located in a park, play through physical activity is also encouraged. Similarly, the surrounding environment with interactive sculptures and play equipment at the Bilderbuch Museum made for a fun experience.
- Interactive displays: Displays that allow children an opportunity to engage by doing are always more fun than static displays. The Children's Museum of Manhattan, Le Musee en Herbe, the Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre and the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery use this approach to great effect.

- (ii) **Fantasy:** for the power of children's picture book art to be unleashed and used to greatest effect, museums should evoke the sense of fantasy in stories through tactics such as constructing displays that are themed with stories and by involving the theatrical arts in guiding and education programs.

To this end, particular attention should be paid to:

- Maximising use of favourite characters: Favourite characters in stories are as well known to children as their family pet or best friend. They are therefore an obvious feature to be exploited. Disney is the exemplar of how this is done. It wasn't so much the rides that had greatest appeal to Grace, but the opportunity to engage with particular characters. This was primarily achieved through actors dressing in costume and 'talking' with the 'guests'. The more popular ones, such as Mickey Mouse, were also used as mascots for the park, which helped to project a 'child friendly' impression. Eric Carl's *Very Hungry Caterpillar* – popularised world-wide in the pre school market is an obvious mascot for the Eric Carl Museum of Picture Book Art. It is used to some effect through the museum's logo and merchandising – but it could provide major 'pulling power' as signage on the façade of the building as well as a giant size feature in the foyer to allow children a way to exercise their sense of touch and kinaesthetic learning. Similarly, the Bilderbuch Museum has a little zebra from one of its illustrations, which runs back and forth on its web site and is also made into little chairs in the museum – but could be developed more as a character who 'befriends' and guides museum guests. Animal characters are generally of great appeal to children and are not necessarily sex specific.
- Using story themes: The Children's Museum of Manhattan's use of the *Alice in Wonderland* story provided a perfect setting for a range of cross-curricular observations in addition to visual and verbal literacy learning experiences. Also, the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery used Dahl stories and Blake images to describe scientific phenomena. Disneyland theme stories throughout different parts of the park so that children can enter into their fantasy and also take comfort in the familiarity of the stories they know and loved. Recognition of story themes was therefore a successful engagement strategy. Another obvious strategy is to engage the authors and illustrators themselves to tell the stories with words or images as was the case at the Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre.
- Taking a theatrical approach: By employing actors to carry the sense of the story or the attitude of central characters combined with fitting out museums like a 'stage set' to evoke a story creates a sense of fantasy. Also, as a whole-of-staff approach all employees could be encouraged to maintain the fantasy of any given story by talking as though particular characters are actually present (much like all adults talk of Santa Claus to children). This was a key observation at Disneyland – emerging as it does from the film industry. Traditional museums tend to be more static affairs, with pictures hung on walls and left for the viewer to decipher. The Disney approach was more theatrical with different parts of the park depicting different scenes from movies. The museum that came closest to matching this approach was the Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre with its fit out bringing to life Dahl's life and his story themes by using enlarged Quentin Blake images, sound scapes and moving images. The Children's Museum of Manhattan and the Musee en Herbe also created images into three dimensional objects and environments into which children could enter and touch.

(iii) **Friendly:** museums must be 'child friendly' in everything from display policies and amenities provided to the attitude of staff. This includes allowing opportunities for objects to be touched, kinaesthetic learning, learning by doing and ensuring inclusion of the human element through guides, interpreters, visiting artists etc;

To this end, particular attention should be paid to:

- Encourage touching: Touch is a fundamental sense for children. It therefore should be encouraged wherever possible. Budgeting for the regular maintenance of exhibits to keep them clean, in good repair and looking fresh is therefore a necessary consideration.
- Providing equipment for physical activity: Kinaesthetic learning opportunities are an essential part childhood development and should be offered by museums. Including sculptures and equipment that can be climbed on and entered into is desirable for a child-friendly environment.
- Ensuring the human element: The most successful museum experiences during this Fellowship involved people – either with interpreters, artists or demonstrators of some sort. Providing people to engage with children is essential for the museum to present as child friendly.

(iv) **Focus:** museum layout and program development must provide opportunities for children to focus so they can explore their own creativity as well as develop their visual and verbal language skills. Structuring quiet zones in museum layouts, establishing places that invite parent and child to sit and read, and interpretation of images through structured questioning techniques and music were found to be successful strategies. For clarity of program development and marketing museums must focus on accurately defining their target markets and attending to their needs.

To this end, particular attention should be paid to:

- Providing quiet spaces: Where there is free play and stimulation, it is easy for children to lose a sense of focus. The absence of quiet spaces was the down side of the Disneyland experience where constant stimulation and entertainment is the name of the game. By direct contrast, the Eric Carl Museum of Picture Book Art had several quiet zones: the workshop, the library and the gallery itself where the works were displayed in museum atmospherics with low lighting. The Children's Museum of Manhattan managed to provide a balance between the two types of environments: whilst most of the museum is brightly lit with stimulating interactive exhibits, it had, for instance, a separate exhibition space for original works of art and places for resting and reading between exhibits. Both museums facilitated easier viewing for children by hanging illustrations at a lower height.
- Providing structured learning experiences: A strength of the Eric Carl Museum was the VTS approach and the creative learning environment in the workshop; the Children's Museum of Manhattan had themed workshops; Manchester Art Gallery uses a novel approach of using musical concepts to interpret the visual language; and the Roald Dahl Museum had workshops with visiting illustrators and authors.
- Museum defining and catering for target markets: Where museums are clear about their target markets and how to cater for them, the total endeavour of the business works harmoniously. At Disneyland, for example, families are the primary market – not only are children and

adults well catered for, but by being focused on family friendly issues, Disney can be more strategic in its approach. Where the target market was less clear, such as with the Eric Carl Museum of Picture Book Art – not regarding itself as a children’s museum – yet wanting to appeal to children, this created a conflict where despite the quality of its exhibits and offerings, there was a tendency in some respects for it to not feel child friendly. The Children’s Museum of Manhattan is positioned as catering for 0-12 year old – yet tends to attract a large number of pre-school children. During our visit, this created a conflict for Grace as she was unable to play successfully with so many young children dominating the displays. It may therefore be better for the museum to either limit their market to the younger age group or to segment times for different ages.

5.2 How this information is to be disseminated

- Canvassing opportunities to present findings at industry conferences
- Writing articles for relevant industry publications and posting report on Bundanon Trust web site and others that are relevant to the topic
- Developing relevant programs at Arthur Boyd’s Bundanon and sharing the findings with industry colleagues

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 Children's picture book art should be more actively used by museums as a medium through which the visual and verbal language can be developed with young audiences;
- 1.2 Planners, architects and exhibition designers should be briefed about the essential issues in successful engagement of children in visual art generally and picture book art in particular;
- 1.3 Art museum exhibition designers and educators should work beyond the visual arts and take a cross-curricular approach to develop displays and programs;
- 1.4 Museum managers should be encouraged to look outside the visual arts sector to the performing arts for suitable employees such as actors and musicians;
- 1.5 Museum managers should benchmark their businesses more with non-art related museums such as theme parks and living history museums for a more dynamic approach to display and program development;
- 1.6 Museums should develop partnerships with relevant businesses such as publishers and libraries to develop capabilities for successfully using picture book art to this end and to meet mutually beneficial business outcomes.

I will be able to help implement these changes through word of mouth within the museum services sector and promoting partnership ventures to players within children's literature circles. In particular, I will present this report to Dubbo City Council, which is presently establishing a new gallery with a children's museum featuring picture book art, and make my advice available to its management if requested. This museum stands to be unique amongst regional galleries in Australia and has the opportunity to be a market leader in featuring picture book art in such a context.

In my current role as Chief Executive Officer of Arthur Boyd's Bundanon, I am in a position to promote the children's literature genre – both illustrators and authors – through our education and artist in residence programs. Given the national profile of Bundanon, this provides considerable opportunity for my research findings to be disseminated widely.