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Museum- School Collaboration as a Site of Transformation: Designing a Toolkit for Language Awareness and Participatory Learning

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Museum- School Collaboration as a Site of Transformation: Designing a Toolkit for Language Awareness and Participatory Learning

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Porto, 26 de julho de 2025/ porto, 26 July 2025

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Abstract

This dissertation critically examines the evolving landscape of museum-school collaboration, moving beyond episodic visits to explore transformative, sustained partnerships. The literature review highlights an educational turn in museology, advocating museums' shift from authoritative repositories to inclusive, dialogic spaces fostering critical learning and social transformation, requiring re-evaluation of practices to address power imbalances and promote co-creation. The research investigates how museums and schools co-construct meaningful learning experiences, identifying structural, organisational, and pedagogical barriers. Key questions explore museum education's significance, theoretical frameworks in critical museology, institutional dynamics influencing transformative partnerships, and the design of a methodological tool to foster sustainable co-constructed learning.

Adopting a theoretical-conceptual approach, this dissertation is grounded in critical analysis of academic literature and documented practices. It draws on secondary sources and four international case studies chosen for their innovative, participatory approaches, inspiring the toolkit's design. This conceptual inquiry prioritises theoretical reflection and critical synthesis to theorise and design practical tools. All the chapters contribute to developing *The Power of Words* toolkit, which synthesises theoretical insights and reflections inspired by the case studies. The toolkit responds to the need for museums as spaces of dialogue, transformation, and civic engagement, embodying a vision of museums as responsive, relational spaces where language, empathy, and ethical awareness are central.

This research emphasizes how diverse collaborative strategies can promote participatory, experiential, and socially responsive educational experiences. It underscores the value of co-construction, ongoing dialogue, and student agency in transforming museums into critical and engaging learning environments. Contributing to the fields of heritage education and participatory pedagogy, the study presents *The Power of Words* toolkit as a practical resource for museum professionals and teachers to co-create learning experiences rooted in listening, reflection, and shared responsibility.

Key Words: Museum Education - Museum-School Collaboration - Language Awareness

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAMD	Association of Art Museum Directors
CHAT	Cultural Historical Theory
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Critical Digital Pedagogy
CPS	Creative Problem Solving
CRDL	Centre for Research on Language Teaching
FMP	Framework for Museum Practice
GLOs	Generic Learning Outcomes
ICOM	International Council of Museums
IRF	Initiate-Response-Feedback
MLA	Museum, Libraries and Archives Council
MILE	Museums and Innovation in Language Education
NAEA	Museum Education Division of the National Art Education Association
OEI	Organisation of Ibero-American States
RE	Reggio Emilia
SMILES	School-Museum Integrated Learning Experiences in Science
SVAF	School Visits Articulated Framework
VINES	Modified Visitor Identification in STEM**!Unexpected End of Formula**
VTS	Visual Thinking Strategies

ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Introduction

This dissertation was developed within the framework of the master's degree in Museology at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto (FLUP) and explores the challenges and potential of school–museum collaboration as a space for critical, affective, and democratic education. Rooted in the intersection between museological practice and educational theory, this work responds to an increasingly pressing question: how can museums and schools co-construct meaningful learning experiences that move beyond occasional visits or superficial encounters, and instead foster long-term, dialogic relationships grounded in mutual care and critical awareness? This research seeks to investigate not only the potential of such partnerships, but also the structural, organisational, and pedagogical barriers that often hinder their development. It aims to identify the key factors that influence the quality and sustainability of school–museum collaborations, including shared objectives, communication practices, institutional support, and educational methodologies. At the same time, it asks what conditions are needed to activate the museum's potential as a space of possibility, empathy, and personal transformation — a space where students and educators alike can engage critically with the world and with one another. Throughout this dissertation, terms such as *meaningful* or *effective* learning experiences are employed to describe educational encounters that succeed in engaging participants on a personal and profound level. It is therefore important to clarify that these descriptors do not refer to standardised outcomes or predefined metrics of success but are instead grounded in Falk and Dierking's (2016) understanding of museum learning as a process of individual meaning-making. In this view, the effectiveness of a museum visit lies in its capacity to foster subjective engagement and enable visitors to construct their own significance from the experience.

In recent decades, museums have undergone profound epistemological and institutional transformations, moving away from traditional models of authority and representation towards more inclusive, dialogic, and participatory practices (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Dewdney et al., 2013; Achiam et al., 2021). Since their inception, museums have functioned as instruments of power, constructing selective narratives that often reflect dominant cultural values and exclude alternative voices (Bennett, 2017; Hooper-Greenhill,

2007). Yet contemporary museum theory increasingly calls for institutions that embrace uncertainty, pluralism, and self-reflexivity, reconfiguring themselves as spaces of inquiry rather than repositories of certainty (Falk & Dierking, 2016; Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018; Semedo, 2020).

This paradigmatic shift, often associated with the educational turn, responds to feminist and postcolonial critiques and reimagines museum learning as a performative and intersubjective process (Andermann & Arnold-de Simine, 2012). In the wake of these developments, the museum becomes a space in which contested narratives can coexist, and visitors are invited not only to receive knowledge, but to co-construct it through affective, social, and critical engagement (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Karp & Kratz, 2014). As Mascheroni (2024) observes, a museum without narrative risks becoming inert and self-referential. Instead, it must be a dynamic site of communication, where multiple voices are welcomed and historical traces are made relevant through shared interpretation and exchange (Mascheroni, 2024, p.16).

Such a vision of the museum foregrounds not only its epistemological redefinition, but also its ethical and political dimension. The heritage that inhabits the museum should be understood as a living, pulsating presence—a dialogic body shaped by entangled experiences, gazes, and questions that demand to be heard. Listening to and gathering diverse voices, granting them the dignity of presence, and composing a singular-plural polyphony capable of reflecting a social consciousness in real time is, as the anthropologist Pietro Clemente (as cited in Mascheroni., 2024, p. 16), argues, a profoundly political act. It is precisely through this attentiveness to “otherness” that the museum may become a truly discursive space, where the “other” can exist not as an object of interpretation, but as an interlocutor.

However, these ambitions remain fraught with institutional and political tensions. While critical museology has foregrounded the museum’s potential as a civic resource—capable of addressing social injustice and enabling democratic participation—it continues to face significant structural constraints (Mörsch et al., 2016). The proliferation of public engagement projects, often framed in terms of human rights or social justice, risks devolving into symbolic gestures, especially when driven by external funding, managerial demands, or reputational concerns (Bodo, 2024, pp. 31–33). Lynch (as cited in Bodo, 2024, p.32), has aptly warned against superficial forms of empowerment that leave intact long-standing

institutional biases and hierarchies. In this sense, a genuine reorientation of the museum's mission requires more than inclusive rhetoric; it demands a critical examination of its governance, funding models, and epistemological assumptions (Bodo, 2014, p. 29). A more radical posture is needed—one that shifts from speaking on behalf of communities to fostering their capacity to speak and act for themselves. Museum activism should not consist merely in taking a stand on major contemporary issues, but in supporting individuals in the development of active citizenship, co-forging the tools and capacities necessary to effect real social change and to build lives worth living (Bodo, 2024, p. 31). This ethical commitment calls upon museums to hold open discursive spaces where transformation is not imposed but nurtured collectively.

Within this complex landscape, the relationship between museums and schools emerges as both promising and problematic terrain. On one hand, educational partnerships offer opportunities to activate the museum's potential as a civic and dialogic space. On the other, such collaborations often suffer from weak curricular integration, episodic encounters, and a lack of genuine co-design between institutions. As recent literature points out, there is still a shortage of pedagogical models that enable schools and museums to engage in sustained, reflective, and mutually transformative relationships (Lorente, 2022; Mörsch et al., 2016). There is a risk that museum visits become isolated moments—memorable, perhaps, but not always meaningfully embedded in broader learning trajectories. As Falk and Dierking (2016) argue, such experiences can indeed have a long-term impact when supported by intentional design and reflective integration. However, memorability alone does not guarantee self-transformation, particularly when visits are episodic or disconnected from sustained educational engagement.

While this dissertation is theoretically grounded in such debates, it is also driven by a personal encounter that continues to shape my academic and professional aspirations. In my final year of secondary school, our art history teacher took us to the Marina Abramović retrospective in Florence. That experience—both challenging and profoundly moving—left an indelible mark on my educational path and planted the seed that would later grow into a desire to pursue museological studies. I vividly remember how our teacher prepared us in advance, introducing us to the language and intentions of performance art. At the time, we were just seventeen years old, and about to be confronted with one of Abramović's most

iconic performances, which involved walking between two naked bodies positioned barely twenty centimetres apart. That visit, far from being a moment of shock or discomfort, unfolded as a deeply meaningful encounter. I recall feeling as though everything in the exhibition was speaking to me in a way no one ever had before—clearly, directly, and without words. The presence of a museum educator further enriched the experience, offering tools and language to make sense of what we were witnessing, and inviting us to engage in critical reflection. Our group of students remained mostly silent throughout the visit. Yet the glances we exchanged suggested that something had shifted within each of us—a silent, shared recognition. Years later, that exhibition still resurfaces in conversations with former classmates, a moment that many of us remember as formative, transformative, or at the very least, deeply striking. Although I first chose to study Languages, Literatures and Intercultural Studies—a decision that greatly enriched my critical perspective and cultural sensitivity—it was this early museum experience that ultimately led me to pursue a Master's in Museology. It continues to guide my interest in the potential of museum-school collaborations to create spaces of resonance and discovery. With this dissertation, I hope to contribute, however modestly, to the design of educational experiences capable of reaching students in a way that resonates deeply — even if only a fraction of the intensity I experienced that day.

In order to develop *The Power of Words* —an educational toolkit included in the Appendix—this dissertation is structured into five chapters, each contributing to the conceptual and analytical foundation that underpins the proposal. The toolkit is intended to raise adolescents' awareness of the ethical and relational implications of language, fostering empathy, critical reflection, and sensitivity to the power of words in shaping identities, relationships, and social imaginaries. It emerges as a response to the often careless and violent use of language in contemporary media environments, particularly on social platforms. The decision to include a toolkit is not simply a practical addendum, but a deliberate outcome of the theoretical and analytical path undertaken throughout the dissertation. Grounded in the principles of critical museology, participatory learning, and dialogic education, the toolkit operationalises the conceptual insights developed in the previous chapters. It offers a situated, ethical, and reflexive framework for educational practice that responds to the need for tools capable of translating theory into actionable

strategies within museum–school collaborations. Rather than providing a prescriptive model, the toolkit invites dialogue, experimentation, and context-sensitive adaptation, reflecting the relational and non-normative ethos that guides the entire research.

Chapter One outlines the methodological foundation of the study, which adopts a theoretical–conceptual approach grounded in critical museology and situated epistemologies. Through a critical review of literature and documented practices, it clarifies the research design, epistemological stance, and key questions guiding the inquiry. The chapter frames the study as a reflective contribution to rethinking museum–school collaboration, culminating in the development of an ethically grounded, practice-oriented toolkit. Chapter Two frames the museum as a dynamic social institution evolving toward critical education and transformative engagement. It draws on key theorists such as Freire and Dewey to emphasise museums' potential as spaces for dialogue, civic participation, and fostering social change. Chapter Three focuses on the dynamics of museum–school collaboration, analysing their educational value, structural forms, and the conditions that enable or hinder meaningful partnerships. Chapter Four presents four international case studies of school–museum initiatives chosen for their innovative, critical, and inclusive approaches. Selected also for their capacity to provoke reflection, these cases offer concrete insights into how collaboration can be enacted in transformative ways. Chapter Five serves as the Conclusion, where I reflect on the main findings of the research and explicitly show how each case study inspired the development of *The Power of Words* toolkit, while also discussing the broader implications and limitations of the project.

Through this journey, the dissertation investigates the conditions that support meaningful museum–school collaboration, but also it aims to contribute—albeit modestly—to the development of tools and visions capable of reimagining museum education as a space of dialogue, responsibility, and collective becoming.

1.Methodology

1.1 Research Design and Nature of the Study

This dissertation adopts a theoretical-conceptual methodological approach, grounded in the critical analysis of existing academic literature and in reflective engagement with emerging and documented practices in the field of museum education. The research does not follow an empirical design and therefore does not entail the collection, processing, or interpretation of primary data. Instead, it draws upon a wide range of secondary sources to critically examine conceptual frameworks, institutional strategies, and educational models that shape and influence the development of collaborative practices between museums and schools. Within this framework, the museum is understood not merely as a cultural repository or educational service provider, but as a complex social institution that embodies specific value systems and narratives. As Marstine (2008, p.1) argues, professional practices in museums are presented as neutral or natural, yet they are in fact embedded in institutional ideologies that both reflect and reproduce dominant cultural assumptions. A critical engagement with museum education therefore requires attention not only to what is made visible through interpretive strategies, but also to what is left unsaid, silenced, or marginalised.

The study follows a conceptual inquiry paradigm, which prioritises theoretical reflection and critical synthesis over data-driven generalisation. This approach is directed towards theorising and designing tools that are both grounded in academic scholarship and responsive to the practical realities faced by educators and museum professionals. By adopting a non-empirical and reflective orientation, the research interrogates dominant narratives and assumptions embedded in institutional discourse around museum education. As Watson (2007) notes, the power of museums to shape collective values and social understandings is inseparable from the perspectives of the communities they serve and from the attitudes of the professionals who mediate these encounters (p.1). In this sense, the study explores how collaborative practices can move beyond conventional object interpretation and foster more inclusive, dialogic relationships both within and beyond museum walls.

At the epistemological level, the research draws upon the notion of situated knowledge (Haraway, 2013), which challenges traditional ideals of objectivity and instead advocates for a partial, embodied, and accountable vision of knowing. This perspective reinforces the need for context-sensitive educational approaches that recognise the positionality of all actors involved and promote reflexivity in the construction of meaning. By acknowledging the co-produced nature of knowledge in educational settings, the study affirms the ethical responsibility of institutions to remain open to contestation, difference, and transformation.

In this context, the dissertation positions itself as both a contribution to professional practice and a scholarly intervention into broader debates concerning the evolving role and responsibilities of museums. The work is situated within the wider framework of the "educational turn" in museum theory, which has drawn attention to the political and civic dimensions of museum education and the potential of cultural institutions to act as catalysts for critical engagement and social change. As Janes (2009) warns, museums risk becoming increasingly detached from their public purpose if they remain captive to internal agendas or market imperatives. A renewed commitment to civic engagement and institutional self-reflection is therefore essential. The development of a practical, theoretically informed, and ethically grounded toolkit responds to this need by suggesting possible directions for participatory and critically informed educational practice.

Rather than generating new empirical data, the study synthesises insights derived from a critical review of literature, theoretical contributions, and carefully selected case studies of museum–school collaborations. These cases are not presented as prescriptive models, but as generative examples that highlight diverse strategies for fostering educational relationships based on equity, dialogue, and mutual learning. Central to the investigation is the development of a practical, theoretically informed, and ethically grounded toolkit, designed to support both cultural institutions and educational settings in co-creating sustainable, inclusive, and context-sensitive collaborative initiatives. The conceptual toolkit proposed embraces a situated epistemology, recognising knowledge as relationally co-constructed through negotiated, dialogic, and locally embedded processes. Ethically, the toolkit does not seek to impose a fixed model but instead offers a set of

adaptable and culturally responsive possibilities, oriented towards inclusive and reflective educational practices.

1.2 Structure of the Dissertation

The structure of this dissertation is designed to progressively build a robust conceptual and analytical foundation that leads to the development of a concrete methodological proposal. Each chapter contributes to a cumulative trajectory in which theoretical insights, critical perspective, and exemplary practices inform the outcome: a practical toolkit for museum-school collaboration. The dissertation is organised as follows:

- Chapter 1 (Methodology) outlines the research design, questions, theoretical positioning, and methodological approach.
- Chapter 2 (Museums as Arenas of Critical Learning and Social Transformation) explores the paradigm shift that redefines museums as inclusive, participatory, transformative spaces rooted in dialogue and critical inquiry. Drawing on thinkers such as Freire and Dewey, it highlights the centrality of education in this transformation and lays the conceptual groundwork for analysing school-museum collaboration.
- Chapter 3 (Museum-School Collaboration) examines the dynamics of partnerships between museums and schools, focusing on their educational value, structural characteristics, and the factors that enable effective collaboration. It draws on interdisciplinary literature to explore roles, benefits, challenges, and the importance of sustained, goal-oriented relationships.
- Chapter 4 (Inspirational Case Studies) analyses a selection of case studies that serve as a conceptual and practical inspiration for the development of the toolkit.
- Chapter 5 (Final Considerations) serves as the concluding chapter, offering a synthesis of the main insights gained throughout the research. It highlights how specific elements from each case study informed the conception of *The Power of Words* toolkit, while also addressing the wider implications and limitations of the work.

Rather than offering a fixed or prescriptive model, the toolkit is conceived as an open-ended, adaptable resource—emerging from critical reflection rather than normative instruction. Its development is rooted in a sustained engagement with the complexities of real-world educational contexts, aiming to translate theoretical insights into ethically informed, flexible strategies for participatory and dialogic collaboration.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

This dissertation aims to explore how to develop museum-school collaborations that are genuinely transformative, positioning museums as dynamic educational spaces that foster critical, inclusive, and sustainable learning experiences through meaningful partnerships with schools. Grounded in a critical, interdisciplinary, and practice-oriented approach, the study aims to:

- Examine the epistemological, pedagogical, and institutional conditions that foster meaningful and socially responsive museum-school partnerships.
- Analyse the dynamics that unfold during educational visits, with particular attention to the roles and interactions between museum educators, teachers, and students, identifying best practices, benefits, and the conditions necessary for defining a collaboration as successful.
- Contribute to the conceptualisation of the museum as a dialogic and participatory space of co-created knowledge and shared authority, capable of fostering critical literacy, cultural participation, and active citizenship.
- Develop a context-sensitive and adaptable toolkit aimed at empowering museum professionals and teachers to co-design collaborative educational projects grounded in critical engagement, reflexivity, and empathy.

For these objectives, the following research questions are articulated:

- What is the significance of museum education in addressing the cultural and educational demands of contemporary society?
- Which theoretical and pedagogical frameworks inform and support museum-school collaboration within critical museum education?

- What institutional dynamics, professional roles, and structural conditions enable or hinder the development of transformative museum-school collaborations?
- How can a methodological tool be designed to support museum education departments and schools in building sustainable and co-constructed learning experiences?

1.4 Limitations and Delimitations

While this study aims to offer an innovative contribution to the field, it is important to recognise its limitations:

- The research does not involve direct fieldwork, interviews, or surveys, which limits the empirical testing of the toolkit in real world contexts. However, this limitation has been mitigated by a comprehensive critical analysis of a wide range of published sources, including academic literature, institutional reports, and well-documented case studies, which provide valuable insights into museum–school collaborations.
- The analysis is limited to published sources, including academic literature, institutional reports, and documented case studies.
- The scope is primarily focused on museum-school collaboration in Western contexts, particularly in the field of art.

While acknowledging these limitations, the dissertation aims to suggest methodological and pedagogical direction that may inform future reflection, adaptation, or empirical exploration within diverse educational contexts.

Positioned within the field of critical and educational museology, this study is informed by a commitment to rethinking the museum's role in contemporary society and to developing educational practices that are dialogic, inclusive, and socially responsive. Grounded in a reflective and non-empirical approach, the research critically engages with theoretical and institutional frameworks to inform the design of an applied toolkit intended to support ethically grounded and context-sensitive museum–school collaborations. Central to this perspective is the conception of the museum as a space of listening and exchange, where diverse voices can be heard, recognised, and brought into dialogue. The researcher's

positionality shapes the interpretation of theory and practice, framing the museum as a dynamic site of learning attuned to contemporary social and cultural problems.

2. Museums as Arenas of Critical Learning and Social Transformation

Following the introductory chapter that outlined the aims and significance of this research, this chapter reviews the theoretical and contextual foundations underlying school-museum collaboration practices. Drawing on key critical and participatory educational theories, including those of Freire, Rancière and Dewey, it explores the evolution of museums from traditional repositories of objects towards participatory, inclusive spaces for dialogue and learning. The chapter also addresses contemporary challenges faced by educational and cultural institutions, setting the stage for understanding the pedagogical frameworks and conceptual approaches that inform the study's conceptual analysis.

The museum, in the collective imagination of the general public, is often perceived as a reliable institution where universal knowledge is preserved and where facts and truths are displayed for visitors to acquire. However, as the literature on the subject indicates (Falk & Dierking, 2016; Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Lorente, 2022; Mörsch, Sachs, & Sieber, 2016; Watermeyer, 2012), contemporary museums are increasingly presented as spaces of inquiry rather than certainty. Instead of presenting assertive discourses, contemporary museums raise questions and stimulate critical reflection, encouraging visitors to actively participate in meaning-making processes. Recognising their historical role as instruments of power, museums today engage in critical self-examination, striving to become spaces of dialogue and active participation. Visitors are no longer regarded as passive recipients of information but as active participants in the construction of meaning. Consequently, the museum is not merely a site for reflection but also a catalyst for it, fostering personal identity formation and the development of more informed citizens who can think critically and engage actively in democratic society. According to the latest definition presented by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2021 in Prague:

> *A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible, and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally, and with the*

participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.

This chapter analyses the paradigm shift that has influenced museums over the past forty years, with particular attention to the role of education. This focus is justified not only by its relevance to the dissertation but also because education is one of the key drivers of this transformation. Education will be examined not only as a function of the museum institution but also as one of its foundational components, since educational intentionality is inherently embedded in the museum narrative, as will be explored later. This theoretical foundation provides a robust basis for the critical reflection on school-museum collaboration that will be developed throughout the following chapters. These chapters will not only expand the theoretical discussion but also articulate a critically informed reflection that underpins the development of the proposed toolkit in the appendix.

2.1 Museums, Power, and the Educational Turn

From its origins, the museum has never been a neutral institution and continues not to be. Since its inception, it has operated as an instrument of power, adopting practices of representation that, by their very nature, involve a selective act and, consequently, exclusion (Bennet, 2017; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). Museum representation determines which elements are worthy of being transmitted and recognised, and thus included in the museum's collection and which, on the other hand, are destined for invisibility. In this way, boundaries are delineated that separate what is included from what is excluded, enacting epistemic violence, a term that Enrique Galván Álvarez (as cited in Vawda, 2019, p.77) defines as one of the key elements of any process of domination. Epistemic violence refers to the harm caused when certain forms of knowledge are marginalised, distorted, or erased, often through the privileging of dominant worldviews. In museum context, this form of subtle, non-physical violence emerges through institutional power over what is considered valid knowledge, and whose voices are legitimized in the construction of narratives. For example, epistemic violence occurs when objects are removed from their original cultural context and reinterpreted through the lens of the exhibiting institution. In such cases, the 'Other' is often portrayed through representations shaped by the museum's perspective, rather than by those of the communities represented (Vawda, 2019, p.77). The museum,

therefore, has always had an implicit pedagogical role. To understand these mechanisms, it is essential to consider the colonial practices that contributed to the emergence of museums: the collection, display, and classification of objects not only reflect but also perpetuate the dynamics of cultural domination (Trofanenko & Segall, 2014, p.1). Presenting objects in a certain way and excluding others is, in itself, a pedagogical act that educates the audience to perceive the world from a specific perspective. These ongoing processes and continuously drawn boundaries give rise to what are known as *silent pedagogies*, which are implicit in the museum and conveyed through its educational and exhibition practices. These can reinforce hierarchical and asymmetrical dichotomies and visions of knowledge (Semedo, 2020, pp. 111–112).

It was in the 1970s that Cameron (1972), one of the most significant figures in the international museological scene, questioned the concept of the museum as a sacred, elitist space and promoter of dominant narratives in his essay *The Museum: A Temple or the Forum*. He advocated for a museum that was more open to the public and engaged with society. Cameron (1972) explains:

> *What is missing cannot be found by reforming the museum as a temple. In my view, it is clear that there is a real and urgent need to re-establish the forum as an institution in society. While our bona fide museums seek to become relevant while maintaining their role as temples, there is a simultaneous need to create forums for discussion, experimentation, and debate, where forums are connected but discrete institutions. (p. 11)*

With Cameron's proposal for a paradigm shift from *temple* to *forum*, the foundations were laid for rethinking the museum as a space of dialogue, confrontation, and experimentation, reassessing its practices from this new perspective. This concept was reiterated more concretely at the UNESCO regional seminar held in Santiago de Chile in 1972, known as the Round Table on the Development and Role of Museums in the Contemporary World. As Jagodzińska (2025) explains, the roots of the new museology can be traced to this moment, marking a shift that redefines the museum as a socially engaged institution. In this view, museums have a "primary responsibility to meet the needs of their communities" (Brown & Mairesse, 2018, p. 529). New museology, formalised in the 1984 Quebec Declaration and

solidified in the 1980s, further develops and completes these earlier reflections. This movement, aimed at transforming museums into social institutions with a political mission, subverts traditional hierarchies and places the public and the community at the centre of museum activity (Jagodzińska, 2025). It is within the new museology that the educational turn emerges, through which, as Bernadette Lynch (2016) explains in *Contemporary Curating and Museum Education*, the boundaries between curating and education become much more blurred. If, in the past, the conflict between education and curating in museums was widely debated, with the latter being seen as a conservative force limiting public involvement, in the 1990s, museums started engaging the public further by forming direct collaborations with communities (Lynch, 2016, p. 257).

The educational turn represented a significant shift in museum practice, responding to feminist and post-colonial critiques and steering the museum towards a more inclusive and dialogic curatorship. This approach views the museum encounter as a performative and intersubjective event, recognising that historical and ethnographic narratives are not objective but rather the result of interpretations. In this context, the museum seeks to engage the public in the construction of meaning, thereby strengthening its social and educational role (Andermann & Arnold-de Simine, 2012, p. 1). This reconceptualization is particularly relevant to the study of school-museum partnerships, as it dissolves the traditional boundaries between education and curatorship, fostering collaborative and participatory learning experiences that position students not as passive recipients, but as active agents in the creation and negotiation of knowledge within museum contexts. Reflecting this shift, O'Neill and Wilson (2010) note that the educational turn has led curatorial practice to increasingly incorporate pedagogical strategies, to the point that "curating increasingly operates as an expanded educational praxis" (p. 12). Whereas in the past activities such as lectures, debates, and educational programmes were marginal to exhibitions, with the educational turn, these discursive practices have become central, transforming the way the public interacts with the museum (O'Neill & Wilson, 2010). Irit Rogoff (2010), further elaborates on this concept, stating that "education and the educational turn might be the moment in which we attend to the production and articulation of truth" (p. 46). By the term "truth," Rogoff (2010) does not refer to absolute and objective truths, but rather those that emerge from personal and subjective

experiences, shaped by the individual's interaction with the educational and curatorial processes within the museum setting.

Museums have historically exercised epistemic control through selective representation, but the educational turn redefines them as forums for dialogue, where knowledge is co-created and multiple perspectives are acknowledged. Within this reconfiguration, collaboration with schools can be seen as a natural extension of the museum's commitment to participatory learning, fostering relationships that challenge traditional boundaries between formal and informal education.

2.2 Critical Museology and the Post-Museum: Reframing Museums as Reflexive and Participatory Spaces

Building upon the principles laid by the new museology, critical museology further deepens the interrogation of the museum's role in society. While the new museology represented a decisive shift from object-centred institutions to socially engaged spaces, it largely focused on redefining the museum's relationship with its audiences and communities. Critical museology extends this trajectory by adopting a more explicitly political and reflexive stance, not only advocating for participation but also challenging the structural inequalities embedded within museum practices themselves. In doing so, it moves beyond the call for relevance and inclusivity, to critically examine the mechanism through which museums produce, legitimise, and circulate knowledge. This transition signals an important evolution in museological thinking, making a move from participation as inclusion to participation as co-authorship and contestation. As Professor Louis Geraldo Morales (as cited in Lorente, 2022) points out, critical museology is not a fixed concept; rather, it has developed progressively, gaining increasing prominence over time (Lorente, 2022, p. 23). In his book *Reflections on Critical Museology: Inside and Outside Museums* (2022), Lorente analyses the topic of critical museology with a reflexive and interdisciplinary approach, highlighting its similarities with the new museology, particularly regarding the social and participatory vision of the museum. However, while both approaches challenge traditional museum models, critical museology distinguishes itself by focusing more explicitly on deconstructing dominant narratives and foregrounding cultural conflict within museum contexts. Throughout this chapter, the term *critical museology* refers to this reflexive approach that

critically examines how museums reproduce hegemonic discourses, with the aim of democratising cultural representation (Lorente, 2022). Unlike new museology, which prioritises the museum's social function, critical museology places greater emphasis on interrogating institutional power dynamics and curatorial practices. As Angelica Sachs (2016) notes, critical museology promotes the transformation of the museum into "an arena of political action, in which conflicts can be made visible, articulated, and worked through" (Sachs, 2016, pp. 15–16). From this perspective, the museum must engage more closely with the external social and cultural context, fostering an active dialogue with the public and involving them in the co-creation of meaning. Such an approach positions museums as political entities, capable of making a tangible impact on society. As institutions that are never neutral, they bear the responsibility to consciously and reflexively situate themselves within the world, acknowledging their role in shaping cultural knowledge and public discourse. While critical museology has challenged the authority of the museum and promoted more dialogic and participatory approaches, it remains constrained by institutional structures that often co-opt its more radical potential. It has foregrounded the museum's agency in addressing social issues, promoting civic participation, and engaging with contested narratives—yet these aims are frequently curtailed by organisational inertia, managerial logic, and external political pressures. Within this complex terrain, museum education assumes a central role, evolving into a critical practice that questions, expands, and redefines both exhibitions and the institutions that house them (Mörsch et al., 2016, p. 10).

However, this critical momentum has often had a limited impact, as many of the most subversive or innovative initiatives tend to emerge outside the core institutional structures—frequently led by individuals not part of the permanent museum staff and taking place in spaces disconnected from the main collections. As a result, there is a risk that institutional change remains superficial, without truly reshaping the internal dynamics of museum organisations (Mörsch et al., 2016). Nevertheless, critical thinking has profoundly influenced museum practice, particularly the educational services of contemporary art museums (Lorente, 2022, p. 31). In this context, especially in the UK, museum education is inspired by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, which emphasises learning through dialogue and the questioning of dominant ideas. This approach has shaped the concept of pedagogical

curatorship— a term that Lorente (2022) considers "redundant, as curatorial work is by definition educational" (p. 31). However, despite this critique, Lorente (2022) acknowledges that the formulation highlights a crucial shift in museum interpretation: rather than focusing solely on what is exhibited, pedagogical curatorship emphasizes the personal and collective reflections that emerge through engagement with the display. Critical pedagogy, therefore, fosters a learning environment centred on dialogue, aligning with the institutional critique advanced by artists. Through collaborations with curators and educators, these artists have played a key role in re-examining the museum's role, challenging traditional narratives, and expanding its educational potential (Lorente, 2022). Regarding the application of Freire's pedagogy in the museum context, Bernadette Lynch (2016) observes that it has been misunderstood: Freire's original message—profoundly decolonising, democratic, and activist-oriented—has been domesticated, losing its revolutionary charge. Lynch therefore advocates for a re-examination of concepts such as decolonisation, social justice practices, and critical pedagogy within the museum context, with particular attention to how critical capacities can be developed and translated into concrete action (Lynch, 2016, pp. 263–264).

The concept of the *post-museum*, first introduced by Hooper-Greenhill in 2000 in *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, has contributed to the redefinition of the museum's role. This new museum model started to emerge during the last two decades of the twentieth century, positioning itself in opposition to the traditional modern museum and highlighting the necessity of transforming the museum into a space for dialogue and reflection. As Jagodzińska (2025) highlights, the term "post-museum" is part of a broader trend encompassing several "post-" concepts that emerged at the turn of the century. These terms reflect the necessity of redefining established paradigms and reinterpreting past ideas and practices to meet contemporary demands. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) outlines the characteristics of the post-museum, emphasising its inclusive and participatory approach, its commitment to amplifying a plurality of voices, and its intention to challenge the dominant narratives of the past. In this context, the post-museum uncovers stories that had previously been neglected, offering a more critical and diversified interpretation of reality. As Hooper-Greenhill (2000) states:

> *Knowledge is no longer unified and monolithic; it becomes fragmented and multivocal. There is no necessary unified perspective—rather, a cacophony of voices*

> *may be heard that present a range of views, experiences, and values. The voice of the museum is one among many*. (p. 152)

The museum no longer prioritises objectivity, rationality, order, and detachment; instead, it privileges sensitivity, empathy, exchange, and diversity. This epistemological shift has significant pedagogical implications, especially in collaborative contexts with schools, where learning is increasingly seen as a process of negotiation and mutual exploration rather than passive reception. This transformation forms part of a broader redefinition of the museum's role in the contemporary world. About twenty years later, Pat Cooke (2020) revisits Hooper-Greenhill's vision of the post-museum, noting that although this perspective did not explicitly address globalisation, it nevertheless redefined the museum's function in a way that implicitly embraces the opportunities presented by this phenomenon. As previously mentioned, according to Hooper-Greenhill, knowledge is no longer unitary and monolithic but fragmented and plural (Cooke, 2020, p. 218). This perspective further emphasises that the museum object cannot be considered the sole repository of knowledge. Instead, it must be reinterpreted within a broader framework that integrates both local and global dimensions (Cooke, 2020, p. 218).

While critical museology and the post-museum framework position museums as active, political spaces, their transformative claims must be assessed critically, especially in light of institutional resistances and the persistent tension between radical discourse and conservative practices.

2.3 Critical Museum Education for Post-Museum

The evolution of the museum outlined by Hooper-Greenhill has paved the way for new museological conceptions that go beyond a mere redefinition of the institution. Nora Sternfeld (2016), drawing on Chantal Mouffe, emphasises the need for a radical and democratic museum following the crisis of representation. A museum of this kind must give visibility to the voices and perspectives that the dominant consensus tends to marginalise, offering space to those who have been historically silenced. For this to be possible, curation and museum education cannot remain mere institutional tools but must become the product of an open dialogue with external movements and initiatives. This process requires

the museum itself to be willing to question its own role and reconsider its place in society (Sternfeld, 2016, p. 179).

In this scenario, the museum draws upon one of its most powerful functions: critical education. We are thus witnessing a radicalisation of education, characterised by a growing focus on projects that challenge traditional teaching and learning methods, transforming the museum into a space for active reflection and social change. This perspective seeks to transform the museum from within, without entirely opposing the institution or allowing itself to be completely defined by it. The concept of the *para-museum*, as discussed by Nora Sternfeld (2016, p. 185), refers to a critical rethinking of the museums from both within and beside the institution. The prefix "para-," of Greek origin, means both "next to, together with" and "in comparison, in opposition to," thus indicating a relationship of divergence without contradiction. This ambivalence reflects the essence of the *para-museum*—it does not seek to dismantle or replace the traditional museum, but rather to engage with it critically and constructively. A *para-museum* operates simultaneously within the institutional framework and at its margins, challenging dominant structures and epistemologies while still participating in museum practice. It creates a space for reflection, negotiation, and dissent, where the museum's own interpretative authority and mechanism of knowledge production are exposed and questioned. In this vision, the museum becomes a space that is both internal and external to itself, a place where its own interpretative power and structures are critically examined. A key role in this process is played by critical education, which has already been highlighted as a tool for transformation. Sternfeld (2016) emphasises that it is essential for change and gives rise to a form of "undisciplined knowledge production" (2016, p. 184), emerging from the intersection of the museum, participatory research, and militant investigations. This form of knowledge resists academic and disciplinary constraints, opening the museum to diverse forms of inquiry and collaboration.

This critical and transformative perspective is evident in the educational practices discussed by Janna Graham, particularly in the context of art education. As cited in Sternfeld (2016), Graham introduces the concept of a "para-sitic agenda" (p. 184), highlighting that these practices are not separate or independent. Instead, they intentionally occupy cultural spaces to provoke criticism and spark conflict. These parasitic practices, while critical,

ultimately feed off the very institutions they aim to challenge. Janna Graham (2016) defines radical educational practices as "thinking with conditions" (p. 188), urging engagement with concrete historical contexts and the direct confrontation of social, economic, and political inequalities. This radical approach to education finds a parallel in curatorial and institutional practices informed by Chantal Mouffe's theory of hegemony. Drawing on this framework, Sternfeld (2016, p. 179) advocates for a radical-democratic museum that operates as a public and intellectual agent. According to Mouffe's agonistic model, the role of cultural institutions is not to neutralise conflict but to make visible the exclusions and silences imposed by dominant hegemonies. This requires aligning with existing social struggles and engaging critically with the socio-political conditions in which the institution is embedded. As such, curation and education are conceived not as neutral or inward-looking practices, but as acts of solidarity shaped by extra-institutional activism and by the museum's own capacity for self-reflection (Sternfeld, 2016, p. 179). In this sense, the museum becomes a space of political engagement, committed not merely to representing inequality but to actively confronting it. However, the realisation of such transformative potential is fraught with complexity. It becomes essential, therefore, to critically examine whether the agonistic paradigm risks becoming performative serving more as a rhetorical gesture than a truly transformative praxis. This is particularly pressing in contexts where museums operate within neoliberal frameworks that prioritise consensus, risk management, and measurable outcomes over dissensus and ambiguity. Institutional inertia, limited resources, and political resistance- particularly within formal education systems- often hinder the realisation of such transformative agendas. More broadly, the implementation of these visions within the everyday practices of museums- whether through community engagement, participatory programming, or educational partnerships such as those with schools- faces persistent challenges. Among these are difficulties in genuinely redistributing authority and sustaining meaningful collaboration. As Wallen, Docherty-Hughes, and Darling (2024) emphasise, while efforts to build closer relationships between museums and communities are increasing, they risk being perceived as tokenistic- symbolic gestures that fail to disrupt existing hierarchies (pp. 688-689). Even institutions that appear committed to participatory work often reproduce uneven power dynamics that constrain authentic engagement. These tensions suggest that, while Mouffe's and Sternfeld's propositions provide valuable critical frameworks for rethinking the role of cultural institutions, their translation into practice

requires not only pedagogical openness, but also deep cultural structural and ideological shifts that remain difficult to achieve within the current institutional landscape.

These obstacles can be understood through key institutional tensions that hinder the effective implementation of critical paradigms (see Table 1).

Table 1 - Institutional Tensions Obstructing Transformative Museum Practices

TENSION	POSSIBLE MANIFESTATION
Institutional rigidity and ideological conservatism	Organisational and discursive resistance to dissent, including structural inertia and the persistence of conservative practices despite critical rhetoric.
Political resistence	Preference for consensus and avoidance of conflict within policy and governance structures.
Superficial participatory practices	Risk of tokenism and failure to redistribute authority.
Resource limitations	Lack of funding, time, and staff dedicated to critical educational initiatives.

*Note***.** The content of this table summarises key theoretical insights discussed earlier in this chapter and was elaborated by the author to highlight structural tensions affecting transformative museum practices.

The concept of the *para-museum* previously mentioned, aligns closely with the perspective proposed by Karp and Kratz (as cited in Semedo, 2020) of the *interrogative museum* — a museum that not only welcomes criticism but also turns that critical lens inward, actively questioning its own assumptions, raising fundamental issues, and fostering spaces for open discussion. In this type of museum, the need for critical reflection, which arises from educational practices, forms the foundation of its identity. The interrogative approach envisions a museum that asks questions, rather than providing definitive answers, encouraging visitors to critically examine their beliefs. Educational practices, therefore, should move away from a didactic approach, instead promoting dialogue, discussion, and

dissent (Semedo, 2020, p. 109). The aim is no longer to offer certainty, but to provoke doubt, inviting visitors to reflect critically on what they thought they knew.

Years after Hooper-Greenhill (2020) introduced the concept of the post-museum, Richard Watermeyer expanded on this idea in 2012, exploring the museum as a pedagogical space. Watermeyer (2012) observes that, in contemporary Western society, the museum experience is increasingly perceived as a leisure activity. As a result, the post-museum must integrate learning, knowledge, and entertainment — three elements that are often difficult to reconcile. Therefore, the post-museum, which fosters cultural exchange, community dialogue, and the continuous construction of meaning, becomes a "non-place" (p. 3), an unstable and eclectic system where narratives are not fixed but are in constant flux. This type of museum facilitates cultural exchange, promotes community dialogue, and supports ongoing meaning-making, offering the public an opportunity for experiential learning. According to Watermeyer (2012), the museum must respond to societal uncertainty and change, prioritising participatory experiences designed to provoke what he terms "momentary epiphanies" (p. 5), or moments of insight in which individuals realise they have understood something profound about themselves or the world around them. In this context, the post-museum audience becomes both co-author and co-creator of knowledge, transforming the museum into a space that fosters greater awareness, enthusiasm, and empathy (Watermeyer, 2012). Yet, one might question whether these momentary epiphanies, rooting in fleeting affective responses, are sufficient to generate sustained critical awareness or institutional transformation.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a pivotal moment for museums and educational institutions alike, forcing a sudden transition to digital and hybrid modalities. Museums, in particular, were compelled to adapt rapidly in order to sustain engagement and continue their educational missions, thus reinforcing the notion of the museum as a flexible and adaptive space—a notion already anticipated by the post-museum paradigm (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Watermeyer, 2012). This abrupt transformation, however, exposed a number of structural tensions, particularly within educational departments. Beyond infrastructural limitations, it revealed a deeper institutional tendency to undervalue educational work, often treating it as peripheral despite its foundational role in the museum’s mission.

As Zollinger and DiCindio (2021) observe, many museums expanded their digital programming in response to closures, often under conditions of reduced staffing and limited resources (p. 481). These developments carry significant pedagogical implications, as digital tools reshape how knowledge is produced, communicated, and interpreted (Zollinger & DiCindio, 2021, p. 487). Simultaneously, the global education sector underwent a comparable disruption. The abrupt shift to online learning altered not only modes of delivery but also catalysed a re-evaluation of pedagogical philosophies and teaching practices worldwide (Masood & Basque, 2021, p. 68). Within this context, Critical Digital Pedagogy (CDP) emerges as a particularly relevant framework. Rooted in the principles of critical pedagogy, CDP moves beyond content transmission to promote collaborative, open, and culturally responsive learning environments. It positions both educators and learners as co-investigators, challenging hierarchical models of knowledge and fostering critical engagement and reflexivity (Masood & Haque, 2021, p.71). More than a strategy for accessibility, CDP foregrounds equity, diversity, and justice—values that strongly resonate with Hopper-Greenhill's (2000) call for multivocality and Freire's vision of dialogical learning, now reimagined within digital contexts. The urgency of such approaches has been amplified by the pandemic, offering museums a timely opportunity to align their educational practices with more participatory, inclusive, and critically responsive pedagogies.

These rapid adaptations reveal that museum education must evolve beyond crisis responses, embracing a sustained commitment to critical engagement and transformation. From these reflections, it becomes clear that critical museum education is the driving force behind museum transformation. It fosters conscious and participatory learning, empowering visitors to become co-creators of meaning, while simultaneously deconstructing dominant narratives. In this context, critical museum education lays the foundation for a vision of the museum as a dynamic platform for dialogue and reflection, where criticism is not an end but a starting point for the creation of new meanings. While critical museology has significantly reshaped our understanding of museums as political, educational, and contested spaces, its emphasis on critique alone has at times led to a disconnect between theoretical reflection and institutional practice—highlighting the urgent need for approaches that do not merely interpret institutional dynamics but actively intervene in them. As museums face increasingly complex social, digital, and pedagogical challenges, a need has emerged for

frameworks that not only critique existing structures but also offer constructive, practice-oriented alternatives. It is in this evolving landscape that post-critical museology takes shape, proposing a more reflexive and pragmatic approach that seeks to bridge theory and practice, and to engage more directly with the everyday realities of museum work. An important reference in this field is the book *Post-Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum* by Dewdney, Dibosa, and Walsh (2013), which introduces the concept of post-critical museology. This approach builds on the principles of critical museology but moves beyond mere critique of museum practices, advocating for a more reflexive, practice-oriented methodology. Post-critical museology emphasizes dismantling power structures within museums, encouraging a closer dialogue between researchers and museum practitioners, bridging the gap between theory and practice (Brown, Cummins, & Rueda, 2023, p. 181). Dewdney, Dibosa, and Walsh (2013) observe that critical museology has traditionally concentrated on the analysis and critique of established museum practices, often relying on detached theoretical frameworks rather than engaging with the practical realities of museum operations. In contrast, the approach promoted by post-critical museology—emerging from the research methodologies of the Tate Encounters project—builds upon and challenges existing theories, adopting what Thrift defines as "radical empiricism" and "a poetics of the release of energy" (Dewdney et al., 2013, p. 224).

Post-critical museology situates itself in everyday spaces that exist outside, between, and beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries (Dewdney et al., 2013, p. 226). This reflects an ongoing process of dynamic interaction and change. Unlike critical museology, post-critical museology emphasizes the need for a reflexive methodology within museums, as many of the issues in contemporary museum practices are deeply embedded within the institutions themselves (Dewdney et al., 2013, p. 224). Consequently, the post-critical movement concentrates on addressing concrete challenges, particularly the daily decisions that museums must make, and proposes practical solutions that respond to the social, economic, and political realities in which they operate (Achiam et al., 2021, p. 2). Such an approach is particularly relevant for exploring innovative school-museum partnerships, as it bridges theoretical reflection with tangible co-creative practices that can redefine educational experiences in both institutions. By bridging the gap between critical theory and practical application, post-critical museology provides a flexible framework for addressing

real-world challenges while maintaining a commitment to social responsibility and cultural transformation.

Building upon the critical reflections of post-critical museology, experimental museology seeks to enact innovation through co-creative practices that address contemporary institutional challenges (Achiam et al., 2021). Nina Simon's concept of the participatory museum exemplifies the principles of post-critical museology. The participatory museum is defined as a cultural environment that encourages active engagement between the museum and its visitors, transforming them from passive observers into co-creators of the museum experience. Rather than being fixed or predetermined, the museum experience becomes dynamic and shaped by the diverse perspectives that emerge through collective interaction. The success of this approach lies in its ability to create spaces and tools that make the participatory process both meaningful and engaging, amplifying the contributions of visitors and seamlessly integrating them into the overall museum experience (Simon, 2010, p. 2-3). In the context of the participatory museum, museum education adopts a facilitative role by providing support structures—or scaffolding—that "help people feel comfortable engaging in the activity" (Simon, 2010, p. 13), without enforcing predetermined outcomes. The balance between flexibility and structure fosters visitors' confidence, enables skill development, and empowers them to contribute meaningfully to the creation of meanings. As a result, the museum transforms into a shared learning space, where both museum staff and visitors collaborate in content creation, fostering dialogue and personal expression. This dynamic supports a horizontal relationship between the institution and the public, grounded in mutual exchange and appreciation of diverse perspectives. For such participatory experiences to succeed, proper training for museum staff is essential (Simon, 2010).

Critical museum education emerges as a catalyst for institutional transformation, fostering participatory, situated, and socially responsive learning. In dialogue with post-critical and experimental museology, it redefines the museum as a space of co-creation, reflexivity, and plural knowledge. This evolving paradigm opens new possibilities for equitable and dynamic collaborations between museums, schools, and communities.

2.4 Moving Beyond Critique: Towards Transformative Practices in Museums

Building on the theoretical foundations of post-critical museology, in *Experimental Museology: Institutions, Representations, Users* (2021), Achiam, Haldrup, and Drotner discuss an approach that further explores the idea of a museum open to the active contribution of the public. While post-critical museology establishes the foundations for critically reflecting on the relationship between institutions and the public, experimental museology aims to translate this reflection into concrete practices of innovation and transformation. This approach asserts that museum practices should engage with interdisciplinary academic discourses to better address contemporary challenges, such as balancing education and entertainment. At the core of this perspective is the call for scholars, professionals, and museum practitioners to go beyond mere criticism and reflection, and instead adopt experimental approaches based on co-design and co-creation, with the aim of overcoming dichotomies and transforming current practices. Although experimentation is not a new concept in museums, this approach seeks to make it more conscious and systematic, promoting the adoption of innovative models inspired by other cultural contexts (Achiam et al., 2021, p. 2–3). From this vantage point, experimentation is understood not simply as a tool for innovation but as a fundamental mode of operation intrinsic to experimental museology. It is conceived as a process of continuous transformation: experimentation involves pushing beyond existing boundaries, questioning institutional practices, and addressing challenges that often lie outside the direct control of museums. The inherently non-linear nature of this process acknowledges that outcomes frequently diverge from intentions, underscoring the dynamic and emergent character of experiential work (Achiam et al., 2021, p. 136). Beyond its methodological implications, experimental museology carries profound social significance. By fostering citizen empowerment, it positions itself as a catalyst for strengthening democratic processes and promoting cultural citizenship. Through its cultural practices, it seeks to cultivate capacities for action and responsibility that extend beyond the individual to the collective sphere, thereby contributing to the development of a more inclusive and participatory society. This reorientation of museum practice reflects what scholars identify as a post-materialist shift in cultural and educational institutions—a transition that prioritises values such as self-actualization, emancipation, participatory engagement, and overall quality of life, rather

than economic growth or material gain. Rooted in Inglehart's theory of post materialism, this shift draws on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, suggesting that once basic material needs are satisfied, individuals and societies tend to prioritise non-material goals such as freedom of expression, tolerance and democratic participation. Within this framework, education functions as both a product of material security and a channel for transmitting non-material civic values. It plays a dual role: it reflects the level of socioeconomic stability needed to access these ideals, while also acting as a transformative force capable of fostering tolerance, empathy, and active citizenship (Kurniawan, 2018, pp.17-18). Museum education aligns closely with this vision. By prioritizing engagement over instruction and co-creation over consumption, museums contribute to the formation of critically aware citizens capable of navigating contemporary social challenges. In the context of school-museum partnerships, this vision supports the development of civic competence and collaborative responsibility among students, aligning educational practice with broader democratic aims.

Within this broader framework, the role of museum narration becomes particularly central. Guarcello and Nosari (2019) emphasize that museum visitors have the opportunity to perceive themselves as an integral part of a larger narrative. According to the authors, contemporary individuals can develop active, critical, and informed citizenship by actively engaging with and paying close attention to stories and narratives. Educational practices play a pivotal role in this process: through them, visitors transition from passive spectators to active participants in museum narratives, becoming engaged and reflective contributors (Guarcello & Nosari, 2019, p. 4). Educational intentionality is inherently embedded in museum narration: when a museum presents a series of objects, it is constructing a story that reflects specific human choices and conveys a particular perspective on reality. In this way, visitors are encouraged to reflect on what they observe, develop critical awareness, and engage in a personal dialogue with the narrative being presented. In this context, educational pretext practices serve as the most effective tool for deeply involving the visitor. These practices enable visitors to engage in a process of personal reconstruction by providing a starting point (a pretext) that encourages reflection, connecting with the museum's proposed narrative (Guarcello & Nosari, 2019, p. 9–10). By immersing themselves in the narratives and engaging with diverse perspectives in a sensitive and empathetic manner, visitors move beyond passively receiving a message, instead building their own

subjectivity. In this process, understanding the narratives is not an end, but serves as a catalyst for the development of a personal worldview. However, it is important to recognise that this process of personal reconstruction is often mediated by the institution's framing, curatorial choices, and underlying ideological commitments which can limit the scope of visitor agency. These institutional mediations do not simply guide interpretation; they can inadvertently restrict the diversity of perspectives accessible to visitors, thereby sustaining prevailing narratives and reducing space for alternative or marginalised viewpoints. As a result, opportunities for radical reinterpretation or critical engagement tend to be constrained, raising concerns about how far visitors are truly able to question dominant narratives or articulate alternative viewpoints. As Pietro Clemente (2024, p. 81) notes, meaningful transmission of narratives only occurs when these are met by an active interlocutor—one who not only listens but engages in a dialogic exchange that allows for questioning, interpretation, and response. The relationship between telling and listening is therefore fundamental to enabling genuine reception and participatory meaning-making within the museum space.

This concept echoes Martha Nussbaum's idea of *narrative imagination* (as cited in Semedo, 2021), which refers to the capacity to understand and identify with the stories of others, thereby broadening one's perspective on the world. Semedo (2021) highlights that such an ability is fundamental to the development of informed and compassionate citizens who remain open to the world. It is cultivated not through logical reasoning, but through empathy and sensitivity (p. 119). This perspective is rooted in what is known as the affective turn- a theoretical shift in the humanities and social sciences that acknowledges the centrality of emotions and affect in learning and knowledge construction. Moving beyond purely cognitive or rationalist models, the affective turn recognises that affect is not separate from reason but plays a constitutive role in how individuals engage with the world, construct knowledge, and form identities. In the field of museology, this shift has led to significant changes since the early 2000s in how museums conceptualise education and visitor engagement (Varutti, 2023). Marzia Varutti (2023) elaborates on this shift, explaining how museum experiences can foster an "affective encounter" (p. 62)—an engagement that profoundly involves the visitor on an emotional level. This approach acknowledges the affective potential of museums, recognising them not only as spaces for learning but also as

sites of collective well-being and care, particularly relevant in times of global crises such as pandemics and ecological disasters (pp. 63-64). A key element of this transformation is the concept of the *pedagogy of feeling*, introduced by Witcomb (2015). This concept describes:

> The ways in which some forms of contemporary exhibition practices stage affective encounters between viewer and viewed through the ways in which they use a range of devices to promote sensorial experiences that encourage introspective reflection on the part of visitors. (p.322)

This perspective reinforces the pedagogical nature of the museum institution, which Trofanenko and Segall (2014) define as a "pedagogical endeavor" (p. 59). This term acknowledges the museum's role in the construction of representations and identities. Pedagogy, in this context, is not limited to the mere transmission of knowledge; rather, it is understood as a process that encourages individuals to interpret, organise, and assign meanings to the world in specific ways. This process influences not only personal knowledge and experience but also subjectivity, shaping how meanings are absorbed, recognised, and accepted (Trofanenko & Segall, 2014, p.59). As Trofanenko and Segall (2014) assert, "the message any museum presents is pedagogical, as the purpose of every museum is, inherently, to communicate knowledge to others" (p. 60). Thus, it is essential to recognise the inseparable connection between pedagogy and politics, since every form of learning, including museum education, is inherently political. Political choices determine which narratives are elevated and which are marginalized. At the same time, politics itself exerts a pedagogical effect by influencing how knowledge is structured and received. Recognising the intrinsic political nature of knowledge means acknowledging that education does not simply transmit information; it actively shapes how individuals relate to the past and present, directing their understanding of the world and their role within it (Trofanenko & Segall, 2014, p. 172).

Therefore, it is crucial to consider the potential of museum education as a tool for social justice. In this regard, critical museum education plays a pivotal role, not only by making alternative narratives accessible but also by fostering conscious and autonomous thinking—thinking that challenges dominant representations and expands public discourse (Janes & Sandell, 2019, p. 388).However, for critical museum education to be truly

transformative, it must not only prompt reflection but also foster transformative learning. This means encouraging educators and visitors to critically engage their own beliefs and assumptions, uncovering and questioning the *silent pedagogies* and *hidden curriculum* of museums. Semedo (2020) highlights that transformative museum education critically examines both the structures governing cultural production and the representational practices that have historically reinforced dominant narratives. By doing so, it redefines the museum as a space for collaborative knowledge construction, promoting critical awareness, social responsibility, and empowering individuals to actively participate in shaping cultural discourse (p. 117).

From this perspective, the museum must not only present narratives but also reveal its own ideological positioning, actively participating in cultural and social discourse (Guarcello & Nosari, 2019, p. 18). However, this transformative role is often undermined by the persistent lack of specialised training for museum professionals. As Janes and Sandell (2019) argue, without targeted educational programmes that prepare curators and educators to foster museums as spaces of participatory and critical learning, institutions risk perpetuating exclusionary practices and failing to fulfil their potential as agents of social change (pp. 91, 98). Museum educators, in particular, should cultivate critical awareness, a concept Paulo Freire defines as *conscientization*—a process of empowerment that fosters ongoing critical reflection and an understanding of power dynamics and inequalities in educational and cultural practices (as cited in Semedo, 2020, pp. 133–134). Building on Freire's notion of critical awareness, other educational thinkers such as Jacques Rancière (as cited in May, 2007) and John Dewey (2001) also emphasize the importance of participatory and non-hierarchical approaches to learning. Their perspectives reinforce the idea of education—and by extension, museum education—as a collaborative, experiential, and emancipatory process. Within this framework, museums are reimagined as spaces where authority is shared, knowledge is co-constructed, and diverse voices are actively included. This shift requires museum professionals to embrace greater reflexivity and openness, fostering practices grounded in participation, dialogue, and critical engagement. In this regard, Bernadette Lynch (2016) underscores the value of collaboration between curators, educators, and communities in co-designing educational programs that challenge the control over knowledge production, values, and skills. To achieve this, museum professionals

must strive for greater honesty, reflexivity, and inclusivity in their practice (Lynch, 2016, p. 267). In practical terms, Freire's emphasis on dialogical learning can inspire collaborative museum-school programs where students co-create exhibitions or interpret collections from their own perspective. These Freirean principles are not only theoretically relevant, but also foundational to the design of the toolkit presented in this study, which seeks to foster horizontal learning experiences, shared authority, and critical agency within school-museum collaborations.

Museum education, oriented toward transformation, serves as a space for civic empowerment and critical reflection. Through co-creation and emotional engagement, museums contribute to shaping informed and active citizens, promoting social justice and participation of all cultures. At times, it is in a small shift—a question raised, a discomfort felt, a personal memory recalled in front of an unexpected object— that the educational potential of the museum quietly emerges. These moments are rarely planned, but they open up space for new understandings and repositioning. This potential, however, demands intentional practices that foreground participation, empathy, and critical inquiry.

2.5 Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, it is impossible to discuss the evolution of the museum paradigm without considering museum education. Throughout history, educational intentionality has been a driving force in shaping the museum's functions and objectives, continuously adapting to changing contexts. The notion of the museum as a custodian of absolute truths is now obsolete; it must now serve as a space for critical inquiry, dialogue, and comparison. Instead of offering definitive answers, the museum should provoke reflection and foster critical thinking and encourage open-ended questioning. Furthermore, it should cultivate empathy, enabling a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and helping to dismantle ideological and cultural barriers. Building on these premises, the next chapter will examine the relationship between schools and museums, focusing on school visits and the interactions between museum educators, teachers, and students. It will explore the role of these figures in the educational process and their contribution to the co-creation of meaningful learning experiences. This discussion has also laid the theoretical foundation for understanding participatory educational practices and the evolving roles of

museums and schools in promoting active citizenship and cultural agency. By drawing on insights from critical pedagogy, transformative learning, and participatory museology, it has established a conceptual framework that informs the analysis of collaborative practices presented in the following chapter.

Building on the theoretical foundations discussed in this chapter, it becomes evident that the transformation of museums into dialogic, participatory and critically reflexive spaces holds significant implications for their relationships with educational institutions. If museums are increasingly positioned as arenas for the co-construction of knowledge, fostering active citizenships, social responsibility and critical engagement, their collaborations with schools acquire renewed importance. School-museum partnerships emerge not merely as logistical arrangements for educational visits, but as potential laboratories for applying, testing and refining these participatory and transformative pedagogies in concrete learning contexts. The following chapter will therefore explore the dynamics of museum-school collaboration, critically analysing their institutional frameworks, pedagogical potentials, and the complex interplay of roles, relationships and power structures that shape such educational encounters.

3. Museum-School Collaboration

Following the broader contextual analysis outlined in the previous chapter, this section focuses on the specific dynamics of collaborations between schools and museums. These long-standing partnerships play a crucial role in fostering educational enrichment, cultural engagement, and community involvement. Drawing on a range of scholarly contributions, the chapter explores the core characteristics of effective collaboration, the factors that influence its success, and the importance of shared goals and sustained relationships. This theoretical foundation will inform the analysis of case studies presented in the following chapters, offering insights into how such partnerships can generate meaningful and transformative learning experiences.

Situated within the wider social and educational landscape, museums increasingly engage with schools through structured initiatives that support both formal and informal learning. A substantial body of research has examined the educational value of school–museum collaborations, emphasising their capacity to enrich learning through the integration of formal and informal educational settings (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008; Falk & Dierking, 2016; Griffin, 2004; Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018; Kisiel, 2014; Osterman & Sheppard, 2010). Within this framework, schools—primarily through structured educational visits—constitute one of the most significant audiences served by museums. After family groups, school visitors, particularly students participating in guided tours, represent the most thoroughly studied category of museum-goers. Research consistently demonstrates that when museum visits are meaningfully aligned with classroom instruction, they can deepen student engagement, reinforce conceptual understanding, and promote long-term learning retention.

Throughout this chapter, references to educational practices and pedagogical approaches specifically concern initiatives involving students aged between 12 and 18. This clarification is essential, as teaching strategies and interaction styles vary significantly depending on learners' age and developmental needs. Although much of the existing literature focuses on science museums, particularly in the context of school visits, the insights gained are broadly applicable. These studies have explored how museums facilitate learning in informal settings and have contributed valuable perspectives on how institutional

partnerships can support pedagogy. In this study, such research is referenced where relevant, insofar as its conclusions are applicable to a broader spectrum of museum-school collaboration, with particular attention to those involving art museums.

3.1 Historical and Theoretical Background

3.1.1 The Museum as a Pedagogical Actor

Museums differ from formal educational institutions in their role as privileged environments for informal learning (Anderson, Lucas, & Ginns, 2003; Falk & Dierking, 2000, 2016; Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; O'Neill & Wilson, 2010). Unlike formal learning, which takes place within a structured and hierarchically organised institutional system such as traditional schooling, informal learning is a spontaneous and continuous process that unfolds throughout life, shaped by everyday experiences and social interactions. Informal learning, therefore, lacks the systematic structure characteristic of formal education. As Bitgood (1989) highlights, unlike classroom settings where educational stimuli are often theoretical and symbolic—such as textbook descriptions—museums offer visitors the opportunity to engage directly with tangible objects. This form of learning evolves spontaneously, allowing individuals to explore at their own pace, free from the constraints typically associated with more structured environments. The museum experience is inherently dynamic, promoting social interaction and the sharing of experiences among participants, which in turn supports a more natural and fluid learning process (Bitgood, 1989, pp. 3–4). Consistent with this view, Griffin and Symington (1997) define informal learning environments as "unstructured and nonsequential; self-paced, voluntary, and exploratory; nonassessed and open-ended; and social" (p. 764). Within this context, the museum emerges as an ideal setting for learning to develop in an authentic and personalised way.

The scholars mentioned above, along with others (Anderson, Storksdieck, & Spock, 2007;) agree that informal learning environments, such as museums, promote effective and lasting learning experiences. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2007) emphasises that numerous studies have shown how students who actively engage in museum-based activities "show greater gains in knowledge from pre- to post-test and retained their knowledge longer compared with studying in the classroom" (p. 87). This suggests that, beyond cognitive

improvement, the museum approach also fosters emotional and intellectual engagement, which is not always present in the more formal school context. However, while these studies highlight clear benefits, it is important to critically consider the extent to which this type of learning is universally applicable. As Falk and Dierking (2016) observe, among the many activities people engage in throughout their lives, museum visits frequently stand out as vivid and memorable experiences. Nonetheless, their effectiveness depends significantly on external factors, including the individual visitor's motivation, the museum environment, and the quality of the overall experience. Novelty, the encounter with new objects and experiences, the emotional response elicited, and the opportunity for reflection or social interaction are four key factors that significantly contribute to memory retention after a museum visit. Although it cannot be definitively stated that these are the primary factors influencing long-term recall for all visitors, it is reasonable to hypothesise that museums—by virtue of their unique characteristics—are particularly well-suited to activate these mechanisms, thereby contributing to the consolidation of lasting memories (Falk & Dierking, 2016, pp. 203–204).

Another characteristic that distinguishes the museum institution from the school environment is its role as an optimal setting for free-choice learning—a concept clearly articulated by Falk and Dierking (2000) in their book *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*. The authors explain that "free-choice learning tends to be nonlinear, is personally motivated, and involves considerable choice on the part of the learner as to what to learn, as well as where and when to participate in learning" (p. xii). In *The Museum Experience Revisited*, Falk and Dierking (2016) further develop the notion of free-choice learning, adopting a more nuanced and multifaceted approach. Museums are portrayed not only as environments that foster free-choice learning—emphasised in contrast to the rigid structure of compulsory classroom settings —but also as spaces where educational experiences can be intentionally designed to stimulate a wide range of cognitive and emotional processes (Falk & Dierking, 2016, p. 107). Within these contexts, visitors exercise a high degree of control over what they choose to focus on, and their learning is significantly shaped by their prior knowledge, personal experiences, and individual interests. These factors influence both the content and the nature of their museum experience (Falk & Dierking, 2016, p. 220).

Thus far, learning within the museum context has been discussed, but what exactly does the term *learning* mean in relation to museums? In this setting, the concept of learning is multifaceted, and even among professionals in the field, there is no universally agreed-upon definition. As Falk and Dierking (2016) highlight, the museum experience can be understood through their Contextual Model of Learning. According to this model, learning in museums cannot be conceived as a uniform process, as each visit is experienced uniquely by each individual. The museum experience is shaped by the dynamic interaction of three interconnected contexts: the personal context (which includes prior knowledge, motivations, and visitor expectations), the social context (relationships and interactions with other visitors or museum staff), and the physical context (the environment, exhibition design, and spatial features of the museum) (Falk & Dierking, 2016). Within the same epistemological framework of constructivism, Anderson, Lucas, and Ginns (2003) emphasise the challenges in developing a single theoretical framework for understanding how individuals learn in informal settings such as museums. The authors propose a view of learning that acknowledges how "individuals' present conceptions are products of diverse personal experiences, observations of objects and events, culture, language, and teachers' explanations" and, further, that "it recognises the dynamic nature of knowledge construction—for example, the role of subsequent experiences, back in a formal classroom, say, in changing and restructuring knowledge developed from experiences encountered in the museum setting" (Anderson et al., 2003, pp. 180–182). From this perspective, museum learning is conceived as a dynamic and fluid process in which subsequent experiences—whether in school or beyond—contribute to the reworking and enrichment of knowledge acquired within the museum.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of museum learning, it is essential to distinguish it from school-based learning, which is typically associated with cognitive or conceptual change. In contrast, learning in museums often involves more complex, multifaceted processes that extend beyond formal educational models (Schauble et al., as cited in Griffin, 2004). In this context, learning may involve developing a deeper sense of aesthetic appreciation, enhancing motivation and personal interest, cultivating and refining critical thinking, as well as strengthening one's personal identity. This view aligns with a sociocultural approach to learning, in which the acquisition of knowledge and information occurs through the influence of cultural norms, the use of a variety of tools and methods,

and—most significantly—through social interaction (Griffin, 2004, p. 60). In line with this perspective, Falk and Dierking (2016) emphasise that social interaction during museum visits, when appropriately encouraged and facilitated, can lead to meaningful educational outcomes. In particular, the authors focus on the importance of peer interaction during school visits, highlighting its central role in learning processes (p. 159)—a theme that will be explored in greater depth later in this study.

To fully understand the dynamics that characterise educational experiences in museums, it is essential to consider the main learning theories that have guided or influenced the work of museum educators. This is key to understanding how and why people learn in informal settings. Museum educators often adopt learning theories that are recognised as effective within the framework of object-based learning. According to Hein (1998), developing an educational theory requires addressing three types of questions: "a theory of knowledge (epistemology), a theory of learning, and, deriving from the first two, a theory of teaching (pedagogy)" (p. 16). These three components form the theoretical framework underpinning the educational practices implemented by museum educators. Hein (1998) argues that an educational approach grounded in constructivism—according to which learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment—is particularly well suited to the museum context. Museums, in fact, are object-centred environments (Falk & Dierking, 2016), and numerous studies in the fields of learning psychology and pedagogy, as highlighted by Alderoqui (as cited in Binaghi, 1997), demonstrate that direct contact with objects is a fundamental element in the knowledge-construction process. From an educational perspective, the encounter with an original object is what often makes learning in museums so impactful—and frequently more effective than other methods, such as textbook-based learning. The object is perceived as a document containing meanings and information (relating to its details, history, creator, function, cultural and social significance, museological positioning, etc.) that are activated according to the visitor's interests or level of expertise. At the same time, the object elicits a sense of wonder—a response to the allure of the original—which makes the museum visit a unique and memorable experience (Xanthoudaki, 2003, p. 106). As a result, the principal educational theories adopted in museum education are based on the idea that learning in museums emerges through direct engagement with authentic objects. However, it is also important to acknowledge that not all museums are based on

object collections. There are, for instance, interactive museums in which the primary interpretive value does not reside in objects, but rather in the phenomena, processes, or concepts communicated to the public through purposefully designed modules and exhibits (Alderoqui & Pedersoli, 2012, p. 50). Although much of the research in museum education has focused on object-centred or client-centred museums, it is essential to consider the extent to which the findings of such studies may be applicable to other types of museum settings. As highlighted in the literature, educational theories are not limited to a single type of museum but can offer valuable insights and adaptable guidelines for a variety of institutions with differing characteristics (Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018, p.2).

3.1.2 The Evolution of school-museum partnerships

The origins of school–museum collaborations can be traced back to the early 20th century, when museums began to serve as supplementary educational spaces. Inspired by John Dewey's philosophy of learning through experience, educators in the 1920s and 1930s increasingly incorporated museum visits into school programmes (Frankel, 1996). However, these early engagements were typically limited to brief, passive tours through exhibition halls, with little opportunity for interaction or curricular integration. For decades, museums maintained a primarily observational role in education, and the relationship with schools remained informal and one-directional. By the 1970s, as museum education departments became more professionalised, a number of experimental initiatives began to emerge. Thanks to funding from federal agencies and private foundations, programmes began to adopt more participatory formats—such as classroom–museum exchanges, docent-led workshops, and object-based activities. These efforts marked a shift towards more student-centred and experiential learning. Yet, as Frankel (1996) notes, many teachers continued to view these programmes as external supplements rather than integral components of the curriculum. Despite growing enthusiasm among museum educators, the absence of structural support within school systems hindered the development of sustained, systemic partnerships (p.11).

A more significant transformation occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, when educational institutions began to articulate specific learning needs, and museums responded with tailored solutions. As both sides came to recognise each other as equal partners,

collaboration became more intentional and curriculum-aligned. Long-term partnerships began to take shape, often supported by leadership at the institutional level (Frankel, 1996, pp. 11–13). This trend was further reinforced by national programmes such as *True Needs, True Partners*, launched by the Institute of Museum Services in the mid-1990s, which identified best practices and aimed to institutionalise collaboration across the United States. Since the early 2000s, the pedagogical value of museum–school partnerships have become increasingly evident. As previously discussed, combining museum and school-based experiences enhances the potential for deeper, more meaningful learning. Xanthoudaki (2003), stresses that such collaborations not only foster awareness of cultural heritage but also support the development of cognitive and critical thinking skills (p. 102). Building on this perspective, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) conducted a national survey in 2002 that underscored the importance of integrating museums into educational strategies. The report confirmed that museums offer unique learning environments capable of making abstract concepts more tangible and accessible to students (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2002).

In recent years, the role of museums as educational partners has become even more central in global policy agendas. Increasingly, museums are viewed not merely as providers of extracurricular enrichment, but as active contributors to formal education. This paradigm shift is exemplified by initiatives such as the *Plano Nacional das Artes* (National Plan for the Arts), a national strategy promoted by the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Ministry of Education and Culture (Plano Nacional das Artes, n.d.).This initiative is among the first of its kind to systematically embed the arts within education and civic life (Plano Nacional das Artes, n.d.). The programme fosters long-term collaboration between schools, artists, and cultural institutions, promoting innovative and inclusive educational practices. Since 2020, in partnership with the Organisation of Ibero-American States (OEI), the programme has supported artist residencies in collaboration with various Portuguese schools. These initiatives aim to foster meaningful encounters between artists, educators and students, thereby enriching cultural learning and promoting personal and collective development. Today, partnerships between schools and museums are increasingly recognised as essential for delivering inclusive, interdisciplinary, and transformative educational experiences. Far

from being peripheral or occasional, such collaborations are now regarded as structural to the educational mission of museums and schools alike.

3.1.3 Key Theoretical Contributions

This section presents key theoretical perspectives that underpin and guide the development of school-museum collaborations. These frameworks focus on the pedagogical, institutional, and cultural dimensions of partnerships, offering insights into how museums and schools can work together to foster inclusive, democratic, and transformative educational practices.

Alderoqui and Pedersoli, in their volume *La educación en los museos: De los objetos a los visitantes* (2012), dedicate an entire chapter to the complexity of school–museum collaboration, highlighting that it requires the consideration of multiple interrelated factors. While both institutions share an educational purpose, their underlying logics and actors differ significantly, making their partnership particularly challenging (Alderoqui & Pedersoli, 2012, p. 139). The authors define this collaboration as both a "cultural" (p. 141) and "professional negotiation" (p. 143), aimed at fostering democratic practices that strengthen social and cultural cohesion—an essential condition for the formation of active citizenship. For such a partnership to be genuinely effective, teachers and museum educators must engage in sustained, collaborative efforts—proposing initiatives, communicating needs, and constructing a shared vision. Building on this idea, Almagro Lomichar (2020) encourages abandoning the notion of museums and schools as separate, isolated entities, stressing instead that they share a common educational mission—to nurture critically aware and engaged citizens within a democratic and globalised society. Achieving this goal requires a collaborative and committed effort from both sides: teachers and museum educators alike must work together to ensure that school content is meaningfully integrated with museum experiences, thus enabling both spaces to serve as sites of genuine social transformation (Almagro Lomichar, 2020, p. 180).

Falk and Dierking (2016) similarly emphasise the importance of shared responsibility in these partnerships. They argue that schools should not, as is often the case, fully delegate the design of curriculum-relevant programmes to museums, but should instead participate actively in their co-development (Falk & Dierking, 2016, p. 281). In this perspective, school–museum collaboration should be understood as an alliance oriented toward the co-construction of educational programmes that are coherent, meaningful, and mutually

beneficial (Alderoqui & Pedersoli, 2012, p. 141). This also implies a rethinking of the museum's role: it should not be perceived merely as a reward, an extracurricular outing, or a simple extension of the classroom, but rather as a space for lifelong learning (Arriaga, 2013, pp. 12–13).

Within this reconfigured framework, museums and schools are increasingly seen not as parallel institutions, but as complementary ones. As Ben Garcia (2012) eloquently puts it, "formal and informal educational environments—schools and museums—should serve as the yin and yang of learning in a healthy community: equally necessary for education of the whole person" (pp.51-52). This metaphor underscores the need for balance, reciprocity, and integration between two different but equally valuable educational spaces. In order to achieve this kind of synergy in practice, Liu, as cited in Chen (2007), notes that the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has identified key conditions necessary for effective partnerships between museums and schools:

> commitment of administrators; participation of teachers; understanding needs; the common vision; the different organizational culture; planning and evaluation; enough resources; clearly define the role and responsibility of each; to promote the dialogue and open communication among collaborative partners; to provide the real benefits for school teachers; by flexibility, creation and experiment to encourage the best potential; participation of parents and community. (Chen, 2007,p. 106)

With these strong foundations in place, collaboration can genuinely "widen the horizons and capabilities of both museum and school" (Chen, 2007, p. 107), effectively addressing a range of educational needs.

In summary, these theoretical contributions position school-museum collaborations not merely as logistical partnerships, but as intentional and reflective educational alliances. Rooted in shared pedagogical values and a commitment to social engagement, they provide a conceptual foundation for designing collaborative practices that are inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to the evolving needs of learners and communities.

Yet, to fully comprehend the epistemological and pedagogical implications of such collaboration—particularly those that seek to challenge conventional hierarchies and institutional roles—it is necessary to further examine how curatorial practices themselves have been reconfigured in the wake of the educational turn. This shift not only dissolves traditional boundaries between education and curatorship, as noted in Chapter 2, but also

opens new possibilities for participatory and transformative learning within museum contexts. The following section thus delves more deeply into the notion of curatorial education, understood as a relational and politically situated practice that plays a critical role in shaping and enriching school–museum partnerships.

3.1.4 The Curatorial Turn in Museum Education

As introduced in Chapter 2, the educational turn in museums has led to a significant rethinking of curatorship, gradually eroding the rigid boundaries that once separated curating from education. In light of this shift, curatorial work can no longer be understood merely as the selection and interpretation of objects. Instead, it increasingly embodies pedagogical and relational dimensions, positioning itself as a site of social engagement and critical reflection. O'Neill and Wilson (2010) describe this transformation by noting that curating has come to operate as an expanded educational praxis, incorporating discursive formats such as workshops, lectures, and debates as central components of the exhibition process. This shift signals not only an increasing pedagogisation of curatorial practice, but also, as they suggest, a kind of "curatorialisation" (O'Neill and Wilson, 2010, p.13) of education, whereby the educative process itself becomes the object of curatorial production.

Building on these insights, the emergence of educational curatorship can be understood as a part of a broader reconfiguration of museum education — no longer seen as a peripheral function, but as a critical agent in shaping what Semedo and Freitas describe as the "interrogative museum": a contemporary institution marked by criticality, reflexivity, performativity and political activism (Semedo & Freitas, 2017, p.56). This reconfiguration is reflected in the increasing convergence between educational/pedagogical and curatorial/artistic domains, whereby both curators and educators operate in dialogic and mediating roles, contingent upon a genuine sharing of authority (Semedo & Freitas, 2017, p.57). A notable example of this dialogic ethos can be observed in the 10th Mercosul Biennial, where the educational curator Cristián G. Gallegos was designated as a "dialogical-curator," and mediators were referred to as "dialoguers," thus signalling a terminological and methodological commitment to horizontal dialogue as a guiding principle (Semedo & Freitas, 2017, pp. 57–58). In this context, artworks are understood not merely as material

entities but as conceptual operations designed to provoke dialogue and foster critical encounters between publics, objects, and institutions.

This dialogic approach, however, does not escape the structural tensions inherent in curatorial decision-making. As several critical museology scholars have noted, to curate—whether objects or discourses—is to draw borders, to define what is visible and what remains unseen, what is included in the conversation and what is left outside of it. As Semedo (2020) poignantly argues, border-making in museums is never a neutral act: it establishes binary orders—between the original and the reproduction, the connoisseur and the amateur, the worthy and the marginal—that function as silent pedagogies of exclusion and symbolic violence (p.111)—a dynamic already addressed earlier in this work. Within this framework, educational curatorship, despite its dialogic aspirations, is still shaped by choices that reflect institutional values and priorities. Even when it stages debates that question the institution itself, such debates are, paradoxically, authorised by it. This tension reveals the political nature of educational curatorship: by mediating which stories are told and which silenced, which objects are foregrounded and which marginalised, it participates in the continuous (re)production of cultural meaning and institutional identity. Thus, rather than being a neutral transmission of knowledge, educational curatorship emerges as a situated, contested, and inherently political practice—one that must constantly navigate the fine line between institutional critique and institutional complicity.

3.2 Models and Typologies of Collaboration

3.2.1 Forms of collaboration

After outlining the general features of collaboration between schools and museums, it is useful—before examining the challenges such partnerships may face—to consider the concrete forms this collaboration can take. These may range from short-term initiatives, such as a single school trip, to more sustained, long-term projects, all of which share the common feature of relocating learning beyond the traditional classroom setting.

Among the most structured and ambitious examples of long-term collaboration are complex educational projects that unfold over the course of an entire school year. These initiatives involve regular interaction between schools and museums and may combine different components—such as guided visits, hands-on workshops, outdoor excursions, temporary exhibitions, and student-led productions. As noted by Celi et al. (2013), such projects foster stronger relationships between institutions by building continuity across encounters. They also enable deeper levels of engagement: teachers are involved more consistently and meaningfully; students benefit from opportunities to actively produce and present knowledge; and the museum educators gain valuable insights by following the learning process over time and assessing its outcomes. The inclusion of complementary activities—both inside and outside the museum—requires significant commitment from all participants. Yet, this very demand is what enhances the project's educational value: it provides students with a tangible experience of collective effort and long-term investment as key ingredients for meaningful learning (Celi et al., 2013, pp. 14-15).

Whether these collaborations take the form of brief, one-off initiatives or more complex, year-long projects, the school visit to the museum remains a recurring and essential component. Regardless of its place within a broader educational framework, the visit represents a concrete moment of exchange between the two institutions. Susana P. Gomes (2018) defines these visits as "uma atividade prática, letiva e exterior ao recinto escolar, assumida como estratégia pedagógica e onde, sob a orientação do professor, são abordados os conteúdos curriculares de uma ou mais disciplinas" (p. 71). Years earlier, Kisiel (2014) described field trips as a form of "boundary activity" (p. 346), a structured encounter between two distinct learning communities: the school and the museum. Both are organised around specific educational aims yet operate within different frameworks. This interaction between formal and informal educational contexts creates what Raaijmakers et al. (2021) describe as a "third space" (p. 2749)—a transformative learning environment that blurs traditional boundaries between formal and informal education. Rather than being a neutral middle ground, the third space allows students to actively shape their social identities and claim *epistemic authority*: the power to validate and express their own knowledge and lived experiences—even when these fall outside conventional school discourses. Within this space, dialogue takes place across different discursive communities—both academic and

marginalised—making room for languages, experiences, and values often excluded from traditional curricula. For this transformative space to fully emerge, it requires intentional, collaborative planning—open to multiple perspectives and inclusive in nature. This planning should be grounded in a holistic, interdisciplinary, and values-driven approach (Raaijmakers et al., 2021, p. 2749).

This transformative potential becomes particularly visible when students are not merely visitors, but co-creators of meaning within museum spaces. Practices such as co-curation, participatory action research, and narrative reinterpretation invite them to engage actively in the construction of knowledge—questioning assumptions, negotiating perspectives, and reshaping institutional narratives. In this context, learners do not exercise their role as knowers in isolation. Their capacity to contribute meaningfully to knowledge-building develops through interaction—with peers, educators, museum objects, and the surrounding environment. This is what recent scholarship defines as *epistemic agency*: the confidence and competence to engage in disciplinary meaning-making by posing questions, solving problems collaboratively, and expressing ideas that resonate with their lived experiences (Jung et al., 2023, p.2). Crucially, this agency is not fixed nor individual; it emerges from the material and relational conditions of the learning context. Interactions with content, tools, spaces, and people influence how students position themselves —and are positioned— in processes of shared making-meaning, revealing epistemic agency as a deeply situated and context-sensitive practice (Jung et al., 2023, p.3). An illustrative example of this is found in the Art-Science Learning Pathway (ALP) described by Raaijmakers et al. (2021). This programme integrates Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to foster group dialogue about artworks related to science topics. Students are encouraged to explore how artists express perspectives on scientific themes and to relate these to their own lives and the environment. Following this dialogic phase, they develop their own artistic responses—sculptures or paintings—based on personal interpretations, which are then exhibited with descriptive labels in a public school exhibition. This process not only reinforces students' conceptual understanding but also affirms their role as knowledge producers and cultural agents, bridging disciplinary learning with creative expression and public visibility.

Yet, as powerful as these practices may be, participation in museum learning cannot be reduced to surface-level inclusion. It demands a willingness from institutions to

redistribute authority and embrace shared decision-making. As Nora Sternfeld (2013, as cited in Særkjær, 2024, p.7) argues, participatory frameworks often fall short when they merely invite the visitors to *join the game* without questioning or transforming its rules. Authentic co-curation enables learners to intervene in meaning-making processes, potentially transforming not just content but also the museum's structures and voice. This tension is evident in the participatory experiment conducted at Randers Art Museum in Denmark. In this initiative, visitors were invited to comment on their experiences with artworks, and a curated selection of these comments was integrated into the exhibition display (Særkjær, 2024, p.1). The aim was to create a dialogic and polyphonic museum experience, in which the institutional voice could be complemented—and, at times, challenged—by those of the visitors. The museum was envisioned as a dialogic space, where meaning emerges through interaction between diverse voices rather than being pre-determined by curatorial authority. However, important limitations remained. Visitor contributions were shaped by a prompt jointly developed with the institution, and the selection process—managed internally—prioritised personal, affective, and reflective responses. These were chosen specifically to contrast with the existing interpretive framework and to provoke new conversations. While this curatorial approach enabled a degree of plurality, it also underscored the extent to which institutional control was maintained, revealing persistent asymmetries in participatory practice (Særkjær, 2024, p. 7). Even when multiple voices are welcomed, the museum often retains the power to decide what is displayed, how, and why.

This discussion underscores the need to consider not only *what* kinds of educational experiences museums and schools can co-create, but also *how* such collaborations are structured in practice. While participatory and transformative approaches hold significant pedagogical promise, their success often depends on the institutional frameworks that support—or constrain—them. In other words, meaningful student agency and co-creation do not emerge in a vacuum: they are shaped by the broader configuration of the museum-school partnership. To better understand the structural dynamics that enable or limit collaborative potential, Liu (1999, as cited in Chen, 2007, p.107) identifies six models that exemplify different configurations of educational partnership between museum and schools. These models reflect varying degrees of curricular integration, leadership, and reciprocal engagement:

1. Affiliated School Model: the school is formally linked to the museum, with an arts-based curriculum developed in close alignment with the institution. Despite this integration, it operates within the framework of the local education system.
2. Provider-Accepter Model: museum assumes the role of content provider, designing and delivering educational programmes for students and teachers with minimal collaborative input from the school side.
3. Museum-Oriented Interactive Model: the museum initiates the educational planning and actively engages teachers in the co-creation of learning activities, fostering a more participatory dynamic while maintaining institutional leadership.
4. Teacher-Oriented Interactive Model: educators from the school propose project ideas or thematic directions, which are then developed jointly with museum staff. The teacher's agency is central in shaping the collaboration.
5. Community Museum School Model: the collaboration is anchored in the local community, often involving community museums as key resources for the school. This model promotes integration of school learning with community heritage and knowledge.
6. Third-Party Facilitated Model: a separate organisation—neither the museum nor the school—acts as an intermediary, planning, coordinating, and supporting the partnership to ensure continuity and shared goals.

The six models of museum-school collaboration identified by Liu (1999, as cited in Chen, 2007) can be synthesised in a comparative table to highlight differences in leadership, curricular integration, and teacher participation (see Table 2).

Table 2 - Comparative Framework of Museum-School Collaboration

MODEL	LEADERSHIP	CURRICULAR INTEGRATION	TEACHER PARTICIPATION	PRACTICAL EXAMPLE
Affiliated School Model	Both (Museum + School)	High – co-designed, arts-integrated	High – joint curriculum development	School curriculum fully integrated with museum programming and resources
Provider-Accepter Model	Museum	Low – standalone	Low – passive recipient	Museum offers workshops or tours for schools, with minimal school involvement
Museum-Oriented Interactive Model	Museum	Medium – museum-aligned experiences	Medium – teacher consulted	Museum invites teachers to provide input on planned activities
Teacher-Oriented Interactive Model	School	Medium – school-driven content	High – active co-design by teachers	Teachers propose themes and design visits in collaboration with museum educators. The school determines teh content and purpose of the collaboration, using the museum as resource.
Community Museum School Model	Community Musem	Medium–High – community-centred	Medium – involvement of local actors	Museum draws on local community knowledge, integrates heritage into learning
Third-Party Facilitaded Model	Third party	Variable – dependent on project	Variable – depends on facilitation	NGO or external body mediates planning, coordination and resource-sharing

Note. Based on Liu (1999, as cited in Chen, 2007, p. 107). The original typology has been restructured here for comparative purposes. Some categories—such as teacher participation and practical examples—are not explicitly defined in Liu's work but have been inferred and adapted from the models' descriptions to facilitate analytical clarity. The resulting framework is intended as a conceptual tool, not as a rigid classification.

These models should not be seen as rigid categories but rather as conceptual tools to reflect on the diversity and complexity of educational partnerships. They help to illuminate how roles, responsibilities, and pedagogical priorities can be negotiated.

3.2.2 Factors Affecting the Educational Value of School Visits

School trips to museums are rarely linear or entirely predictable experiences. Often, the educational goals set by both the school and the museum are not fully achieved. This outcome depends on a variety of factors that can influence the effectiveness of the visit as a learning experience. What follows is an analysis of some of these elements.

A key factor is the novelty of the environment. When the setting is either excessively unfamiliar or, conversely, too familiar, it may distract students and negatively affect both

cognitive and emotional learning. In this sense, a proper orientation activity—either before or during the visit—can help mitigate such effects, supporting greater focus and engagement (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008, p.185). A second important element is the social context of the visit. Spontaneous peer interactions—such as sharing observations and reflections—can enhance learning and make the museum experience more engaging, meaningful, and lasting (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008, p.185). The value of these interactions is highlighted by several scholars. Falk & Dierking (2016), for instance, emphasise how social interaction increases educational benefits, particularly when students are given the opportunity to explain what they have learnt to others. This supports both memory retention and the ability to transfer knowledge across contexts (p.158). Likewise, Griffin (2012) notes that the quality of learning also depends on the quality of interactions between teachers, museum educators, and students (p.117), —a theme explored further in this dissertation— more successful when they have some foundational knowledge of the subject matter. Here, the teacher's role becomes essential: museums cannot always adapt to each visitor's level, whereas teachers are familiar with their pupils' starting points and can therefore tailor the experience more effectively (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008, p.185). Yet, beyond disciplinary knowledge, another crucial dimension influencing student learning remains less visible: the cultural capital each student brings with them into the museum setting—a concept that warrants closer examination. Drawing on the theories of Giroux and Freire—who conceptualise knowledge as a form of cultural capital—this idea has its roots in Bourdieu's theory of practice. According to Bourdieu (as cited in Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018) each individual develops a way of thinking and acting—what he calls *habitus*—based on the resources (*capitals*) they possess in specific social contexts (*fields*). These resources may be economic, cultural, social, or symbolic in nature and are applied within various social contexts, or *fields* (Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018, p.274). In the context of museum learning, it is therefore vital to recognise that students come with differing levels of cultural capital, which can be understood as the extent to which they are familiar with the dominant cultural norms of society and their capacity to comprehend and use formal, educated language (Sullivan, 2001). While the teacher may understand students' disciplinary knowledge from classroom work, they are not always aware of the students' cultural capital, which can shape their educational experience in the museum.

A brief reflective digression on the complex concept of cultural capital is essential at this stage, as it provides a valuable framework for understanding the role museums can play in challenging social inequalities and promoting a more equitable distribution of cultural resources. According to Bourdieu (as cited in Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018) individuals acquire their *habitus*—their dispositions and ways of engaging with the world—through the mobilisation of various forms of capital: economic, social, symbolic, and cultural. Each of these holds particular value within distinct social fields, such as that of the art museum. These fields function as arenas in which individuals compete for position, and success within them depends on the possession and recognition of specific forms of capital. This framework sheds light on the ways in which privilege is socially produced and maintained, and it thus calls for critical reflection and action against structural forms of exclusion (Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018, p. 274). Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction highlights how cultural capital—understood as knowledge, skills, and aesthetic preferences—is transmitted within privileged families, thereby perpetuating existing social hierarchies. Schools and cultural institutions, including museums, often reinforce these inequalities by privileging dominant cultural norms and ways of knowing (Kisida et al., 2014, p. 281). However, more recent scholarship suggests that cultural capital may not be as tightly bound to parental background as Bourdieu originally proposed. DiMaggio (as cited in Kisida et al., 2014; Semedo, 2022) challenges this determinism through his theory of cultural mobility. Drawing on data from the TALENT research project, he developed a tool to measure students' interest in and experience with culturally prestigious resources—what Bourdieu would term cultural capital—understood as instruments for accessing symbolically valued knowledge (Semedo, 2022, pp. 381-382). His analysis confirms that cultural capital has a significant positive effect on secondary school performance. Access to cultural resources, such as arts and heritage education, can thus positively influence students' academic achievement. Teachers tend to communicate more easily with students who already exhibit culturally valued knowledge and behaviours, often perceiving them as more capable and intelligent. Notably, students from disadvantaged backgrounds show greater gains in their attitudes toward acquiring cultural capital when exposed to enriching cultural experiences, suggesting a higher motivational potential when such opportunities are made accessible (Kisida et al., 2014, p. 282).These findings reinforce the importance of ensuring that cultural resources are meaningfully embedded within the school context, not only to support academic success but also to promote upward cultural

mobility. In this light, fostering a mutual understanding between museums and schools—grounded in shared values, research, motivations, and action—is essential for building educational frameworks that respond to the diverse needs and aspirations of all learners (Semedo, 2022, p.282).

Building on this perspective, the theory of cultural mobility also invites reflection on how cultural institutions—particularly museums—can actively contribute to this process. Rather than functioning solely as transmitters of dominant knowledge, museums are increasingly called to serve as inclusive spaces that support the development and recognition of diverse forms of cultural capital. Consequently, the theory of cultural mobility has important implications for how schools and educational policy understand the availability and role of cultural resources. Museums, in particular, are positioned to support students in enhancing their cultural status, especially when their practices are informed by inclusive and dialogic principles. An essential step in this direction involves recognising not only how museums can help develop cultural capital, but also how they might meaningfully engage with the cultural capital that visitors already possess. As Hohenstein and Moussouri (2018, p. 285) suggest, museums must ask themselves how they can use people's existing cultural resources as a bridge between their lived experiences and the museum's content. This reflection is crucial, as it moves the museum beyond a unidirectional role of transmitting knowledge and instead calls for openness to diverse perspectives and interpretations—especially those brought by students and communities whose cultural capital may differ from dominant norms. In this way, museums can create more inclusive spaces where multiple worldviews are not only acknowledged but also welcomed and interrogated. A pertinent example of such an inclusive and dialogic approach is the *My London Story* project at the Museum of London Docklands (Museum of London, n.d.). This initiative invites young people from multilingual and migrant backgrounds to share personal narratives and objects connected to their family histories, which are then brought into conversation with the museum's collections. By foregrounding participants' lived experiences and cultural narratives, the project moves away from a deficit model that merely seeks to "fill gaps" in cultural knowledge. Instead, it actively validates and integrates diverse forms of cultural capital, recognising them as legitimate and valuable contributions to the interpretative framework of the museum. This approach illustrates how museums can shift from being exclusive institutions that reproduce dominant

cultural hierarchies to becoming more relational and reflexive spaces. Through initiatives such as *My London Story*, museums can foster environments where multiple epistemologies coexist and where visitors see their identities and histories not only reflected but genuinely respected. In doing so, museums can act as sites of cultural empowerment and social inclusion, actively contributing to a more equitable distribution and recognition of cultural capital.

Nevertheless, student learning is a multifaceted process that extends beyond structural access to cultural resources; it is also deeply influenced by personal interests, prior expectations, and internal motivations. Every student arrives with a personal *social agenda*, which may facilitate or hinder engagement with content and profoundly shape the learning experience (Falk & Dierking, 2016, p.149). While it is difficult for teachers to meet everyone's needs, simply acknowledging their existence can support the design of more inclusive and engaging activities (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008, p.185).

One of the most debated elements affecting learning during school visits, according to DeWitt & Storksdieck (2008), is the degree of structure within the visit. Research indicates that overly structured activities—such as rigid worksheets or highly directive guided tours—may enhance cognitive learning but reduce emotional engagement and student interest. Conversely, completely unstructured visits may become unfocused. The most effective approach appears to be a flexible structure that leaves room for independent exploration. In this context, well-designed worksheets can play a key role: if they are intended to stimulate observation, peer discussion, and connections to classroom content, they can foster greater attention and promote deeper, more engaged learning (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008, pp.185–187). A flexible structure is therefore recommended—an equilibrium between, as Maria Xanthoudaki (2003) puts it, "wonder and clearly defined, well-designed educational objectives" (p. 106). *Wonder*, understood as a sense of awe and openness to the unexpected, represents the emotional and personal dimension of learning and can make the experience memorable. However, for it to become truly educational, it must be accompanied by intentional planning, guided by clear and coherent learning goals.

3.3 The Roles and Social Interactions of Museum Educators, Teachers, and Students

As highlighted earlier in this work, social interaction within the museum is a central element in the educational experience of students. Indeed, as Griffin (2012, p.113) notes, the most significant aspect of a school visit to a museum is the social interaction between museum educators, teachers, and students. This section aims to further explore this dynamic, with particular attention to the roles and responsibilities assumed by museum educators and teachers, as well as the actual and desirable behaviours that contribute to making the educational experience as effective and meaningful as possible.

3.3.1 The Evolving Role of Museum Educators as Learning Facilitators

Trombini (2003) explains that museum educators play a fundamental role within museums, as their primary function is to facilitate the museum experience. This means their role extends beyond merely providing information; it involves activating and supporting cognitive and emotional growth processes in visitors (p. 15). Their task is not limited to transmitting knowledge but also includes supporting the public in developing a conscious approach to cultural heritage, acquiring and understanding data, and reconstructing historical or cultural contexts that are not immediately visible. Additionally, museum educators assist visitors in applying the knowledge gained during the visit, using it in other contexts, and enriching their learning. They encourage an active and reflective approach, aiming to elevate the museum experience to a significant educational value (Trombini, 2003, p. 16). As highlighted in the first chapter, these museum professionals have played a central role in transforming museums into more inclusive, accessible, and visitor-oriented spaces. Therefore, in addition to their technical functions, such as organising programmes and writing educational materials, they have contributed, through their practices, to promoting diversity, accessibility, and a focus on the visitor experience. For this reason, museum educators are recognised as true "change agents" (Munley & Roberts, 2006, p. 35).

This evolving identity of museum educators has been shaped through an ongoing process of critical reflection on practice. Griffin (2012) highlights how such reflection, coupled with a consistent commitment to educational research, can lead educators to redefine their identity, transitioning from mere transmitters of content to genuine mediators of knowledge.

From this perspective, the educational intervention no longer relies solely on a frontal and one-way communication approach but is conceived as a dynamic, participatory process aimed at facilitating learning. This reconfiguration of the museum educator's role also calls for a deeper examination of the concept of mediation, a notion that has become central to contemporary museum education theory and practice. Rather than being a purely technical or logistical function. As Semedo and Freitas (2017) note, mediation is not merely a functional task, but rather an active, critical and situated form of engagement that enables moments of reflection and meaningful experiences for visitors (p.49). The role of the educator-as-mediator is thus grounded in presence, dialogue, and orality—a conversational practice that creates the conditions for participatory learning. This conversational model moves away from traditional monologic transmission and contributes to shifting institutional paradigms by favouring dialogic, co-constructed, and affective encounters with knowledge. This inherent fluidity and contestability of mediation—as a space of both connection and tension—highlights the educator's role not only as a facilitator of access, but as a critical negotiator of meaning, authority, and visibility, actively intervening in the institutional dynamics that determine what is shown, said, or silenced (Semedo & Freitas, 2017, p.50). In order to enact this critical and situated form of engagement, educators and curators are also called to cultivate what Sandell (as cited in in Huang & Liem, 2022, p. 302) describes as *cultural humility*. This concept refers to the ability to recognise how one's own cultural background, assumptions, and institutional positioning may influence interactions with diverse audiences, and to actively seek approaches that decentre dominant narratives. As Sandell (as cited in Huang & Liem, 2022, p. 302) notes, one of the barriers to genuine sectoral transformation toward social participation lies in the attitudes of museum professionals themselves—particularly when they do not subscribe to inclusive values. To address this, he advocates for training programmes co-designed with marginalised communities, enabling practitioners to confront their positionalities through lived, relational experience. Within a dialogic and affective mediation model, cultural humility becomes an essential disposition—anchoring the educator's practice in reflexivity, openness, and ethical accountability.

This critical repositioning of the educator—as an agent who not only mediates access but also questions institutional hierarchies and cultivates cultural humility—necessarily translates into concrete pedagogical practices. It requires a rethinking of how learning is

supported and relationally co-constructed in museum contexts. In this regard, a key element of this shift is working within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), a concept developed by Vygotsky (as cited in Ash et al., 2012, p. 24). This concept describes an individual's potential for learning at a given moment, defining the space between what one can do independently and what one can achieve with the support of a more experienced person. It helps to understand how much a person can grow when adequately guided in the learning process (Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018, p. 305). Operating within this zone means implementing the so-called "scaffolding," which involves providing gradual, targeted support to help the learner go beyond what they could do alone. Hohenstein & Moussouri (2018) define scaffolding as "the adult–child (or teacher–student) interaction that aims to facilitate an individual's learning" (p. 303). It is a collaborative activity, where multiple participants engage in a shared task. The support provided gradually decreases as the learner gains greater mastery. This type of interaction is dynamic and symmetrical rather than hierarchical. The zone of proximal development itself is not a fixed state; rather, it evolves continuously as learners acquire new levels of competence. By working within this framework, museum educators redefine their role and relationship with visitors, shifting towards a model based on guidance, active participation, and mutual growth (Ash et al., 2012, pp. 24–25).

The redefinition of this role has also involved a reconsideration of the way knowledge is negotiated during museum visits. Sienkiewicz (as cited in Anderson et al., 2015, p.240), focusing on the role of educators in art museums, highlights the complexity of shifting from the position of the all-knowing expert—traditionally attributed to the educator by visitors—to that of a co-explorer of artworks alongside the public. To support this transformation, some educators have altered their approach with the aim of no longer being perceived as the sole holders of knowledge, but rather as equal interlocutors with visitors (Anderson et al., 2015, p. 238), thereby fostering more horizontal and participatory interactions. Within this context, an essential competence for museum educators lies in the combination of sensitivity and perceptual acuity—that is, the ability to read the characteristics of the group in front of them, to recognise the most appropriate moment to introduce content or provoke questions, and to adapt accordingly (Anderson et al., 2015, p. 242).

A particularly illustrative example of this shift in pedagogical stance is the adoption of facilitation methods that promote shared meaning-making. Among these, Visual Thinking

Strategies (VTS) is one of the most effective pedagogical approaches in contemporary museum education. Rooted in the psychology of aesthetic development, VTS aims to develop the ability to attribute meaning to images (Anderson et al., 2015; Arriaga, 2013; Burchenal & Grohe, 2007). Developed in the late 1980s by Abigail Housen, an art psychologist and former director of MoMA, the method seeks to stimulate critical thinking, communication, and observation through guided discussions that encourage dialogue, collaboration, and the exploration of multiple interpretations. Furthermore, it enhances both oral and written language skills (Housen & Yenawine, 1996, p. 1). This discussion-based approach not only actively engages participants but also reflects the educator's role as a facilitator of thinking, consistent with the model of the educator-as-explorer—no longer the sole source of knowledge, but rather a sensitive and attentive guide in the development of shared meanings. Due to its capacity to foster dialogue and active participation, the method has been systematically adopted in numerous museum education programmes. VTS is structured around the facilitation of discussion by the museum educator through the use of open-ended questions such as: "What is going on in this picture?", "What do you see that makes you say that?", and "What more can we find?" (Burchenal & Grohe, 2007, p. 114). Students are thus encouraged to observe carefully, interpret, and articulate their thoughts within a context where there are no right or wrong answers. As Raaijmakers et al. (2021) explain, the facilitator does not impose authority but rather adopts the role of a guide, allowing space for critical thinking, reciprocal listening, and the co-construction of narratives (p. 2753). Since this method intentionally limits the amount of information provided by the educator; it brings about new questions and areas for reflection regarding the balance between content delivery and open-ended exploration. The discussion that arises from this approach often prioritises participant's personal interpretations, thereby requiring educators to carefully navigate when and how to integrate information without compromising the participatory nature of the activity.

Beyond its pedagogical function, however, VTS can also be understood as a curatorial gesture—a deliberate redistribution of narrative authority within the museum space. Considering earlier reflections on educational curatorship as a practice that blurs the boundaries between curatorial and educational work—foregrounding care, reflexivity, and the active involvement of audiences—VTS exemplifies how educational interventions can

assume a curatorial dimension. By decentralising expertise and inviting visitors to co-construct meaning, this method challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge production. It repositions interpretation as a shared, plural, and contingent process, and in doing so, opens space for alternative voices and experiences to emerge within the institutional narrative. In this sense, dialogic practices such as VTS do not merely facilitate learning; they also function as critical interventions in the epistemological frameworks of the museum, aligning educational action with curatorial critique. Nevertheless, it is important to critically examine the extent to which such practices genuinely redistribute power or rather simulate participation within predefined institutional boundaries. While VTS encourages multiple interpretations and fosters a plurality of voices, the museum retains a significant degree of control over the process. It is ultimately the institution—through its educators, curators, and programme designers—that selects which works to focus on, frames the context of engagement, and sets the terms of participation. As such, dialogic and participatory methods, while potentially transformative, are also shaped by the positionality and intentionality of the museum itself. This tension highlights the need to consider not only *how* participation is facilitated, but *who* enables it, *where*, and *to what end*—underscoring that practices like VTS, though valuable, do not escape the broader institutional dynamics they seek to critique.

This ongoing negotiation of roles, responsibilities, and educational approaches highlights the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the museum educator's professional identity. It becomes clear that museum educators cannot be confined to a sole expertise in the contextual knowledge of artworks. Instead, their practice demands a complex interplay of skills: alongside content mastery, they must possess the sensitivity and perceptual acuity to read and respond to the specific characteristics of the groups they engage with—in this case, students—and act as mediators who create the conditions for participatory learning and foster dialogic spaces. This involves a nuanced understanding of group dynamics, expressive needs, and levels of participation. Educators are called upon to flexibly calibrate their interventions, discerning when to impart information and when to prompt reflection through thoughtful questioning. Equally essential is their openness to continuous self-reflection and the ongoing refinement of their pedagogical practice.

3.3.2 Teacher-Museum Educator Dynamics

It is essential to acknowledge that, although their involvement during museum visits is often limited, teachers—being an integral part of the social interaction that unfolds—play a significant role in the educational experience at the museum, even if they are not the primary focus of that experience. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the nature of this interaction in order to better define the role of teachers within this context. In this regard, Palacios and de Atalaya (2025) highlight the importance of a well-structured collaboration between teachers and museum educators, which is fundamental to making school visits to museums a truly integrated component of the teaching–learning process. The success of integrating such experiences, they argue, depends largely on the synergy between the roles of teachers and museum educators. While teachers are responsible for embedding museum visits into the curricular framework, museum educators must ensure accessibility, flexibility, and effective communication with schools. Within this scenario, Palacios and de Atalaya (2025) stress the need to foster collaboration aimed at designing learning activities aligned with the current social paradigm—so that students can acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in an ever-changing world (p. 3).

Despite this potential, collaboration remains limited in many cases. As Weiland and Akerson (2013) point out, teachers are not always fully aware of how they can actively contribute during school visits to the museum, or which forms of interaction are most effective with museum educators (p. 1334). Communication between the two parties is frequently minimal, focusing mainly on logistical matters, without a real exploration of the pedagogical aspects of the visit. This communication gap leads to a poor integration of museum activities with the school curriculum. Moreover, museum educators themselves often report frustration regarding the passive role that teachers sometimes adopt during visits. This dynamic can hinder the development of a coherent and supportive learning environment. As suggested by Weiland and Akerson's (2013) study, which primarily focuses on the interaction between museum educators and teachers in the school context, their findings also provide valuable insights for developing effective collaborations within a museum setting. Their research suggests that successful cooperation does not always require teachers to be deeply involved; rather, active and conscious participation, along with clear and effective communication with the educator, can be sufficient. In this context, the term

coordination is used to describe situations where interaction between the two parties is minimal—such as a single meeting or a brief phone call—but still structured enough to clearly establish goals, expectations, and roles. If this type of interaction is based on mutual respect for each other's expertise and transparent communication, it can be sufficient to ensure a meaningful educational experience for the students (Weiland & Akerson, 2013, pp. 1350-1351).

However, the effectiveness of a school visit is further enhanced when teachers and museum educators move beyond coordination to become complementary collaborators. By intentionally aligning pedagogical approaches and sharing their unique expertise, they enrich the educational value of the visit, supporting students not only as learners but as active participants in a socially constructed experience.

3.3.3 Teachers- Students Dynamics

This section explores the overall interaction between teachers and students to understand how the transition from the school environment to the museum setting affects the communication between these two actors, who already have an established relationship within the school context. It should also be considered that, in some cases, the interaction between teachers and students may be limited, as the interaction between museum educators and students occupies the majority of the time. However, the teacher may intervene during the interaction between museum educators and students or there may be moments of interaction between the teacher and students during specific times, such as when transitioning between rooms or during breaks between activities. Therefore, it is essential to explore the nature of these interactions, even if limited, as each exchange impacts the students' museum experience. To analyse how these dynamics evolve, it is necessary to understand how the interaction between teachers and students changes depending on the context, from the school context to the museum context, and how this shift influences the attitudes of each actor. To this end, the study by DeWitt and Hohenstein (2010) is referenced, which adopts a sociocultural perspective to highlight how the context plays a significant role in influencing the interactions and perceptions of the involved subjects.

DeWitt and Hohenstein (2010), in their study, examined how, although most classroom conversations follow the triadic IRF model (Initiate-Response-Feedback), in which the teacher directs the discourse, maintains authority, and determines the content, in the museum, non-triadic interactions are more frequent, characterised by a more dialogic and free-flowing exchange. However, teachers still tend to retain a certain degree of control over the discourse, without fully abandoning the school-based approach. Therefore, while the museum offers opportunities for more dialogic interaction, it is not guaranteed that this will automatically change the way teachers interact with students, as this largely depends on the teachers' behaviour and their choices regarding the type of interaction they wish to encourage (DeWitt and Hohenstein, 2010, pp. 461-463). To better understand the nature of this interaction, it is useful to consider how teachers respond to questions and react to students' contributions. In this context, two main types of responses can be distinguished: on the one hand, some teachers embrace students' contributions, building on them and fostering non-triadic exchanges; on the other hand, others tend to disregard such contributions, redirecting students to tasks such as note-taking, thus maintaining a triadic and authoritative model (DeWitt & Hohenstein, 2010, pp. 463-465).

Another important aspect highlighted by DeWitt and Hohenstein (2010) is the lower frequency of evaluative comments (such as "well done", "correct", "excellent") during the museum visit compared to the classroom environment. These comments, which reinforce the teacher's authority and are typical of the IRF model, are less frequent, suggesting that discourse in the museum tends to be more balanced and collaborative. As for the questions posed by teachers, there is a higher percentage of "request help" questions during the museum visit compared to the classroom. "Request help" questions are those in which the teacher seeks support or information from the students, adopting a less dominant position than in the classroom, thereby fostering a more collaborative interaction. Nevertheless, closed, brief, and procedural questions continue to dominate both in the classroom and during the museum visit. Procedural questions, aimed at maintaining order and controlling activities (for example, "Did you take notes?" or "Have you finished the task?"), are primarily used to monitor students' progress. However, it should be noted that some teachers, while maintaining a degree of authority through the triadic model, take advantage of the museum environment to pose more engaging questions. These questions, being more open and

stimulating, encourage students to explore further and develop deeper reflections, contributing to a more dialogic and participatory interaction (DeWitt & Hohenstein, 2010, pp. 466-467).

3.3.4 Dynamics Among Students

In the context of school visits to museums, it is essential to consider that students participate in the experience as part of an organised group. As noted by Falk and Dierking (2016), organised groups exhibit different behavioural dynamics compared to individual visitors. Although united by belonging to the same class, students do not form a homogeneous audience: each brings with them their own background of prior experiences, interests, motivations, and expectations, which influence how they interact with the museum environment. Within a single class group, some students may feel engaged and stimulated, while others may experience confusion or indifference. This diversity makes it challenging for museum educators to propose uniform educational experiences, highlighting the need for a flexible and adaptable approach capable of addressing individual needs within a collective context (Falk & Dierking, 2016, pp. 139-141).

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge that within the class group, students not only bring with them differing past experiences, attitudes, and motivations but also influence each other throughout the experience. As Anderson, Lucas, and Ginns (2003) highlight, drawing on Dierking, learning in informal contexts—such as museums—is deeply influenced by social interaction, within which peer dynamics, typical of school groups, play a significant role in shaping the educational experience (p.178). For example, a student who is initially motivated may lose interest due to the inattentive behaviour of a peer, just as another student may become positively engaged due to the enthusiasm and participation of others. These social dynamics significantly affect how each individual perceives and experiences the museum visit, highlighting the need for educational strategies that can foster constructive and inclusive interaction among students.

As previously highlighted, students tend to exhibit more active participation during museum visits than in the classroom setting. In particular, there is a greater propensity for spontaneous engagement—such as asking questions without prompting—as well as a higher

level of autonomy and emotional involvement (DeWitt & Hohenstein, 2010). This behaviour, as Falk and Dierking (2016) explain, is particularly significant given that by the age of twelve or thirteen, adolescents begin to develop intellectual capabilities similar to those of adults, while still maintaining a strong need for hands-on experiences and a marked desire for social interaction. Moreover, at this stage, students are able to construct new knowledge based on past experiences, which is why museum education should aim to offer activities that foster these connections (Falk & Dierking, 2016, p. 280).

Considering these development and social factors, understanding student dynamics during museum visits become essential for designing inclusive and effective educational interventions—ones that do not merely deliver content, but also create space for participation, autonomy, and peer-supported learning.

3.4 Educational benefits and Impacts

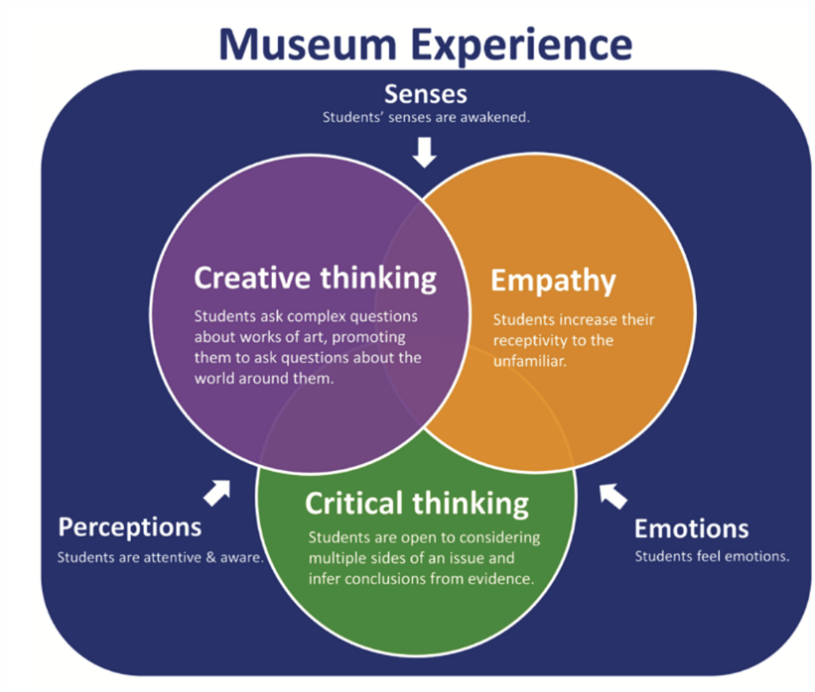
3.4.1 Benefits for students

Among the commonly acknowledged benefits of museum visits for students is their capacity to foster both cognitive and affective learning. As Trombini (2003) explains, meaningful learning in museums occurs when the experience stimulates both rational comprehension and emotional resonance. This dual engagement is closely tied to two core concepts: resonance, which occurs when an object evokes deep personable or cultural significance for the observer; and wonder, which is triggered by beauty, uniqueness, or the unexpected, often provoking awe and curiosity (Trombini, 2003, p. 17). These emotional responses are not incidental; they play an active role in anchoring understanding and making knowledge personally relevant. In addition to emotional engagement, museum visits also appear to support long-term retention of factual knowledge. A study conducted by Greene, Kisida e Bowen (2014) on students who participated in guided art museum tours revealed remarkably high levels of factual recall weeks after the visit. Without any formal testing or incentive to memorise content, students accurately remembered key historical and sociological information about the artworks they encountered. The level of recall observed suggests that learning experiences in museums can leave a lasting cognitive print, reinforcing the idea that such visits are not only stimulating in the moment, but also effective in supporting long-term academic learning (Greene et al., 2014, pp.81-82).

One of the primary ways these outcomes are achieved is through the educational mediation provided by museum educators. While they often lead the visit, their approach tends to be dialogic rather than didactic. As reported by Hohenstein and Moussouri (2018), although museum educators occupy the majority of speaking time during guided tours, over half of their speech is interactive. This reflects a pedagogical emphasis on student participation and engagement, particularly when educators use open-ended questions and storytelling. These strategies not only invite interpretation and discussion but also support the development of critical thinking, by encouraging students to analyse, question, and connect new information to their own perspectives (Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018, p. 117). A clear illustration of this approach—already mentioned earlier in this chapter—is found in Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), a method that guides students to observe, interpret, and express ideas about artworks or objects through structured, open-ended dialogue. This method, as noted by Burchenal and Grohe (2007), cultivates analytical and interpretative skills in a non-judgmental environment where multiple perspectives are welcomed (p.114). According to Raaijmakers et al. (2021), such a format shifts the museum educator's role from expert to facilitator, fostering reciprocal listening and co-construction of meaning—conditions that are ideal for the development of independent thought and reflective learning (p. 2753).

Although the value of museum visits has long been recognised in educational theory, only in recent years have empirical studies begun to rigorously quantify their impact. Notably, Krantz and Downey (2021) present findings from a growing body of research, including the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and a national study led by the Museum Education Division of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) and the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD). These studies have shown that even a single museum visit can significantly enhance students' development in three interrelated areas: creative thinking, empathy, and critical thinking (see Figure 1)—capacities essential not only for academic achievement but also for students' personal growth. These findings confirm that one-time museum experiences can play a meaningful role in complementing and enriching school-based education, offering benefits that extend beyond the immediate context of the visit (Krantz & Downey, 2021, p. 38-39)

Figure 1 - Visualising the effects of a single-visit art museum field trip on students.



Note. Reprinted from *Thinking about art: The role of single-visit art museum field trip programs in visual arts education* (p.39), by A. Krantz & S. Downey, 2021, *Art Education, 74*(3), 37–42. © Taylors & Francis

The development of critical thinking skills is greatly enhanced by the increase in observations that students make during their learning experiences. By becoming more observant and noting finer details, students strengthen their ability to analyse and think critically. This skill is valuable not only in academic contexts but also in everyday situations, helping students refine their thinking, make connections, and engage more deeply with complex ideas. Enhanced attention to detail and thoughtful analysis are foundational for developing a more reflective and independent approach to problem- solving and decision-making (Greene et al., 2014, p.82). A further dimension of critical thinking involves the recognition of multiple interpretations—an essential aspect of the interpretive process. Krant and Downey (2021) consider this ability as a meaningful indicator of critical thinking which also includes openness to new evidence and the capacity to revise one's beliefs. Research suggests that the most notable gains in critical thinking during short-term experiences often arise from the increased quantity and quality of students' observations.

This underscores the value of cultivating observational skills as a foundation for deeper cognitive engagement, even in brief educational settings (Krantz & Downey, 2021, p. 40).

Alongside the enhancement of critical thinking, single-visit museum programmes have demonstrated their potential to cultivate creative thinking through the practice of meaningful questioning. As Krantz and Downey (2021) explain in their study, students engaged in these experiences often begin to pose deeper, more reflective questions that go beyond basic facts and explore meaning, intention, and interpretation. Rather than simply asking who, what, where, or when, they are encouraged to consider why things are the way they are, or to draw references based on what they observe. This shift in questioning style reflects a growing intellectual curiosity and a more exploratory mindset. By creating space for wonder, interpretation, and open-ended inquiry, museum settings inspire students to connect more deeply with artworks—and with the world around them (Krantz & Downey, 2021, p.39).

In addition to fostering critical and creative thinking, museum visits contribute meaningfully to students' social and emotional development. As students engage with diverse artistic expressions and interpretive possibilities, they begin to recognise that multiple perspectives can coexist—and that differences in understanding are not only valid but enriching. This recognition encourages greater empathy and tolerance, as students learn to value the viewpoints of others and become more receptive to alternative ways of seeing the world. Exposure to a variety of cultural and historical narratives through artworks further deepens students' capacity for historical empathy and appreciation of diversity, supporting their personal and social growth (Greene et al., 2014). This interpretive openness is often reinforced in museum settings, where educators emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers and actively welcome a wide range of student responses. Students who take part in these experiences are more likely to question the idea that everyone should understand a work of art in the same way—an important step toward acknowledging the legitimacy of different viewpoints (Krantz & Downey, 2021, pp.39-41). By encouraging curiosity, respectful dialogue, and a willingness to embrace uncertainty, inquiry-based approaches used in art museum teaching promote an inclusive learning environment where students feel safe to express themselves and consider new perspectives.

In this context, Lacoe, Painter, and Williams (2020) argue that experiential education programmes, such as museum visits, can offer alternative and often more effective learning

environments for students who struggle in traditional classroom contexts or come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These programmes, they suggest, foster a form of cultural fluency that is typically more accessible to middle- and upper-income students—an advantage which may ultimately translate into improved educational outcomes and broader opportunities to excel (Lacoe et al., 2020, p. 1). Furthermore, the work of Greene et al. (2014) provides compelling evidence that the benefits of school tours to art museums are significantly greater for students from less-advantaged backgrounds. Their research indicated that pupils from rural areas, high-poverty schools, and minority groups tend to exhibit gains that are two to three times larger than those observed in the general student's population. These findings imply that students with limited previous exposure to culturally enriching experiences are likely to derive the greatest benefit from such opportunities. By contrast, pupils from urban areas and low-poverty schools tend to show comparatively smaller gains, with the impact appearing less pronounced (Greene et al., 2014, pp. 85-86). This disparity underscores the potential of museum education to serve as an equalising force, providing all students—particularly those from underrepresented or marginalised communities—with access to intellectual and culturally rich experiences that might otherwise remain out of reach.

3.4.2 Benefits for teacher and museums

For museums, engaging in collaborative partnerships with schools offers strategic benefits that go beyond immediate delivery of educational programmes. Such collaborations enable museums to position themselves as active agents within broader educational ecosystems, rather than operating in isolation. As Falk and Dierking (2016) argue, museums are likely to achieve greater educational impact when working collectively with other educational partners than when standalone institutions (p.245). Furthermore, these partnerships are increasingly being leveraged by museums as a means to diversify their audiences and to influence educational practices more systematically across communities (Falk & Dierking, 2016, p.167). In addition to these institutional gains, educational collaborations provide museum professionals with valuable feedback that enables them to evaluate and refine their pedagogical approaches. By observing students' responses and engaging with teachers, museum educators can adapt their interpretative strategies to optimise the learning experience. Moreover, the introduction of fresh perspectives from school participants

prompts reflection on the museum's own practices and assumptions, fostering innovation and growth in its educational mission. Importantly, addressing diverse communities through such partnerships does not only benefit the institution but contributes positively to society at large. Involving all members of a community in cultural life can enhance both human and cultural capital, reinforcing the social function of the museum and its potential to promote inclusive cultural participation (Gigerl et al., 2022, p.4). In this sense, school-museum collaborations serve not only educational aims but also contribute to institutional relevance, inclusivity, and responsiveness to the needs of diverse publics.

From the perspective of teachers, collaboration with museums offers valuable opportunities for both professional development and pedagogical enrichment. In the museum setting, teachers can explore innovative or interdisciplinary approaches, including themes they might feel less confident addressing in traditional classroom contexts and that. Museum education, therefore, can empower teachers by offering new insights, methodologies, and tools to diversify and enrich their teaching practice. Moreover, the museum context enables teachers to observe their students in a different light. Being outside the familiar classroom setting allows for a deeper understanding of student dynamics—how pupils interact with one another, with the environment, and with the museum educators. This shift of context can reveal aspects of student behaviour that remain hidden during conventional lessons. Teachers may, for instance, notice quieter students becoming more engaged, asking questions, or participating actively in ways they typically do not within the classroom. Such observations can inform more inclusive and differentiated teaching strategies upon returning to school. Additionally, by interacting with museum educators, teachers can acquire new ways of stimulating curiosity and participation, further enhancing their ability to reach students who may otherwise remain disengaged.

3.5 Critical Success Factors

3.5.1 Shared Objectives, Communication, and Professional Growth

Before exploring which are the factors of a successful school-museum collaboration, it is necessary to reflect on what is meant by "success" in the context of school visits to museums.

In contemporary educational discourse, the concept of success extends beyond the mere acquisition of new knowledge. As Falchetti (2013) explains, it also encompasses less tangible outcomes such as changes in attitudes, the stimulation of curiosity, and the development of personal interests—all of which represent meaningful and positive results of the educational experience. Falk and Dierking (2016) emphasise that the success of a museum visit lies in its ability to engage the visitor in a direct and profound way, enabling the construction of personal meaning and the attribution of subjective significance to the experience (p. 283).

However, when considering collaborative effort between schools and museums, the notion of success must also include the quality and alignment of the partnership itself. Museum educators and teachers may each approach the collaboration with their own professional goals and expectations. Yet, they should all ultimately pursue a shared endeavour: to create meaningful educational experiences that engage students and foster their interest and growth. In this context, a key factor for success is the establishment of a common vision and mutually agreed-upon goals among the different stakeholders. Successful school-museum collaborations rely on a dialectical relationship between individual and collective goals. When the objectives of stakeholders are not aligned, disconnections may arise. In this context, coordination, communication, and mutual understanding are essential to ensure that all actors can work effectively toward shared educational goals (Gupta et al., 2010, p. 687).

Further insight into the complexity of aligning objectives within school–museum partnerships is provided by Karnezou et al. (2021), who empirically examined teachers' beliefs about planning museum visits. Their study, which surveyed both pre-service and in-service teachers, revealed that these beliefs are structured around three interrelated dimensions: cognitive (curricular learning), affective (emotional engagement), and attitudinal (perception of the museum's cultural role). While these dimensions form a coherent framework, the emphasis placed on each varies: pre-service teachers tend to prioritise cognitive outcomes, whereas in-service teachers often focus more on attitudinal aspects, frequently at the expense of structured educational planning (Karnezou et al., 2021, p. 2). This misalignment contributes to challenges such as insufficient curricular integration or unclear teacher roles during visits. Understanding how such belief systems operate is crucial for enhancing collaboration: it suggests that for objectives to be truly shared and effective communication

to take place, training programmes must support a balanced, integrated perspective on museum education. As Palacios and de Atalaya (2025) further argue, including targeted strategies in initial teacher education can encourage the use of museum visits as pedagogical tools and strengthen school–museum cooperation.

In line with this perspective, DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) emphasise the importance of the active and prepared role of teachers in ensuring the success of school visits. Teachers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the museum in advance, guide students through contextual and learning objectives, and plan structured activities before, during, and after the visit to ensure effective curricular integration. They also highlight the importance of leaving space for independent exploration, thereby enhancing the uniqueness of the museum experience (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008, p.187). These actions not only support student engagement but also promote better alignment with the museums' educational intentions. A practical application of these principles is found in Griffin's (2004) SMILES model (School–Museum Integrated Learning Experiences in Science), which involves students in planning, allows for semi-autonomous exploration in small groups, and situates the museum visit within a clear learning framework. This model demonstrates how shared planning and goal-setting can foster student motivation and deepen learning outcomes (pp. 65–66). However, as DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) note, the implementation of such approaches can be challenging due to the significant time commitment, the flexibility required in school scheduling, and the need for specific teacher training—resources that may not always be accessible (pp. 189–190).

These examples highlight that successful collaboration is not simply a matter of goodwill, but rather the result of intentional planning, mutual awareness, and shared responsibility. Supporting teachers—through training, tools, and time allocation—is therefore a fundamental condition for aligning educational goals and sustaining effective communication between schools and museums.

At the same time, the professional growth of museum educators plays an equally vital role in strengthening collaborative practices. From this perspective, Communities of Practice (CoP) offer a valuable social and professional space in which museum staff can engage in critical reflection, exchange experiences with peers, and experiment with new pedagogical

approaches. As Jakobsson & Davidsson (2012) point out, participating in a CoP enables educators not only to develop new competencies but also to progressively reshape their professional identity in connection with broader institutional transformation (pp. 17–18). In this view, individual development contributes directly to the evolution of the museum as an educational environment.

Another essential resource for reflection and alignment is the body of research and case studies focused on school–museum interactions. Such studies provide external perspectives that help museum educators better understand aspects of the educational experience that may be overlooked during the visit itself—for example, the ways in which students process the experience afterwards, or how teachers perceive the educational value of the intervention. By critically engaging with this type of research, museum professionals can improve their awareness of the complexities of collaboration and refine their strategies to better align with the needs and expectations of school partners.

In sum, fostering a culture of collaborative reflection and mutual professional development—both for teachers and museum educators—emerges as a key factor for success. It reinforces shared understanding, supports the alignment of goals, and ultimately enhances the educational impact of school–museum partnerships

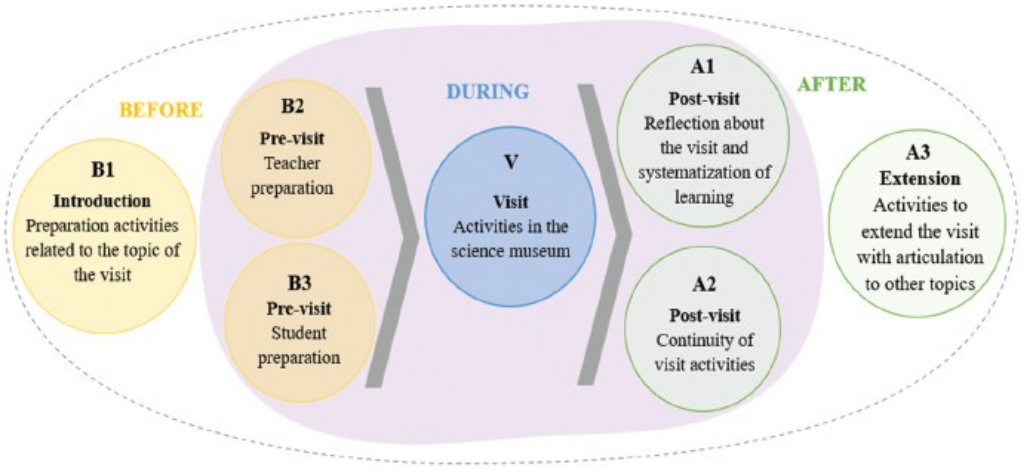
3.5.2 Structured Planning and Pedagogical Models for Effective School Visits

While shared objective and professional alignment are crucial for building strong school-museum partnerships, they must be supported by intentional and well-structured educational planning. In recent decades, several pedagogical models have been proposed to guide the design of school visits to museums in a way that enhances both learning and engagement. These models not only help integrate formal and informal learning environments but also provide practical tools and theoretical frameworks that teachers and museum educators can adopt to maximise the educational impact of these experiences. The following section presents a comparative overview of three influential models—SMILES, the Framework for Museum Practice (FMP), and the School Visits Articulated Framework (SVAF)—and outlines how each addresses the planning, execution, and follow-up phases of a school museum visit.

As previously discussed, the SMILES model, developed by Griffin (2004), promotes an integration between school-based and museum-based learning by involving students in the planning of the visit and proposing activities that enhance the informal dimension of the museum experience. However, according to DeWitt and Osborne (2007), this approach primarily focuses on the practices of teachers without systematically addressing how museums can support them beyond professional development, which is not always feasible (p. 687). To address this gap, the authors developed the Framework for Museum Practice (FMP), inspired by Cultural Historical Theory (CHAT), intrinsic motivation theories, and conceptual learning theories. The FMP aims to enhance the educational opportunities of school visits, maximizing their impact both conceptually and affectively. This framework provides a more solid theoretical foundation, with a stronger focus on the needs, objectives, and perspectives of teachers, ultimately aiming to develop a pedagogical theory for informal contexts (pp. 687-689). Souza, Bonifácio, and Rodrigues (2023) recognise the significant contribution of models like SMILES and FMP in bridging formal and informal learning, emphasizing how these approaches aim to promote a more conscious and effective use of museums and other informal educational contexts by teachers. These models, in fact, offer both theoretical and practical tools to integrate museum experiences into school curricula. However, the authors highlight that neither SMILES nor FMP explicitly divides the school visit into pre-, during, and post-visit phases (Souza et al., 2023, p. 331). Souza et al. (2023) point out that many of the guidelines regarding what to do before, during, and after a school visit to a museum are primarily derived from studies conducted within the museum field, and do not always reflect the perspectives and real needs of teachers. They also highlight a lack of specific research on the teaching practices adopted by educators in relation to school visits, often because these visits are organised independently or because the research methods used do not allow for a precise reconstruction of activities before and after the visit (Souza et al., 2023, p. 332). To address this need, Souza et al. (2023) propose the School Visits Articulated Framework (SVAF), a model (Figure 2) designed to identify, classify, and describe the practices adopted by teachers in the context of school visits. The authors clarify that the SVAF is not an entirely new model but rather a systematic reorganization of the guidelines already present in the literature regarding best practices to be adopted during the preparatory, execution, and post-visit phases (p. 332).

In line with what Hohenstein and Moussouri (2018) have highlighted through various studies, structured and intentionally designed activities in each of these phases can promote deeper student engagement and stimulate reflection and active participation during the museum experience (p. 214). The reorganization proposed by Souza et al. (2023) aims to bring these guidelines closer to the operational reality of teachers. However, the SVAF stands apart from previous models by introducing two new phases: Introduction (B1) and Extension (A3), which will be explored further below (pp. 332-333). The following sections will address the various steps that make up the three phases of the SVAF.

Figure 2 - Original schema of the School Visits Articulated Framework (SVAF).



Note. Reprinted from *School Visits to Science Museums: A Framework for Analyzing Teacher Practices* (p. 338), by V. M. Souza, V. Bonifácio, & A. V. Rodrigues, 2023, *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 34(4), 329–351. © 2023 Taylor & Francis.

Pre-visit preparation, as previously highlighted by Griffin (2004), plays a crucial role in students' learning during museum visits. Griffin (2004) identifies three key aspects that influence the visit, all of which fall within the pre-visit phase: students' prior knowledge, classroom preparation to facilitate cognitive learning during the visit, and orientation towards the museum environment (p. 59). In alignment with these ideas, the *Before* phase of the School Visits Articulated Framework (SVAF), developed by Souza et al. (2023), focuses on preparing both teachers and students, aiming to build meaningful connections between the school context and the museum experience. This phase is structured into three distinct

steps. The first step, *Introduction* (B1), introduced for the first time by Souza et al. (2023), involves the teacher's decision to integrate the visit into the curriculum, gradually developing content related to the museum's theme, thus giving students a clear and coherent understanding of the experience: "the main purpose of this stage is to frame the school visit within the curriculum in a gradual and contextualized manner" (p. 334). This is followed by *Pre-visit: teacher preparation* (B2), in which the teacher defines learning objectives, plans activities, determines the duration, and organises the logistics (transportation, costs, materials), a stage that is essential for the successful outcome of the visit. Finally, the *Pre-visit: student preparation* (B3) focuses on preparing the students, sharing educational objectives, and familiarising them with the museum environment, aiming to reduce the novelty effect (Souza et al., 2023, p. 335).

The *During* phase (V) refers to the actual museum visit and encompasses all activities conducted during the experience, both those managed by the teacher and those led by museum educators. During this phase, the teacher's role is to monitor students' work while ensuring that the museum visit does not transform into a traditional classroom setting (Souza et al., 2023, pp. 335-336). Teachers must be careful not to conceive museum galleries as an extension of the school classroom, as highlighted by Arriaga (2013). During this phase, activities planned in the preparatory stage can be further developed, while those carried out during the visit may be consolidated upon returning to the classroom. A central aspect of this phase is the social interaction between the three main actors—teachers, students, and museum educators—along with time management and adherence to previously planned activities. Among the activities included in a museum visit are worksheets, which Kisiel (2003) defines as tools consisting of questions or tasks related to the museum experience, designed by either teachers or museum staff, with the aim of maintaining students' attention and promoting learning. In this context, worksheets serve as advance organisers, providing a support structure that facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge (Kisiel, 2003, p. 5). To be truly effective from an educational perspective, it is essential, as noted by DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008), that these tools encourage active inquiry and discovery, promote direct observation, focus on the exhibits rather than the labels, and foster dialogue among members of the audience (p. 187). Kisiel (2003) stresses the idea that worksheets should not be mere school quizzes, highlighting how overly rigid or guided structures, with

closed-ended questions, can hinder independent exploration, limit critical reflection, and reduce opportunities for meaningful interaction with the museum environment. As Griffin (2004) notes, both teachers and students recognise the value of worksheets during visits. In their absence, students themselves report that the experience would be reduced to simply looking around, which is perceived as relatively unimportant from a learning perspective (Griffin, 2004, p. 63).

The *After* phase consists of three steps that outline the practices to be implemented upon returning to school. Its primary aim is to consolidate the experience of the museum visit and to connect it with the learning pathway developed in earlier phases. The first step, *Reflection and Post-Visit Systematisation* (A1), involves a moment of discussion between teachers and students focusing on both the strengths and areas for improvement of the visit. During this stage, the learning outcomes are organised and analysed, and any misconceptions are addressed. The second step, *Post-Visit Continuity Activities* (A2), entails the development of tasks that link the museum experience to other topics or projects, thereby reinforcing and expanding upon the knowledge acquired. The third and final step, *Extension* (A3), was innovatively introduced by Souza et al. (2023) and contributes to the longitudinal character of the SVAF framework. This step seeks to extend learning beyond the museum visit by integrating museum-related content into the school curriculum throughout the academic year. In doing so, it supports the sustained relevance of the experience and encourages meaningful connections across disciplinary areas (Souza et al., 2023, pp. 336–337). DeWitt (2012) emphasises that although mediating tools such as dialogue and digital media may not prove effective during the museum visit itself, they play a critical role in the post-visit phase. For instance, when students are encouraged to re-describe their experience, they tend to reformulate and deepen their understanding. These descriptions, particularly when elicited immediately after the visit and still within the museum space, offer valuable insights into students' levels of comprehension. Such insights enable educators to provide targeted support to enhance learning. Moreover, DeWitt (2012) highlights research findings indicating the potential of digital media—such as images and videos—to rekindle students' interest in exhibit content. Recalling observed phenomena allows for the identification of elements within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), previously discussed in this study. This offers the opportunity to activate scaffolding

strategies and to leverage so-called “teachable moments” (DeWitt, 2012, p. 177), in which educators can effectively guide students toward higher levels of understanding. In this regard, digital media can prompt reflections that reveal clues about students’ current ZPD, thus paving the way for the intentional design of personalised educational interventions based on opportunities for scaffolding and optimal instructional timing (DeWitt, 2012, p. 188).

Within the framework of the three phases outlined above, it is essential to consider the role of structural guidance in shaping the quality of the educational experience. DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) argue that the degree of structure—namely, the extent to which the experience is guided or left to free exploration—has a significant impact on learning outcomes. This concept applies not only to the *During* phase but also encompasses activities carried out before and after the visit. While highly structured experiences can indeed support the acquisition of cognitive content, they may also undermine students' intrinsic motivation and foster less positive attitudes towards the activity itself. Therefore, it is not merely a matter of whether structure is present or absent, but rather how and to what extent it is implemented. An appropriately balanced structure—one that provides guidance across the three phases without being overly prescriptive—proves most effective in promoting both cognitive and affective outcomes (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008, p. 186).

3.6 Challenges and Limitations

3.6.1 Institutional and Logistical Barriers

Collaborations between schools and museums are shaped by a range of structural, logistical, and organisational factors that can significantly impact the quality and feasibility of educational initiatives. Kisiel (2014) identifies four key elements—capacity, authority, communication, and institutional complexity—as central to understanding the dynamics and challenges of these partnerships (p. 353). Capacity refers to the availability of material and organizational resources—such as staff, funding, space, and time—necessary to effectively plan and implement a visit. In many cases, this capacity is limited: the lack of funding for substitute teachers, insufficient chaperones, restricted museum space, or understaffed booking departments are all concrete barriers that can hinder the organization and

successful execution of such initiatives. Sometimes, it is thanks to particularly motivated teachers that, despite the challenges, capacity is created. In these cases, one can speak of *creative capacity*, where educators invest their own time and energy to ensure students can participate (Kisiel, 2014, pp. 353–354).

Authority refers to how roles and expertise are distributed and recognized within these partnerships. Museum professionals must respond both to the internal expectations of their institution and to the needs of teachers, who often wish to retain control over the educational experience. This dual accountability can lead to tensions, particularly when both parties seek to lead the activity. Even when educational goals are shared, difficulty negotiating leadership roles may compromise the collaboration and undermine the effectiveness of the learning experience (Kisiel, 2014, pp. 355–356).

Closely related to authority is the issue of communication, which is frequently reduced to logistical coordination (e.g. dates, transport, group size), rather than pedagogical planning. This reductionist approach to communication undermines the potential for meaningful collaboration and co-design. Practical difficulties, including mismatched institutional timetables, delayed correspondence, and the underutilisation of available educational resources, further exacerbate the problem. Despite the availability of printed or digital materials, word of mouth remains the most common way teachers learn about museum programmes, suggesting a lack of strategic outreach and bi-directional communication mechanism (Kisiel, 2014, pp. 357–358). This limited exchange contributes to a broader issue identified by Weiland and Akerson (2013): teachers often lack a clear understanding of their pedagogical role within the school-museum partnership. Uncertainty regarding how to engage effectively with museum educators or how to contribute meaningfully during the visit frequently results in passive involvement. This ambiguity not only hampers the integration of the museum experience into the school curriculum but may also foster mutual misunderstanding. In some cases, teachers may implicitly question the pedagogical competence of museum staff, while museum educators report frustration with the perceived lack of engagement from teachers—both of which limit the educational potential of the collaboration. To address these challenges, it is essential to promote more intentional and structured communication, grounded in mutual recognition of competencies, clearly defined roles, and the articulation of shared educational objectives.

Only through such dialogic collaboration can the full pedagogical value of school visits to museums be realised (Weiland & Akerson, 2013, pp. 1334–1336).

The broader institutional complexity of organising a school visit constitutes another significant barrier. Coordinating transportation, aligning schedules, securing funding, and managing the involvement of various stakeholders—teachers, museum educators, school administrators, parents—require a high degree of organisational effort. These actors often operate within distinct institutional cultures and communities of practice, with differing priorities and temporalities. As Kisiel (2014) notes, while such complexity may foster rich collaboration, it also increases the risk of fragmentation and inefficiency if not adequately managed (p. 359).

Time constraints also play a non-negligible role in limiting effective collaboration. As Karnezou et al. (2021) observe, many teachers, despite recognising the pedagogical potential of museum visits, struggle to engage in preparatory collaboration with museum staff due to curricular overload and institutional rigidity. This situation often results in a reliance on standardised procedures, such as classroom discipline management, and minimal pedagogical integration.

Another important consideration concerns the conceptual tension between the principles of free-choice learning and the structured nature of school visits. Free-choice learning—defined as learning driven by personal interest, intrinsic motivation, and autonomy—has traditionally been associated with informal educational settings such as museums. However, while this approach aligns well with individual or family visits, its total applicability to school groups presents notable challenges. Pupils attending a school-organised visit typically do not choose to participate, nor do they exercise control over the timing, content, or format of the experience, which is often embedded within a broader curricular framework determined by the school. As Falk and Dierking (2016) observe, although identity-related motivations may still play a role in these contexts, tapping into them requires deliberate pedagogical strategies that attend to students' individual interests and provide opportunities for autonomy and peer interaction (pp.153, 159). Such conditions are not always easily achieved within the temporal and structural constraints of a typical school trip. Similarly, Hohenstein and Moussouri's (2018) underscores that, although

students may encounter topics of interest during a museum visit, “the trip was not their idea” (p.67). This externally imposed nature of the experience may limit personal investment and engagement. To address this tension, scholars advocate for more participatory educational strategies that promote student agency within the visit. Encouraging pupils to formulate their own questions, engage in inquiry based tasks, and make meaningful choices during the experience can help align the museum visit more closely with the pedagogical ethos of free-choice learning, thereby fostering deeper engagement and more personalised learning outcomes (Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018).

In sum, institutional and logistical barriers—ranging from limited resources and unclear role definitions to communication gaps and structural mismatches—significantly constrain the potential of school–museum collaborations. Addressing these challenges requires not only operational adjustments, but also a cultural shift towards more intentional, coordinated, and pedagogically grounded partnerships.

3.6.2 Evaluation of Learning Outcomes

A further and often overlooked limitation in school–museum collaborations relate to the evaluation of educational impact. Assessing museum-based learning experiences poses distinct difficulties, particularly in identifying criteria and tools that can adequately capture their complexity when school groups are involved. As previously outlined, within the field of museum education, the concept of learning extends far beyond the acquisition of factual knowledge. It includes emotional engagement, the stimulation of curiosity, the development of personal interests, and the construction of individual meaning. Such a multidimensional understanding makes the task of evaluation especially demanding. This section aims to examine the concept of evaluation within museum education, focusing on the criteria and methodologies most appropriate for capturing the multifaceted nature of learning in this context.

The evaluation of learning in museums presents particular challenges, as traditional school-based assessment methods cannot be directly applied. As Ben Garcia (2012) points out, the adoption of school-oriented methods of both teaching and evaluation by museums may overlook a fundamental distinction: while schools often rely on extrinsic motivators such as grades and rewards to stimulate student learning, museums typically foster learning

through intrinsic motivations, such as curiosity and personal interest (p. 49). Consequently, relying exclusively on quantitative indicators that measure short-term outcomes fails to reflect the full complexity and long-term value of museum experiences. For this reason, a qualitative approach to evaluation is generally preferred, as advocated by various scholars (Falchetti, 2013; Falk & Dierking, 2016; Garcia, 2012; Griffin, 2004). Furthermore, as Falchetti (2013) argues, with the shift away from the traditional tripartite model of perception, cognition, and action—now understood as interconnected elements fundamental to learning—museum education has progressively embraced approaches that engage the sensory, emotional, and practical dimensions of experience. This is reflected in the *minds-on, hearts-on, hands-on* model. As a result, there is a clear need for evaluative techniques capable of capturing the impact of museum experiences across these multiple levels of individual engagement (Falchetti, 2013, p. 187).

With the aim of developing an approach to evaluating learning impact that extends beyond cognitive outcomes, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in the United Kingdom introduced the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs). These were tested in 15 cultural institutions, including museums, archives, and libraries. The GLOs were found to be flexible, easily comprehensible, and effective in describing various dimensions of the educational experience (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, p. 44). The five GLOs include: knowledge and understanding, which refers to the acquisition of information and the ability to assign deeper meaning to it; skills, encompassing intellectual, social, emotional, and physical abilities developed through direct engagement; enjoyment and creativity, which relates to the pleasure and creative stimulation derived from cultural experiences; activity, behaviour, and progression, concerning the actions taken by visitors following the experience; and attitudes and values, which involves the evolution of opinions, perceptions of others, and core life principles (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, pp. 53–57). Despite the challenges encountered in implementing the GLO-based evaluation approach—such as time constraints and difficulties in categorising evidence—Hooper-Greenhill (2007) acknowledges its positive contributions. Among these are the establishment of a shared language for discussing learning outcomes and the promotion of a culture of evaluation within cultural institutions (pp. 58–59).

In discussions about learning assessment in museum contexts, Pekarik (2010) critiques the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) approach, highlighting that it is fundamentally outcome-based. While acknowledging that such a model may prove useful in certain situations, Pekarik (2010) argues that it is not universally applicable. Specifically, he highlights that the measurements derived from this framework can be overly rigid, failing to capture the full range of effects that a museum experience may have on its visitors (p. 107). This form of evaluation risks oversimplifying the visitor experience, reducing the complexity and richness of the individual reactions and learning processes that may be elicited. Similarly, Alderoqui and Pedersoli (2012) discuss the limitations of applying rigid tools and taxonomies in the evaluation of learning within museums, particularly in relation to school visits. The authors point out that learning processes in museums tend to be more individualised and less structured than those found in formal educational settings, making it problematic to impose predetermined learning objectives (p. 180). In response to these concerns, Pekarik (2010) proposes an alternative model of assessment known as *participant-oriented evaluation*. This approach moves away from goal-based models and instead emphasises the active involvement of visitors in the design and ongoing modification of exhibitions. As noted by Pekarik (2013), effective evaluation emerges when visitors are directly engaged in the programming and continuous reconfiguration of museum displays, allowing these to reflect the public's evolving needs and interpretations (p. 155). Unlike traditional evaluation, *participant-oriented evaluation* does not merely address the question of "what happened" during a museum visit but also seeks to understand *why* certain phenomena occur. This approach offers a deeper insight into how visitors think and act, providing exhibition designers with a more nuanced mental model for both the creation and revision of displays (Pekarik, 2010, p. 111).

In line with these reflections, Alderoqui and Pedersoli (2012) conceptualise evaluation as a form of investigation—a process aimed at collecting information to analyse, revise, and improve the museum's educational and communicative practices. Evaluation, therefore, should be understood as a collaborative process that involves both museum professionals and participants. This inclusive approach ensures that museum offerings and actions can be continuously refined based on the experiences and feedback of those actively engaged in its activities. In this way, evaluation not only enhances educational practices but

also fosters a deeper connection with the public, transforming the museum into a dynamic and constantly evolving space (p. 182).

These considerations suggest that evaluating learning in museum contexts—particularly with school groups—requires moving beyond standardised, outcome-driven modes. Embracing qualitative, participatory, and reflective approaches allows institutions to better capture the richness of informal learning and to continuously adapt their practices in response to visitors' evolving needs.

3.7 Addressing Key Challenges in Museum–School Collaborations: Insights from Inspirational Cases

In the preceding chapter, the complexities and challenges inherent in fostering effective museum–school collaborations were outlined, particularly regarding the alignment of visions, communication dynamics, and pedagogical roles. The inspirational cases analysed in the following chapter provide tangible examples of how these challenges can be successfully addressed in practice. The critical issue of establishing a common vision and mutually agreed-upon goals among stakeholders, as emphasised by Gupta et al. (2010), is exemplified by Ponce-Delgado, Pocevičienė and Rubira-García's (2024) collaboration case, where a sustained, participatory planning phase includes formal recognition by the school institution, ensuring the project's relevance and tackling outcome evaluation through reflective documentation practices that prioritise students' evolving ideas over fixed results (Garcia, 2012). Similarly, the Reggio Emilia approach, discussed by Feliu-Torruella, Fernández-Santín, and Atenas (2021), highlights the importance of intentional, dialogic communication infrastructures that prevent tensions over authority between museum educators and teachers, avoiding the reduction of communication to mere logistical coordination—a concern raised by Kisiel (2014)—and addressing issues of teacher understanding of their pedagogical role, as noted by Weiland and Akerson (2013). The necessity of thorough teacher preparation, advocated by DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008), is also realised in this context, with extensive teacher training integral to Pocevičienė and Rubira-García's project. Additionally, the value of broad educational partnerships, championed by Falk and Dierking (2016), is evident in Garner et al.'s (2025) environmental stewardship collaboration, which involves scientific experts and community groups to enhance programme relevance and

sustainability. Conversely, Fazzi's studies (2020, 2023) provoke critical reflection on the risk of utilising museums simply as venues for curricular performance, underscoring the need to exploit the museum's unique potential as an educational space. Together, these cases concretely demonstrate how some of the theoretical challenges identified earlier are addressed in practice, while additional specific issues and the distinctive characteristics of these collaborations will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the complex landscape of school-museum collaborations, highlighting both their institutional potential and the structural, pedagogical, and institutional challenges they entail. Drawing on a range of scholarly contributions, it has considered how different forms of collaboration take shape, the factors that affect their educational value, and the benefits they can yield for teachers and museums alike. Particular attention was paid to the importance of shared objectives, dialogic communication, and the need for structured planning grounded in pedagogical coherence. These elements emerged as crucial at fostering partnerships capable of moving beyond transactional encounters and towards genuinely co-constructed educational experiences.

At the same time, the chapter has identified key limitations that often hinder meaningful collaborations. Tensions between free-choice learning and the structured nature of school visits further complicate the design of student-centred experiences. Moreover, the evaluation of learning outcomes remains a persistent challenge, with dominant assessment models often failing to account for the complex, multidimensional nature of informal learning in museums. In response, the chapter has advocated for participatory and qualitative approaches that foreground the perspectives of both educators and learners, and that position evaluation as a process of inquiry, reflection, and continuous improvement.

In summary, the examination of school–museum collaborations underscores both their transformative potential and the intricacies involved in their implementation. The diversity of models, benefits, and critical factors outlined here offers a valuable conceptual foundation for interpreting how these partnerships operate in practice.

These insights will inform the methodological orientation and analytical lens adopted in the next chapter, which presents a selection of museum-school collaborations that have served as inspirational cases. These examples reflect the principles and tensions discussed

thus far and have inspired the development of a practical toolkit intended to support practitioners in fostering sustainable and critically engaged educational partnerships.

4. Inspirational Case Studies

This chapter brings together a series of case studies that have served as key sources of inspiration in the development of the toolkit *How to Develop a Connection Between Schools and Museums through the Power of Words*, later discussed in this dissertation. Each case offers a compelling vision of how cross-institutional partnerships can foster inclusive, reflective, and transformative learning experiences. What unites these diverse initiatives is a commitment to seeing young people not as passive recipients of knowledge, but as active participants in shaping their own learning. Whether through environmental stewardship, multilingual engagement, or creative exploration, these cases illustrate how collaboration across institutional boundaries can open up new possibilities for dialogue, agency, and connection. To facilitate a coherent and comparative reading, the analysis of each case is structured around three interrelated dimensions: the collaboration model, which examines how the partnership was conceived and implemented; the impacts and outcomes; which consider its educational and institutional effects; and the inspiring aspects, which highlight practices that offer insight or potential for adaptation in other contexts. The chapter concludes with a set of reflections that synthesise key insights across the examples. These final considerations aim to identify recurring patterns, highlight structural tensions, and offer a critical lean through which to understand the broader potential—and challenges—of meaningful collaboration between schools and museums.

4.1 Reggio Emilia Model for Dialogic and Creative Museum–School Collaboration

This section draws on the work of Maria Feliu-Torruella, Mercè Fernández-Santín, and Javiera Atenas, whose article “Building Relationships between Museums and Schools: Reggio Emilia as a Bridge to Educate Children about Heritage” (2021) offers a compelling account of how the Reggio Emilia approach can serve as a foundation for sustained and meaningful collaboration between educational and cultural institutions. Their research is based on a triangulated analysis that combines a review of relevant literature, an examination of museum education programmes inspired by the Reggio Emilia (RE) model, and interviews with fourteen internationally recognised experts in early childhood education and Reggio

Emilia pedagogy. The authors aimed to identify and recommend a set of good practices capable of fostering long-term, value-based collaborations between schools and museums, both in physical and digital spaces.

The city of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy is internationally recognised for its innovative pedagogical philosophy, known as the Reggio Emilia (RE) model. Originally developed for early childhood education, this model has had a profound impact not only on schools but also on museums and cultural institutions worldwide. At the heart of the RE philosophy is the idea of the school as a living organism, a space where knowledge is co-constructed through experimentation, dialogue, and respect for the expressive and interpretive capacities of each learner.

In recent years, the RE model has been increasingly adopted as a framework for reimagining the relationships between schools and museums, particularly in contexts seeking to integrate arts and heritage into participatory and democratic learning experiences. The model's core principles—creativity, observation, collaboration, and critical engagement with the environment— align closely with the educational missions of museums and provide a solid foundation for cross-institutional partnerships.

4.1.1 Collaboration Model

What distinguishes the Reggio Emilia case is not merely the shared vision between schools and museums, but the intentional, dialogic infrastructures that sustains this collaboration. Institutions are not only partners but co-constructors of learning environments. RE schools, in fact, often share more in common with museums than with conventional schools: they both understand learning spaces as informative environments—not passive containers, but active agents that communicate values, aesthetics, and possibilities.

In this context, collaboration is grounded in dialogue—not only among professionals, but crucially between children and their environments. Educational projects are the result of co-design processes involving teachers, museum educators, and children, and unfold in a dynamic rather than predetermined manner. These processes evolve through continuous cycles of observation, reflection, and documentation. Central to the Reggio Emilia approach, documentation serves to make learning visible, to interpret children's thinking, and to adapt

pedagogical strategies in an ongoing, responsive way. Learning pathways are thus shaped by visible thinking processes, with the arts and heritage functioning as mediums for non-verbal expression and critical engagement.

From a methodological perspective, the study reveals how certain museums have integrated the RE approach in their educational programming by adopting its core principles—emphasis on process over product, responsiveness to children's ideas, and the use of materials and spaces to provoke inquiry. In addition, the research highlights the importance of recruiting and involving experts in the RE approach to facilitate knowledge transfer and fidelity to the model's core values.

4.1.2 Impacts and Outcomes

The impacts of this systematic and relational model of collaboration are evident on multiple levels:

- For students, the approach fosters a form of creative and critical agency. Arts and heritage are not merely objects of study but are understood as languages—diverse modes of expression through which meaning is constructed. Arts and heritage are not treated as subjects to be studied, but as languages to be spoken, through which learners construct meaning and connect with others.
- For educators, both in schools and museums, the collaboration creates opportunities for professional growth and shared experimentation, reflection, and pedagogical dialogue. Teaching becomes a reciprocal practice, where museum educators and schoolteachers work together not to deliver content, but to shape environments for inquiry.
- On an institutional level, the case illustrates how a culture of collaboration can be nurtured through intentional design, ongoing dialogue, and a shared investment in educational and social transformation. It also demonstrates how partnerships can be prepared, rather than improvised, based on the alignment of values, consistent communication strategies, and co-designed pedagogical goals. Museums are encouraged to maintain updated digital platforms, newsletters, and open channels of communication with schools to sustain and expand collaboration.

Furthermore, the research emphasises the importance of political support at the local level, highlighting that sustainable school-museum partnerships often depend on territorial governance structures that value education as a civic and cultural project.

4.1.3 Innovative and Inspiring Aspects

Several features of this case stand out as particularly innovative and relevant for broader application:

- Multiplicity of expression: in the RE approach defines “language” as the many ways in which humans express themselves—not just verbally, but through gesture, drawing, movement, and spatial arrangements. Museums, with their rich visual and material resources, become ideal spaces for exploring these “hundred languages”;
- Creativity and autonomy: Citing international literature, the study affirms that students—especially children—tend to be more creative when alone and outside formal school settings. The role of the museum, then, is not to replicate school-based structures but to invite exploration, foster autonomy, and create space for wonder. In the RE philosophy, museums are not sites of passive consumption, but environments of possibility.
- Expanding democratic participation: The RE model reframes school-museum collaboration as a means of expanding democratic participation in cultural life. It supports the development of critical thinking, not through content transmission, but through dialogic problem-solving, expression, and relationship-building. In this way, the model reinforces the museum’s role as a civic institution, deeply embedded in the cultural and political fabric of the locality.
- Strategic and infrastructural considerations: Effective collaborations are also built on clear institutional strategies. Museums are advised to cultivate active outreach policies, ensure accessible online educational content, and build relationships with schools not only through one-off visits, but through ongoing, co-designed projects that reflect shared educational objectives.

In conclusion, the Reggio Emilia model provides a compelling vision of school-museum collaboration as a civic practice that connects children, educators, and institutions in the shared pursuit of meaningful, creative, and critical reflection. Its strength lies in its systematic approach: valuing dialogue, recognising the environment as a pedagogical agent, and respecting children as full participants in their own learning journey.

4.2 Environmental Stewardship – A Transformative Model of School-Museum Partnership

This section draws on the study conducted by Joanna K. Garner, Mel Kuhn, Andrea M. Rocchio, and Grace Friedenreich, published in the article "Learning and Belonging in a Museum-School Environmental Stewardship Partnership" (2025). The research focuses on "The Mariners' Environmental Initiative", a collaborative programme developed in Virginia (United States), involving The Mariners' Museum and park, an urban public high school system, and a network of environmental scientists. The partnership was structured around a shared goal: to engage students in the restoration of the lake ecosystem within the museum's grounds. By positioning learners as stewards of their local environment, the project integrated scientific literacy with civic action and personal development. Drawing on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys and student reflections, the authors aimed to explore how participation in a stewardship initiative could foster knowledge acquisition alongside a sense of responsibility and belonging.

The programme was designed to address two interlinked challenges: the need to improve environmental conditions, and the need to involve youth—particularly those from marginalised urban areas—in meaningful, identity-relevant learning experiences. Many participants came from contexts where contact with the natural world was limited. For these students, the project provided not only access to new knowledge but also a space to reconsider their relationship with the environment, their community, and themselves.

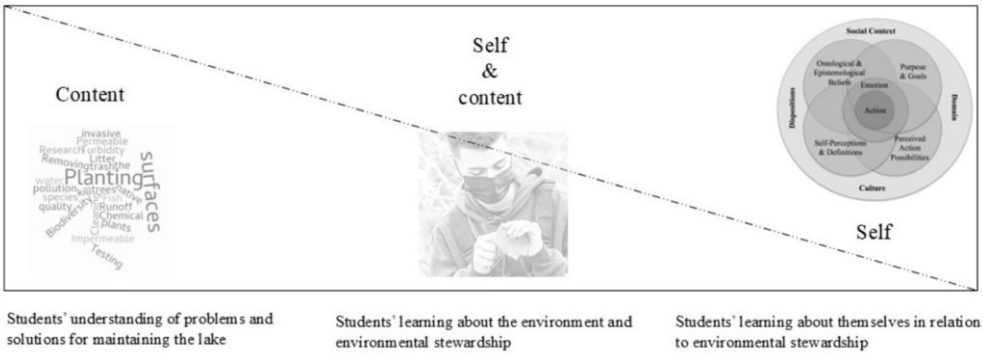
4.2.1 Collaboration Model

This initiative is characterised by its intentional design and attention to context, resulting in a collaboration that extends beyond institutional boundaries. Rather than relying on isolated

educational interventions, the partnerships took the form of a multi-phase stewardship programme, carefully aligned with the school curricula and ecological priorities. Students engaged in preparatory lessons, on-site investigation, and follow-up classroom activities, all contributing to a deeper understanding of local water quality issues.

A central pedagogical element was the VINES framework (Figure 3), which conceptualises learning along a continuum from disciplinary content to personal insight. Within this structure, environmental science functioned as both subject matter and catalyst: students did not simply acquire concepts but used them as tools to integrate their own beliefs, motivations, and capacities to contribute. The programme encouraged alignment between students' self-image, aspirations, and perceived ability to take action.

Figure 3 - A modified Visitor Identification in STEM (VINES) framework that reference objectives associated with the mariners' Environmental Initiative.



Note. Reprinted from *Learning and Belonging in a Museum-School Environmental Stewardship Partnership*, by J. K. Garner, M. Kuhn, A. M. Rocchio, & G. Friedenreich, 2025, *Journal of STEM Outreach*, 8(1), n1.
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The co-design process involved not only educators and museum staff, but also environmental professionals and community stakeholders. This collaborative network enabled the learning experience to remain sensitive to the social realities of its participants while fostering commitment to a shared ecological objective. Teachers received support to integrate stewardship themes into their instruction, while museum educators acted as facilitators of place-based and inquiry-driven exploration.

4.2.2. Impact and Outcomes

The effects of the project manifested across multiple dimensions:

- For students, the experience expanded both their scientific understanding and their perception of agency. Post-programme evaluations showed increased knowledge of aquatic systems and a stronger sense of confidence in their ability to act responsibly toward the environment. Students reported seeing their surroundings—and their role within them—through a new lens, often articulating a desire to continue engaging in environmental work or advocacy. This reorientation of perspective, particularly among urban youth with limited access to green spaces, points to the significance of combining environmental education with identity development.
- For school educators, the programme created opportunities to integrate experiential learning into science teaching, supported by collaborative planning with museum professionals. The interdisciplinary nature of the project encouraged reflection on teaching practices and fostered stronger connections between classroom and community-based learning.
- At the institutional level, this case study demonstrated the potential of school-museum partnerships to serve broader social and ecological purposes. Beyond improving local environmental conditions, the project contributed to the formation of more informed, engaged, and empowered learners. Its success was underpinned by consistent communication, shared goals, and the involvements of external partners such as environmental advocacy groups and local natural resource organisations.

4.2.3 Innovative and Inspiring Aspects

This case highlights several elements that offer valuable insights for the design of inclusive and context-responsive educational practices:

- Stewardship as a vehicle for civic responsibility: The project did not limit itself to the transmission of knowledge. Instead, it invited learners to take part in real-world ecological care, thus transforming passive understanding into active involvement. Students were not only encouraged to protect their environment but were supported in recognising their potential role as contributors to collective wellbeing.
- Place-based and identity-informed learning: By situating learning within a real environmental context, the programme enabled students to connect scientific

exploration with personal relevance. Particularly for youth in densely populated, under-resourced urban areas, access to natural spaces is often restricted, and opportunities for experiential engagement with environmental issues are limited. The programme responded directly to this gap, recognising a structural inequality in educational access and seeking to address it. In doing so, it positioned the museum-school partnership as a strategy to repair community-level disparities by offering transforming opportunities to those who might otherwise be excluded from such experiences. Crucially, it also created the conditions for students to develop a sensitivity to environmental concerns—an awareness that might not have emerged within their everyday realities. By engaging directly with ecological problems, learners were able to internalise the relevance of these issues and begin to see themselves as capable of caring for and contributing to the well-being of their environment.

- Application of the VINES model: The framework offered a nuanced way to understand learning as a dynamic interplay between knowledge and identity. The most meaningful learning moments were those in which students used disciplinary content to interpret their experience and reshape their view of themselves as contributors to environmental health.
- Sustained, multi-actor collaboration: The involvement of a diverse network—schools, museums, scientific experts, and environmental groups—ensured the programme's relevance and sustainability. This collaborative infrastructure allowed the project to adapt to the needs of its participants while maintaining a focus on tangible outcomes.

In conclusion, this case exemplifies how school-museum partnerships can serve as a platform for both ecological restoration and educational transformation. Through a combination of place-based learning, stewardship, and identity exploration, students were encouraged to see themselves not only as learners, but as citizens—capable of engaging with and caring for the world around them.

4.3 Extending CLIL Beyond the Classroom: Museums as Sites of Multimodal and Intercultural Language Learning

This section draws on the research and applied reflections of the italian Fabiana Fazzi, developed across two key studies: “CLIL dalla scuola al museo: potenzialità, criticità e implicazioni glottodidattiche” (2020) and “Musei come luoghi ideali per l'apprendimento integrato di contenuti e lingua fuori dalla classe “(2023). In the former, Fazzi outlines a glottodidactic framework for extending CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) into museum contexts, exploring both the pedagogical opportunities and the practical challenges of doing so. The latter study builds on this foundation by introducing the MILE (Museums and Innovation in Language Education) research group, established in 2020 under the direction of Professor Coonan within the LaDiLS Laboratory at the Centre for Research on Language Teaching (CRDL), Ca’ Foscari University of Venice. The group’s objective is to foster long-term, sustainable partnerships between schools and cultural institutions, while actively contributing to international discourse on the intersection between museum education and educational linguistics.

In recent years, CLIL has gained prominence within European educational policies aimed at fostering plurilingualism and pedagogical innovation. In response to these developments, an increasing number of Italian museums have begun to incorporate CLIL-oriented activities into their educational programmes, often to align with school curricula and meet the expectations of teaching staff. Unlike classroom-based CLIL, museum-based approaches allow students to engage with forms of discourse and literacy more closely aligned with their everyday communicative environments—among peers, at home, or within professional domains. The museum’s distinctive ability to support authentic, multimodal interaction makes this kind of learning particularly accessible and meaningful (Fazzi, 2020, pp.627-628).

At its core, CLIL involves the simultaneous and reciprocal learning of disciplinary content and a foreign language. What distinguishes this methodology from other forms of content-based instruction is its deliberate intertwining of linguistic and subject-matter objectives: language is learned through content, and content through language (Fazzi, 2020, p. 269). From this perspective, museums are not merely auxiliary venues for curricular implementation but are conceived as semiotically rich environments that enhance learners’

ability to construct meaning, critically reflect on language, and navigate content across disciplinary and cultural boundaries.

In what follows, particular attention will be given to Fazzi's 2020 study, which offers valuable insights into how school-museum collaboration can be integrated through the integration of CLIL methodologies into museum education practices.

4.3.1 Collaboration Model

The collaboration between schools and museums described in Fazzi's (2020) works originates from the initiative of schoolteachers who aim to integrate a CLIL pathway into their curriculum by incorporating museum-based activities. The focus is on showing how CLIL-based experiences can be effectively embedded into interdisciplinary, cross-institutional pathways that bridge classroom teaching and cultural learning. This initiative starts with schoolteachers who seek to enrich their curriculum by integrating a CLIL pathway that includes museum-based activities.

Crucially, designing such a pathway requires teachers to make careful decisions about the museum setting, the themes to be explored, and the objects to be selected. These choices must be aligned with students' profile, curricular content, and the specific disciplinary, linguistic, and transversal objectives of the unit being taught. Embedding the museum visit within a broader, structured school curriculum is essential to fully capitalise on its potential for CLIL-based learning. Thematic approaches—whether tied to the language curriculum, to subject content, or to interdisciplinary and transcultural dimensions—support students in making meaningful connections and developing conceptual frameworks that facilitate understandings. A key factor for the success of this collaboration is the synergy between foreign language teachers and subject specialists—such as art history teachers—who must work together to build bridges between their respective disciplines both before and during the CLIL experience. Moreover, for the CLIL approach to generate lasting educational benefits, the school-museum collaboration must be as durable and sequential as possible. Rather than being conceived as isolated experiences, museum visits should be integrated into a longer-term pedagogical trajectory that allows for continuity, progressive language acquisition, and deeper engagement with content.

In the Italian context, when such collaboration takes place in high schools, it is often implemented within the framework of *alternanza scuola-lavoro* (school-work alternation),

an educational model introduced by Law 107/2015. This initiative promotes learning through practical experiences and is designed to consolidate students' academic knowledge, support their personal development, and guide their educational and professional choices through context-relevant projects (Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito, n.d.). In language-focused high schools, for example, CLIL-based collaborations with museums may be integrated into *alternanza scuola-lavoro* programs where students spend a period actively involved in museum activities. A typical scenario involves students acting as museum guides, adapting presentations of artworks or objects into the foreign languages they study at school, tailoring their discourse to different visitor profiles. These immersive tasks offer authentic communicative contexts and allow students to apply both disciplinary and linguistic skills in real-world situations.

The collaboration generally unfolds through a tripartite structure: preparatory activities in the classroom, experiential learning in the museum, and reflective consolidation back at school. Within this sequence, the CLIL approach enhances the educational potential of the museum visit by enabling students to develop both language skills and subject knowledge in a foreign language, through contact with authentic cultural content and multimodal stimuli.

4.3.2 Impacts and Outcomes

The impacts of this model are evident on several levels:

- For students, cognitively, the use of tangible and multisensory stimuli (such as objects and exhibitions) allows for deeper conceptual understanding, even among students with lower language proficiency. Linguistically, the embodied and context-rich nature of museum-based learning enhances vocabulary retention and encourages spontaneous, meaningful communication. Emotionally and socially, museum settings foster a supportive environment where students feel safe to experiment with language, thus lowering the affective filter and increasing motivation. Culturally, the opportunity to engage with diverse narratives and artefacts helps learners challenge biases and develop intercultural empathy.
- For educators, the model promotes cross-disciplinary collaboration and shared pedagogical ownership. Teachers and museum professionals co-design the

experience, aligning learning goals and methodologies. This synergy is essential for achieving the integrative and dialogic potential of CLIL.

- Institutionally, the collaboration demonstrates how museums can act as active partners in educational innovation, rather than merely offering one-off visits. The model encourages museums to reflect critically on their own communicative practices and to co-create inclusive, multilingual narratives with schools.

4.3.3 Innovative and Inspiring Aspects

Several aspects of the school-museum collaboration that adopts the CLIL didactic present innovative and inspiring elements:

- Language as cultural practice: The collaboration supports the idea that language is not neutral but a carrier of identity, ideology, and memory. By engaging with museum texts and narratives, students learn to recognise and question the power of language in constructing meaning. The museum, with its rich semiotic environment, constitutes an ideal setting for the construction of new meanings, the expansion of linguistic repertoires, and fostering a critical awareness of language use. It provides learners with meaningful opportunities to reflect on the significance of language and the weight carried by the words they use, promoting a heightened sense of responsibility and intentionally in linguistic expression as socially and culturally situated practice.
- Revealing of invisible literacy: The museum enables access to forms of literacy that remain invisible within the school setting, as they are embedded in wider social, cultural, and disciplinary practices. This environment encourages students to engage with authentic discourses, genres, and communication modes, fostering an understanding of language as socially situated and ideologically charged.
- Strategic use of multisensory environments for linguistic meaning-making: The museum provides an immersive, multisensory space in which language learning is anchored in embodied experiences. Students see, touch, move, and perceive artefacts in ways that activate memory and cognition, thus rendering foreign language vocabulary more memorable and affectively charged.

- Authentic communication that shifts from form to intention: Unlike the classroom, where linguistic form often dominates, the museum foregrounds communicative intention and content. Students are encouraged to mobilise their full linguistic resources to construct meaning, prioritising expression over accuracy.

The integration of the CLIL approach within school–museum collaborations represents a pedagogically rich and contextually meaningful way to extend language learning beyond the confines of the classroom. By leveraging the museum's semiotic abundance, its potential for multisensory engagement, and its capacity to foster authentic, content-driven communication, such initiatives promote not only linguistic competence but also critical, cultural, and emotional literacy. What emerges is a model of education that is interdisciplinary, inclusive, and deeply situated in real-world experience—one that redefines language as a tool for thinking, expressing, and belonging. These collaborations challenge conventional boundaries between formal and non-formal learning, positioning the museum as a vital partner in the development of plurilingual, reflective, and socially engaged learners.

4.4 Collaborative Strategy to Stimulate Creative Potential through Museum-School Synergy

The discussion below builds upon the research Abel Ponce-Delgado, Rasa Pocevičienė, and Rainer Rubira-García, whose 2024 article *Developing Creative Potential in School Children through Museums as Cultural Institutions* presents a critical and practice-led investigation into how museums can serve as dynamic educational partners in fostering children's creativity. Conducted over the span of an academic year in Madrid, the project involved two primary schools—Ciudad Educativa Municipal Hipatia and El Valle II School—and two major cultural institutions, the National Museum of Natural Sciences and the Royal Botanical Garden. The initiative targeted approximately 200 pupils aged 9 to 11, aiming to reframe the museum not as a supplementary venue for leisure-based learning, but as an integral, communicative space capable of supporting sustained educational processes. By employing a triangulated mixed-methods approach, the study developed and assessed a comprehensive strategy for stimulating creative potential in children through cross-institutional collaboration.

4.4.1 Collaboration Model

A key strength of the Madrid case lies in the articulation of a long-term, participatory strategy in which schools and museums operated as co-constructors of creative learning environments. Rather than imposing a fixed model, the project unfolded through an initial phase of shared inquiry, during which museum educators, schoolteachers, and researchers jointly examined their respective institutional and cultural understandings of creativity. This collaborative groundwork—developed over a three-month period—was essential for building a theoretical and methodological alignment among stakeholders. Preliminary workshops with teachers served two key functions: they helped define the theme to be explored with students—originally centred on environmental topics—and, more importantly, they created space to examine and question prevailing notions of creativity. In several cases, these conceptions were strongly linked to artistic expression or final outcomes, which posed challenges to embracing a more open-ended, process-based approach to creativity as envisioned by the project. While a common structural framework guided the intervention, its implementation took different forms across the two schools, shaped by variations in institutional culture, facilitator preparations, and educational priorities.

The creative potential of children was approached through the structured lens of the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) methodology, specifically informed by the six-step model of the Torrance Center for Creativity and Talent Development of the University of Georgia. This framework shaped the design of five museum-based workshops, developed in close coordination with the spatial and organisational characteristics of each institution. Teachers acted as co-facilitators, adapting activities to the specific dynamic of their classrooms. Emphasis was placed on group work, negotiation, and shared decision-making, with workshops functioning as relational and reflective learning experiences.

Following the initial preparatory phase, the subsequent five months were dedicated to the intervention with the groups of children, during which a total of 20 workshop sessions were carried out, engaging students in activities designed to foster creative thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and decision-making. Rather than focusing on tangible products, the workshops prioritised the development of a process that could evolve and

extend beyond the intervention itself. Documentation was integral to this process, helping make children's ideas and learning pathways visible over time. To evaluate the impact of the intervention, a test-retest model was employed using the Children's Creativity Test. This figurative assessment measured shifts in children's ability to generate, transform, and communicate ideas visually. The evaluation strategy mirrored the project's broader emphasis on process, aiming to capture both immediate effects and the potential for longer-term creative growth.

4.4.2 Impacts and Outcomes

The intervention generated a range of pedagogical and developmental outcomes, particularly in relation to the simulation of creative potential among children and the evolving role of schoolteachers, who acted as facilitators and adapted the methodology to the specific needs of their students. The main outcomes of the intervention can be summarised as follows:

- For students, the intervention promoted both creative and social competencies. Core dimensions of creativity such as motivation, fluency, and flexibility were significantly stimulated, especially through activities involving storytelling, drawing, role-play, and symbolic use of museum artefacts. These processes were often supported by emotionally resonant, context-rich environments, which helped children engage deeply with tasks and connect them to their lived experiences. Simultaneously, pupils demonstrated improved teamwork, communication, and tolerance for different perspectives, indicating strengthened collaborative and interpersonal skills. However, the development was uneven across creativity dimensions. While basic processes like fluency and motivation were consistently activated, more complex components such as elaboration and future projection were less responsive. These findings suggest that deeper-level creative skills may require long-term, embedded strategies with stronger curricular integration.
- For educators, the intervention highlighted the central role of teachers as co-facilitators. Their ability to contextualise and adapt the methodology to their specific classroom needs proved essential in aligning the project with broader pedagogical goals. However, the study also revealed that teachers' and facilitators' conceptions

of creativity—often limited to expressions of spontaneity, imagination, or artistic ability—shaped which dimensions were prioritised during implementation. As a result, dimensions such as originality and elaboration were less consistently stimulated across sites.

- At the institutional level, the outcomes reflected a degree of variability linked to differences in school culture, teaching practices, and facilitator training. For example, in El Valle, storytelling approaches enhanced verbal interaction and symbolic integration, while in Hipatia, emphasis on plastic arts encouraged tactile engagement and manipulation. This divergence underscores the importance of contextual sensitivity in designing and executing interventions. Although quantitative creativity scores showed a general upward trend, the results were not statistically significant. Nevertheless, qualitative evidence strongly supports the educational relevance and transformative potential of the experience. Notably, preliminary data indicate that the facilitator's profile—including gender and background—may influence outcomes more than the design of the workshop itself, though further study is needed to confirm this.

Importantly, the findings reinforce a process-over-product orientation, with the most meaningful learning occurring through dialogue, experimentation, and group reflection. Symbolic production and collaborative discussion emerged as particularly powerful moments for creative engagement, offering insights into how creativity can be supported through sustained, participatory methodologies.

4.4.3 Innovative and Inspiring Aspects

The Madrid case presents several innovative and transferable elements that can inform future school-museum collaborations. Among the most inspiring features are:

- A sustained and participatory planning phase: An inspiring aspect of the project was the structured approach to planning, which began with the formal recognition by school institutions of the project's educational relevance—an essential step that preceded any practical implementation. Building on this initial legitimisation, the three-month series of preparatory workshops with schoolteachers offered valuable

opportunity to co-define thematic priorities and reflect on varying conceptions of creativity. Although divergent interpretations persisted among teachers, the workshops served as critical space for dialogue and mutual understanding. Their inclusion stands out as promising and replicable practice for fostering coherence and shared purpose in future school-museum partnerships.

- Flexibility and contextual sensitivity: While the project followed a shared methodological framework, its implementation varied across institutions due to differences in museum settings, facilitator profiles, and school cultures. This reinforced the need for flexible design models capable of adapting to distinct educational contexts and institutional logics.
- Conceptions of the child as a singular, competent subject: The intervention rejected traditional views of children as learners-in-formation, instead acknowledging them as individuals who both learn and teach. Children were seen as active constructors of their own experiences, capable of using those experiences as resources for further learning. This perspective underpinned the project's focus on relational learning, autonomy, and self-expression.
- Creativity as a process, not a product: Emphasis was placed not on producing polished outcomes, but on cultivating an evolving process through which children could strengthen their relationships with themselves, their peers, and their environment. Workshops became spaces for experimentation, symbolic expression, and collaborative meaning-making.
- Reflective documentation practices: Regular documentation was used not merely to record final outputs, but to trace the evolution of ideas, interactions, and insights throughout the learning process. This practice supported continuous reflection by both educators and facilitators and helped make learning visible.
- Alignment between evaluation and educational goals: The project employed a clear and coherent evaluation strategy, including a test-retest model to assess creative development. This approach allowed the team to measure not only impact but also areas for further growth, offering a model for assessing the role of museums in formal educational settings.
- Relevance of teachers' preparation: The dimension of creativity most effectively stimulated—namely motivation, fluency, and flexibility—corresponded to those most

clearly understood and conceptually elaborated by participating teachers and facilitators. This underscores the importance of targeted teacher preparation and shared theoretical grounding in shaping the creative dimensions prioritised within the learning process.

- Cross-institutional dialogue on creativity: The collaboration revealed that many museum professionals lacked an articulated vision of creativity in educational terms. The project served as a space for mutual learning, where educators and facilitators could jointly reflect on creativity as both a development process and a pedagogical objective.

In sum, the Madrid case provides a compelling vision of museum–school collaboration grounded in theoretical rigour, methodological innovation, and institutional commitment. Its core contribution lies in demonstrating how creativity can be cultivated through intentional design, participatory structures, and an enduring belief in the child as an active agent in their own learning process. Central to this project is the construction of a learning process that progressively strengthens the child's relational capacities—with themselves, with others, and with their surrounding environment.

Table 3 - Key Concepts of the Inspirational Cases

CASE STUDY	COLLABORATION MODEL	IMPACTS AND OUCOMES	INNOVATIVE AND INSPIRING ASPECTS
1. Reggio Emilia Model for Dialogic and Creative Museum–School Collaboration	Institutions as co-constructors and co-designers, rooted in dialogue; involvment of RE approach experts	Enhancement students' critical thinking and creativity while promoting professional develoment for museum and school educators	Museum as a civic space and environment of possibilities, embracing the "hundred of languages" of expression and fostering dialogue
2. Environmental Stewardship– A Transformative Model of School-Museum Partnership	Design and contextual focus beyond institutional boundaries; multi-phase stewardship programme aligned with curricula and ecological priorities; involvment of environmental professionals and community stakeholders	Strengthened scientific understanding and sense of agency in students; school-museum collaboration serving wider social and ecological goals	Stewardship as a means of fostering civic responsibility; addressing community gaps; use of VINES model; development sensitivity through direct engagement with issues, inclusion of diverse actors
3. Extending CLIL Beyond the Classroom: Museums as Sites of Multimodal and Intercultural Language Learning	Co-design by teachers and museum educators; CLIL-based collaboration	Development of language skills and intercultural empathy for students; museums gain opportunities to reflect on communication practices an co-create inclusive, multilingual narrative with schools	Deeper understanding of the power of language as socially and ideologically charged; emphasis on the importance of expression
4. Collaborative Strategy to Stimulate Creative Potential through Museum-School Synergy	Long-term, participatory strategy where museums and schools co-construct creative learning; preliminary workshops with teachers; structural lens of Creative Problem Solving (CPS) methodology	Development of social and collaborative competences; stimulation of core creative skills; enhancement of creativity potential	Structured yet flexible and context-sensitive planning; emphasis on relational learning, student autonomy, and self-expression; strong focus on teacher preparation

Note. Table created by the author as a synthesis of the previous paragraphs.

4.5 Key Considerations Emerging from Case Studies of School–Museum Collaboration

The four case studies presented in this chapter provide a nuanced and multifaceted overview of how collaboration between school and museums can be conceptualised, imagined and implemented. Despite differences in geographical location, pedagogical tradition, institutional scale, and thematic focus, these cases collectively underscored the significant potential for educational innovation at the intersection of formal and non-formal learning, creating the so-called "third space" (Raaijmakers et al., 2021, p.2749)—a transformative context where traditional boundaries are blurred, enabling students to actively shape their social identities and assert epistemic agency. For clarity and ease of reference, the case studies will be referred to as Case 1 through Case 4, following the presentation's order established in the previous chapter, with Case 1 corresponding to "Reggio Emilia Model for Dialogic and Creative Museum–School Collaboration". Building on

these examples, the following section offers a set of critical considerations—grounded in the theoretical foundations outlined in Chapters 2 and 3— that aim to synthesise key insights, highlight structural divergences, and reflect on the broader implications for school- museum partnerships.

The four cases under analysis illustrate differences in the nature and depth of collaboration between museums and schools. Cases 1 and 4, both grounded in creativity-driven initiatives, demonstrate a strong commitment to co-construction. In these instances, schools and museums operate as epistemic partners, engaging in mutual negotiation of pedagogical goals, meanings, and practices. This collaborative ethos enables a richer educational experience, particularly shaped by the synergy between the roles of teachers and museum educators, which Palacios and de Altaya (2025) identify as fundamental for effectively integrating school visits to museums into the teaching-learning process. Case 3, by contrast, reveals a potential risk of the museum assuming a more instrumental role—primarily functioning as a venue for the delivery of pre-determined curricular content. This approach bears similarities to what Chen (2007) defines as a *School-Directed Model*, which carries the risk of the museum being treated merely as a supplementary resource, with limited or no meaningful collaboration between teachers and museum educators. In such cases, activities—such as presenting an artwork in a foreign language—may reduce the educational potential of the museum to a performative task, lacking depth and critical engagement. As a result, the distinctive pedagogical affordances of the museum space—its ability to foster critical observation, multimodal learning, and contextual interpretation—remain largely untapped. This instrumental use of the museum may overlook its unique value as a site for informal education, rich in sensory, emotional, and dialogic potential (Anderson, Lucas, & Ginns, 2003; Falk & Dierking, 2000, 2016; Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; O'Neill & Wilson, 2010). This highlights the importance of professional awareness and alignment between teachers and museum educators. Both should facilitate students' recognition of "where they are"—physically, culturally, and epistemologically—so as to foster meaningful, context-sensitive learning. Critical observation, contextual interpretation, and dialogic interaction with exhibits should be actively scaffolded as integral parts of the educational experience, through forms of guided support that operate within the learner's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, as cited

in Davidsson & Jakobsson, 2012; Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018). These observations underscore the importance of carefully planned educational sequences before, during, and after museum visits. In Case 2, for instance, students engaged in preparatory lessons, on-site investigation, and follow-up classroom activities, all contributing to a deeper understanding of local water quality issues. Such an approach aligns with the model proposed by Souza et al. (2023), who emphasise that meaningful learning in out-of-school settings requires sustained engagement across all phases of the educational experience—not just the museum visit itself.

Case 2 presents a collaborative model that brings together a range of actors, including environmental scientists and community organisations. This multi-layered structure enhances the partnership's ecological and civic relevance but also complicates the distribution of authority, expertise, and responsibility. Gupta et al. (2010) highlight how establishing a shared vision and mutually agreed-upon goals among stakeholders is crucial to avoid disconnections and ensure effective collaboration. While such diversity can broaden perspectives, organisational constraints and entrenched institutional agendas may prioritise top-down directives over bottom-up contributions, risking a diminished focus on the learners' central role. This complexity resonates with Kisiel's (2014) emphasis on authority within school–museum partnerships, where the negotiation of leadership roles and recognition of expertise can generate tension. Kisiel notes that museum professionals often face dual accountability—to their institutions and to teachers who wish to maintain control over educational experiences—which can lead to conflicting expectations. In a context involving multiple stakeholders, as in Case 2, these tensions are likely to increase, making clear communication and a relational approach to collaboration essential for sustaining a coherent and responsive educational partnership.

The various forms of collaboration between schools and museums reflect differing balances between co-construction and a more instrumental role of the museum. For collaborations to be genuinely transformative, deep pedagogical alignment and institutional commitment are essential. Moreover, while complex networks can enhance partnerships, they require careful coordination to ensure that student voice and agency are not compromised. This is particularly important to avoid the risk of overly structured field trips, which, as highlighted by DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008), can inadvertently prioritise

cognitive learning through rigid activities such as worksheets or tightly controlled tours, but simultaneously diminish students' emotional engagement and interest. Therefore, maintaining an appropriate balance in the degree of structure is essential to promote both effective learning and active student participation within these collaborative educational settings.

Across all four cases, experiential and student-centred learning are highly valued, albeit with differing emphases on particular aspects. Cases 1 and 2 position the learner as a meaning-maker and an agent of social and ecological responsibility, encouraging ethical engagement, critical awareness, and a sense of belonging. Achieving such a transformative educational experience requires museum professionals to be adequately prepared to foster participatory and critical learning environments. As Janes and Sandell (2019) emphasise, specialised training is crucial for curators and educators to develop museums as active sites of social change. This professional agency enables museums to engage effectively with social issues, promote civic participation, and navigate contested narratives, positioning museum education as a critical practice that challenges and reshapes both exhibitions and institutional frameworks (Mörsch et al., 2016). By embedding learners in this dynamic process, the development of critical thinking is deeply supported; increased attentiveness to detail during museum visits enhances students' analytical skills and their capacity to engage with complex ideas thoughtfully and independently—foundations essential not only for academic success but also for informed decision-making in everyday life (Greene et al., 2014). Thus, these cases exemplify how the museum can act as a politically engaged institution, fostering reflective learners who contribute meaningfully to social and ecological discourses. Case 3, while more focused on cognitive and linguistic development, also opens spaces for intercultural reflection and multimodal meaning-making. This approach inherently fosters a further dimension of critical thinking, namely the recognition of multiple interpretations as a fundamental part of the interpretive process. As Krant and Downey (2021) argue, the ability to appreciate diverse perspectives not only signals advanced critical thinking but also reflects openness to new evidence and the willingness to revise one's own beliefs. In this way, Case 3 supports learners in developing a flexible and reflective mindset that is crucial for navigating complex cultural and linguistic contexts. The Case 4 project extends this approach by conceptualising creativity not as an innate talent but as a relational

process involving negotiation, risk-taking, and shared authorship. Complementing the development of critical thinking, single-visit museum programmes have shown significant potential to foster creative thinking through the encouragement of meaningful questioning. As Krantz and Downey (2021) highlight, students engaged in such experiences tend to move beyond asking basic factual questions, instead posing deeper, more reflective inquiries that explore meaning, intention, and interpretation. This evolution in questioning not only nurtures intellectual curiosity but also promotes a more exploratory and creative mindset, aligning closely with the collaborative and process-oriented nature of creativity emphasised in Case 4. In all four cases, the museum emerges as a semiotically and affectively rich environment that supports not only knowledge acquisition but also self-discovery and learning oriented towards the community. This is particularly clear in Case 2, where the museum actively addresses structural inequalities by engaging with marginalised urban areas, where students often have limited access to natural spaces and experiential learning opportunities. Through this programme, students were able to connect scientific exploration with their own personal and social realities, highlighting the museum's role in developing cultural capital (Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018). By doing so, the partnership worked to bridge educational gaps and offer transformative experiences to those who might otherwise be excluded. Such an approach exemplifies the post-museum ideal of museums as critically responsive and socially engaged institutions that act as agents of change, rather than merely custodians of collections (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

Regarding the documentation of learning, in Cases 1 and 4 documentation functions not merely as assessment, but also as a pedagogical process —an instrument of reflection, iteration, and meaning-making. Conversely, in Cases 2 and 3, measurable learning outcomes remain more central. Nonetheless, Case 2 adopts the identity-orientated VINES framework, indicating that content knowledge and self-understanding are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the model intentionally draws on the unique potential of museums, galleries, and interpretive sites to support the development of a scientific worldview and to encourage young people to see themselves as capable of contributing to STEM-related fields, whether through future discoveries or professional pathways (Garner et al., 2016). In this way, identity formation becomes intertwined with disciplinary engagement. Despite their innovative aspects, each model reveals persistent challenges. Divergences in institutional

cultures (Kisiel, 2014), time constraints (Karnezou et al., 2021), and a lack of shared pedagogical language (Weiland & Akerson, 2013) can hinder meaningful collaboration. In Case 4, for example, diverging conceptions of creativity among stakeholders impacted both the design and reception of the activities. Similarly, Case 2 illustrates the difficulty of integrating ecological aims into school curricula in under-resourced urban contexts.

Professional development for both teachers and museum educators emerges as a key enabling condition. However, even with extended training—as in Case 4—differences in interpretation may persist, as teachers bring individual backgrounds that inevitably shape how projects are understood and enacted. As DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) highlight, effective school visits require not only structured preparation but also space for open-ended exploration. Within this context, educators are also called to develop an awareness of how their own perspectives may influence their pedagogical approach. Sandell (in Huang & Liem, 2022, p. 302) frames this as *cultural humility*—the ability to recognise how one's own cultural background, personal assumptions, and professional role can shape interactions with others, especially in diverse and plural learning environments. It is a mindset rooted in reflexivity, openness, and ethical responsibility.

Collectively, the four cases offer rich and varied insights into how school–museum partnerships can be imagined and implemented. Taken together, they suggest that effective collaboration depends not only on pedagogical alignment but also on institutional commitment, shared vision, and a willingness to embrace complexity. The most powerful partnerships are those that view students as active participants, educators as co-explorers, and museums as places of inquiry and self-transformation.

Building on these foundational insights, the methodological structure of the *Power of Words* toolkit has been directly informed by the practices and pedagogical principles emerging from the inspirational case studies analysed in the previous chapter. Specifically, the toolkit's three-phase structure reflects the nuanced contributions of each case, ensuring a grounded and practice-driven approach. The first phase, "Collaborative Groundwork: Building a Shared Pedagogical Horizon", draws on Case 1, which foregrounds sustained dialogue, mutual recognition, and a shared ethical-pedagogical orientation between schools and museums. This phase emphasises co-design, dialogic preparation, and communication,

mirroring the intentional infrastructures that support continuous school–museum interaction. The inclusion of co-reflection sessions with diverse professionals echoes the commitment to interprofessional dialogue and collective meaning-making identified in this model. Moving into the second phase, “Contextualised Implementation of Educational Activities”, the toolkit draws inspiration from Case 2’s environmental partnership, which highlights the importance of contextualised, interdisciplinary engagement and the involvement of external actors in strengthening students’ connections to real-world issues. This phase also integrates insights from Case 4, particularly the gradual scaffolding approach that prioritises continuity between pre-visit classroom preparation and post-visit feedback to maintain student engagement. Furthermore, the facilitation of activities that frame language as a site of power and identity resonates with Case 3’s CLIL-based projects, which use language awareness as a gateway to intercultural understanding and the development of critical consciousness. Finally, the third phase, “Reflection and Evaluation”, builds on the emphasis found in multiple cases—most notably Case 4—on fostering reflective practices that transcend simple outcome measurement. Instead, it prioritises formative, dialogic, and process-oriented evaluation. The toolkit’s recursive, spiral structure, moving fluidly between classroom and museum and between action and reflection, mirrors the dynamic, iterative models of collaboration explored in these projects. This reinforces the conceptualisation of learning as a situated, collective, and transformative process.

In the following chapter, a more detailed analysis will be provided to illustrate how the various elements of the different case studies have specifically inspired and shaped distinct components of the *Power of Words* toolkit.

4.6 Conclusion

The case studies in this chapter illuminate the manifold ways in which museum-school partnerships can support inclusive, experiential, and socially responsive forms of education. While each model operates within specific institutional and cultural parameters, common themes emerge: the importance of co-construction, the need for sustained professional dialogue, and the centrality of student agency. Whether through environmental stewardship, linguistic exploration, or creative problem-solving, these collaborations reveal the museum's potential to function not merely as a site of transmission, but as space or

relational, critical and transformative learning. At the same time, the case studies bring to light several structural tensions and challenges—such as disparities in institutional priorities, limitations in professional training, and the risk of instrumentalisation—which must be carefully navigated. Taken together, these examples offer a generative framework for rethinking school-museum relations as shared educational and civic projects, grounded in mutual respect, pedagogical coherence, and a commitment to social and cultural inclusion.

The ways in which these case studies have directly informed the design, structure and pedagogical principles of the toolkit *The Power of Words* will be examined in detail in the following chapter.

5. Final Considerations

This dissertation began by critically examining the current state of school–museum collaboration, identifying both its educational potential and its persistent structural, pedagogical, and institutional barriers. Through a theoretical exploration of museums as arenas for critical, affective, and participatory learning, and an in-depth analysis of the evolving role of educators, the research laid the groundwork for understanding the museum–school relationship beyond the paradigm of occasional visits. Building on this foundation, the following section reflects on how each of the case studies analysed offered valuable insights and prompted specific reflections that directly informed the development of *The Power of Words* toolkit. Rather than serving as prescriptive models, these cases acted as catalysts for reimagining what meaningful and ethically grounded school–museum collaboration might look like in practice

5.1 From Case Analysis to Practice: The Toolkit as an Applied Contribution

The analysis of the first case, centred on the Reggio Emilia approach, was pivotal in shaping the conceptual and practical foundations of the Power of Words toolkit. What stood out most profoundly was not only the shared educational vision between schools and museums but, crucially, the intentional, dialogic infrastructures that underpin and sustain their collaboration. This perspective informed a key principle embedded in the toolkit: the recognition of schools and museums as co-constructors of learning environments, where partnership is an ongoing, responsive process rather than a one-off interaction. The dialogic nature of the Reggio Emilia model, grounded in continuous cycles of observation, reflection, and documentation, directly inspired the methodological design of the toolkit. Mirroring this dynamic, the toolkit emphasises the importance of reflective documentation practices—not as static records of outcomes but as living tools that render learning visible, capture evolving student thinking, and inform adaptive pedagogical strategies throughout the programme. This approach fosters an iterative, responsive educational process, ensuring that activities remain attuned to the needs and voices of adolescent participants. Moreover, the Reggio Emilia case's expansive notion of "language" as a multiplicity of expressive forms—encompassing not only verbal communication but gesture, drawing, movement, and spatial arrangements—deeply influenced the toolkit's conceptualisation of the museum as a

privileged space for exploring these “hundred languages.” By situating the museum as a vibrant environment rich in visual and material stimuli, the toolkit invites students to engage with language beyond words, acknowledging the diverse modes through which meaning and identity are constructed. This insight guided the inclusion of activities that encourage multimodal expression and non-verbal communication, recognising their critical role in shaping affective and relational learning experiences. In sum, the Reggio Emilia case provided both theoretical inspiration and practical guidance, informing the toolkit’s commitment to collaborative, dialogic, and multimodal educational practices within the school–museum partnership. The case underscored the potential of museums as dynamic sites for co-created learning journeys, where the power of language unfolds in its many forms and where educators continuously negotiate meaning through attentive listening, reflection, and care.

Case 2’s central pedagogical element, the VINES framework, provided a sophisticated conceptualisation of learning as a continuum bridging disciplinary knowledge and personal insight. This dynamic interplay between content and identity, where students actively use subject matter to reinterpret their experiences and reshape their sense of agency, profoundly influenced the design of the toolkit, The Power of Words. Mirroring the VINES approach, the toolkit seeks not merely to convey theoretical understanding about language but to foster critical reflection that engages students in constructing a relational and ethical awareness of how language shapes selfhood and community. The programme’s direct engagement with a pressing contemporary issue—in that case, environmental concerns, and in the toolkit’s focus, the ethical and relational dimensions of language use among adolescents, particularly in digital spaces—provided a vital impetus for motivation. This grounding in a relevant, lived problem ensures that the toolkit’s educational interventions resonate authentically with participants, thus enhancing the meaningfulness and impact of the learning experience. Moreover, the sustained, multi-actor collaboration characteristic of Case 2, involving schools, museums, scientific experts, and community groups, has been consciously echoed in the toolkit’s methodological framework. The toolkit explicitly encourages the involvement of diverse professionals—such as sociologists and psychologists—alongside educators and museum staff, recognising that such interdisciplinary participation enhances the responsiveness and depth of the educational

experience. This emphasis on broad stakeholder engagement ensures adaptability to specific contextual needs while maintaining a clear focus on tangible educational outcomes, thereby promoting the sustainability and relevance of school-museum partnerships.

Case 3 has profoundly informed the theoretical underpinnings of the toolkit by emphasising language as a cultural practice deeply embedded in identity, ideology, and memory. This perspective has shaped the toolkit's focus on encouraging learners to critically engage with museum texts and narratives, recognising the power dynamics inherent in linguistic expression. The museum's rich semiotic environment is leveraged in the toolkit to foster an expanded linguistic repertoire and to cultivate learners' critical awareness and responsibility in the use of language as a socially and culturally situated practice. Moreover, the concept of 'invisible literacy' highlighted in Case 3—forms of literacy that remain largely unacknowledged within traditional school settings—has guided the toolkit's integration of activities that expose students to authentic discourses, diverse genres, and multimodal communication modes prevalent in museum contexts. This approach aims to broaden students' understanding of language beyond the classroom, situating it within broader social and ideological frameworks. Finally, the cautionary reflection emerging from Case 3 regarding the risk of museums being reduced to mere instruments for delivering pre-determined curricular content has been fundamental in the toolkit's design principles. The toolkit explicitly avoids instrumentalisation by capitalising on the unique, immersive qualities of the museum environment, advocating for a pedagogical approach that honours the museum as a dynamic, dialogic space for co-construction of knowledge rather than a passive backdrop for content delivery.

The fourth case notably emphasises the importance of a sustained and participatory planning phase, which is reflected in the toolkit's structured yet collaborative approach. The formal recognition of the project's educational relevance by school institutions, preceding any practical activity, highlights the necessity of securing institutional commitment to ensure meaningful engagement. This has inspired the toolkit's recommendation for early and ongoing involvement of teachers through preparatory workshops, facilitating co-definition of thematic priorities and fostering shared ownership of the project. Moreover, the demonstrated flexibility and contextual sensitivity across different institutions in Case 4 underscore the necessity for adaptable implementation within the toolkit. This case has

illuminated how a project, even when meticulously structured and well-organised, must retain a degree of flexibility to respond effectively to the unique demands of each educational context. Accordingly, the toolkit advocates for practitioners to embrace variability and openness to interpretation rather than adhering to rigid protocols, thereby honouring the distinctiveness of diverse museum settings. A further significant insight drawn from this case is the prioritisation of process over product. By focusing on cultivating an evolving, relational learning experience—where children strengthen their connections with themselves, peers, and environment—the toolkit emphasises the value of experimentation, symbolic expression, and collaborative meaning-making. This process-oriented stance aligns with contemporary pedagogical principles that advocate for reflective and participatory learning environments. Finally, reflective documentation practices, as evidenced in Case 4, have directly influenced the toolkit's methodological framework. The use of ongoing documentation not merely as a record of final outcomes but as a tool to trace the evolution of ideas, interactions, and insights supports continuous reflection by both educators and facilitators. This approach renders learning visible and fosters an iterative, responsive educational process, which the toolkit integrates as a core strategy for enhancing the effectiveness and adaptability of school-museum collaborations.

5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

While *The Power of Words* toolkit presents a theoretically grounded and practically oriented contribution to museum-school collaboration, it inevitably carries certain limitations that warrant consideration. First and foremost is the need for empirical validation. As a conceptual and methodological proposal, the toolkit has not yet been tested through implementation in real educational settings. Future pilot programmes and longitudinal studies will be essential to assess its effectiveness, adaptability, and impact on both learners and educators.

Another important consideration concerns the age range for which the toolkit has been designed. Although the toolkit targets learners between the ages of 12 and 18—an age group where language awareness and ethical reflection are particularly urgent due to increased exposure to social media and digital communication—its adaptability to younger audiences remains an open question. Primary school pupils, who may not yet have direct

access to social platforms, are nonetheless in a crucial phase of forming linguistic habits and moral sensibilities. In this sense, the toolkit could be further developed to include early intervention strategies that support the cultivation of empathy, responsibility, and sensitivity towards language use from an earlier age. However, this would require significant adjustments in content, facilitation strategies, and language mediation, which are beyond the current scope of this proposal. Regarding the type of museum, the toolkit is designed to be flexible and non-prescriptive, and therefore not inherently limited to a specific typology of institution. Rather, its applicability depends on the willingness and capacity of museum professionals to engage with the ethical and civic responsibilities embedded in language use, and on whether institutional structures support such commitments. The primary limitation may therefore lie not in the museum's nature, but in the availability of committed practitioners and enabling organisational frameworks. Finally, the toolkit's implementation necessitates careful modulation of facilitation strategies to suit the developmental level, interests, and linguistic repertoires of diverse student groups. Tailoring the toolkit to different educational levels requires an attuned sensitivity to learners' cognitive, emotional, and social capacities, as well as collaborative planning between museums and schools. While this presents a challenge, it also opens up future directions for differentiated applications of the toolkit across varied contexts and age groups. In terms of institutional context, the toolkit is deliberately non-prescriptive and adaptable, not tied to any specific type of museum. Its success depends more on the presence of engaged professionals and supportive organisational structures than on institutional typology. Implementation also requires careful modulation of facilitation strategies to align with the developmental and linguistic profiles of diverse student groups. This challenge opens avenues for differentiated applications across educational levels and settings.

Looking ahead, the toolkit provides a promising basis for concrete collaborative initiatives. Pilot projects could take the form of short-term, co-designed workshops—such as storytelling laboratories or critical media literacy sessions—where students reflect on language through engagement with museum collections and narratives. These could be integrated into school curricula (e.g., civic education or language arts) and culminate in student-led exhibitions or digital outputs. To refine the methodology in context, participatory action research involving educators, museum staff, and students as co-

researchers could be adopted. Cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection would enable ongoing adaptation of tools and strategies. Finally, long-term institutionalisation could be pursued through the integration of the toolkit into teacher training modules, museum educator programmes, and formal partnerships between cultural and educational institutions. This might include the creation of inter-institutional working groups tasked with adapting and scaling the toolkit to different contexts. In this way, the toolkit can move beyond one-off initiatives and contribute to a broader rethinking of language education as a shared civic responsibility within museum-school ecosystems.

5.3 A Theoretical and Practical Contribution

This dissertation offers a meaningful theoretical–practical contribution to the academic and professional discourse on heritage education, museum–school collaboration, and participatory pedagogical practices. Grounded in critical museology and educational theory, it advances a reflective and situated understanding of how museums and schools can co-construct ethical, dialogic, and transformative learning experiences. By critically examining existing institutional dynamics, educational paradigms, and exemplary case studies, the research highlights the epistemological and pedagogical conditions necessary for sustainable and socially responsive partnerships between museums and schools. It underscores the museum's potential not merely as a site of knowledge transmission, but as a space of civic agency, affective engagement, and co-created meaning. The accompanying toolkit, *The Power of Words* — presented as an appendix to this dissertation — constitutes the practical articulation of these theoretical insights. It addresses a pressing contemporary concern: the ethical consequences and potential harm associated with language use among adolescents, particularly in digital spaces. Designed to support educators and museum professionals, the toolkit proposes an adaptable and critically grounded methodology that fosters language awareness, empathy and sensitivity. It encourages the creation of spaces for listening and dialogue, where diverse voices can be heard and valued, supporting the development of social awareness and a deeper sense of shared responsibility.

What distinguishes this proposal is its integration of language awareness, educational care, and dialogic museum practice within a flexible framework grounded in both museological and linguistic theory. *The Power of Words* promotes critical reflexivity,

affective engagement, and sustained institutional dialogue. By emphasising the ethical and relational dimensions of language, it offers a timely and adaptable response to contemporary social challenges in education.

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Appendix - *The Power of Words*: A Toolkit for Critical and Ethical Language Awareness in Museum–School Collaborations

The Power of Words: A Toolkit for Critical and Ethical Language Awareness in Museum–School Collaborations

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Background and Ethical Commitments

This toolkit arises from the intersection of two formative academic trajectories: on the one hand, a deep linguistic awareness developed during my undergraduate studies in literature and intercultural communication; on the other, a critical museological perspective acquired through my current specialisation in museum education. These two threads converge in a shared commitment to fostering transformative, inclusive, and ethically grounded educational practices. This commitment has been further shaped by the critical reflections developed throughout this dissertation and by the analysis of the four case studies presented in Chapter 4, which offered concrete examples of school–museum collaborations grounded in participatory and socially engaged approaches.

During my undergraduate studies, I came to understand language not simply as a tool for communication, but as a deeply cultural and ideological medium. Every word carries with it a weight, a history, and a context; language is never neutral, but embedded in social power relations and shaped by the perspectives and positions of those who use it. Through the study of linguistics, semiotics, and intercultural communication, I developed a sensitivity to the plurality of meanings and to the diverse forms of verbal and non-verbal expression across different contexts. This has led me to cultivate a decentred gaze, one that recognises multiple interpretations and foregrounds the responsibility inherent in every communicative act.

The creation of this toolkit is also a response to a pressing contemporary issue. In a digital age characterised by the ubiquity of social media and instant communication, language circulates rapidly and often without critical reflection. Adolescents today are constantly exposed to verbal exchanges that can shape their self-perception and their

relationships with others. Words—whether spoken, written, or visual—can connect, inspire, and empower, but they can also wound, exclude, and perpetuate harm. This toolkit thus aims to raise awareness of the social responsibility that comes with language use, encouraging young people to become more conscious of how they communicate in both online and offline contexts. More broadly, it seeks to foster critical awareness, sensitivity to the other, empathy, and the capacity to shift perspectives—skills that are essential for navigating increasingly diverse and interconnected social environments with respect and ethical responsibility.

These reflections are not purely theoretical but are rooted in personal observation and lived experience as a digital native. As a member of Generation Z, I have grown up in a digital environment shaped by the pervasive presence of social media. Like many of my peers, I engage with platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X not only as tools for entertainment or communication, but also as spaces that foster connection and the sharing of knowledge. I do not position myself among those who uncritically condemn social media; on the contrary, I acknowledge their potential to promote positive dissemination, intercultural exchange, and a sense of global proximity. However, sustained exposure to these platforms has also made me acutely aware of the extent to which language is frequently employed in harmful, unconscious, and violent ways. Online comment sections, in particular, often become arenas where individuals—shielded by anonymity or pseudonyms—feel emboldened to express judgemental, discriminatory, or body-shaming remarks. The performative and accelerated nature of digital communication can, in such cases, amplify linguistic aggression and social exclusion. Tragically, the consequences of such verbal violence are not confined to the virtual sphere. Numerous reports and testimonies, widely circulated across these same platforms, have drawn attention to the cases of adolescents and young adults who have taken their own lives as a result of sustained online bullying. These devastating instances underscore the urgent need to confront the ethical implications of language use in digital contexts and to recognise the profound emotional and psychological impact that words can have—particularly on young individuals navigating formative phases of identity development.

In this light, museums—as institutions committed to social responsibility and critical engagement—have a duty to respond to contemporary issues that affect younger generations. By fostering reflective practices and promoting awareness of the ethical dimensions of communication, museums can play a pivotal role in equipping adolescents with the tools to understand, question, and transform the linguistic dynamics that shape their everyday lives. This toolkit is one such response: an educational proposal that seeks to challenge normalised forms of verbal and symbolic violence, and to reassert the value of language as a means of connection, care, and shared responsibility.

The proposed toolkit, therefore, seeks to translate these theoretical insights into concrete educational practices. It is designed for educators, museum practitioners, and cultural mediators who wish to support adolescents in recognising the power of language—as spoken, written, visual, and embodied—to shape perceptions, construct realities, and influence social relationships. In an age marked by rapid, digital communication—often lacking in critical reflection—this resource advocates for an education grounded in listening, ethical expression, and the deconstruction of linguistic, verbal, and symbolic violence.

Introduction

This toolkit is a practical resource designed to support museum educators, schoolteachers, and cultural mediators in fostering adolescents' critical and ethical awareness of language in all its forms—verbal, visual, and embodied. Rooted in a commitment to inclusive, reflective, and socially engaged education, it offers a set of adaptable tools for use in school–museum collaborations.

The primary audience for this toolkit includes secondary school students (aged 12–18), who are at a formative stage in developing their communicative, social, and ethical sensibilities. Equally, it addresses the needs of the educators and cultural professionals who accompany them—teachers, museum practitioners, and facilitators—especially those engaged in co-designed, dialogic, and interdisciplinary educational approaches. By

fostering collaboration among these actors, the toolkit aims to bridge institutional cultures and promote shared pedagogical ownership.

In addition to being grounded in a theoretical background that will be presented later in this work, this proposal draws inspiration from four museum-school collaborative cases documented in recent research, including projects described by Ponce-Delgado, Pocevičienė, and Rubira-García (2024) in Madrid; Garner et al. (2025) on environmental stewardship partnerships; Fazzi's studies on CLIL integration between schools and museums (2020, 2023); and Feliu-Torruella, Fernández-Santín, and Atenas (2021) on the Reggio Emilia approach to heritage education. These cases highlight the potential for museums and schools to co-create relevant, context-sensitive learning experiences that inform the toolkit's development.

The toolkit responds to an urgent need to critically reflect on the role of language in shaping our perceptions of self and others. In today's media-saturated environments, language—spoken, written, visual—is both a means of connection and a vehicle for exclusion or harm. The museum–school partnership offers a unique opportunity to explore this dual potential and to cultivate a more conscious, empathetic, and responsible use of language.

Grounded in a theoretical framework that will be outlined later in this work, this toolkit proposes educational pathways that centre dialogue, listening, and perspective-shifting as key pedagogical practices. The toolkit includes:

- A concise theoretical foundation underpinning its approach.
- A step-by-step methodological guide for implementation.
- A selection of adaptable activities for use before, during, and after museum visits.
- Reflective and evaluative tools for educators and students.

The toolkit invites participants to engage thoughtfully with the power of words—recognising how language can connect, divide, shape realities, and create possibilities for meaningful transformation.

Objectives

This toolkit is underpinned by a set of clear and interconnected objectives aimed at fostering a collaborative partnership between schools and museums. At its core, it seeks to create a safe and supportive space for dialogue, self-discovery, and personal transformation. Through this foundation, the toolkit promotes critical and ethical awareness of language among adolescents (12-18 years old), encouraging inclusive communication practices and intercultural sensitivity. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To establish a collaborative framework between schools and museums that nurtures a secure environment for open dialogue, self-reflection, and transformative learning.
- To support adolescents in recognising the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions of language, acknowledging its power to shape perceptions, construct realities, and influence relationships.
- To foster ethical and inclusive communication practices that are attentive to difference, context, and responsibility.
- To develop critical awareness of discriminatory, violent, or exclusionary discourses—whether verbal, visual, or symbolic—and to promote their deconstruction.
- To cultivate intercultural sensitivity and openness to the diverse expressive forms and communicative codes present across cultures.
- To create opportunities within educational settings for self-expression, active listening, and dialogic encounters where learners can engage meaningfully and respectfully.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of *The Power of Words* is grounded in contemporary critical and post-critical museological thought, which reconceptualises the museum as a reflexive, participatory, and politically situated space. At the heart of this approach lies the belief that museums are not neutral repositories of facts but dynamic sites of negotiation, meaning-making, and social responsibility.

Following Hooper-Greenhill's (2000) formulation of the *post-museum*, this framework embraces a shift from monolithic knowledge to multivocality, where the museum's voice becomes one among many. This epistemological turn privileges empathy, diversity, and dialogue over objectivity and detachment, fostering environments in which contested narratives can coexist and be critically examined. Such an orientation repositions learning as a dialogic and affective process, shaped through mutual exploration and co-construction rather than top-down instruction (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). This view resonates with Karp and Kratz's concept of the *interrogative museum*, which advocates for a self-reflexive institution that questions its own assumptions and opens space for dissent and critical inquiry. Rather than offering definitive truths, the museum becomes a space that generates doubt, inviting visitors to interrogate dominant representations (Semedo, 2020). Similarly, *post-critical museology* encourages museums to confront embedded structural issues and adopt practical, responsive methodologies that acknowledge the socio-political realities in which they operate (Dewdney et al., 2013; Achiam et al., 2021).

Crucially, while inclusion and participation have become key terms in the vocabulary of museum practice, they are not without criticism. The concept of inclusion, in particular, has been challenged for reinforcing asymmetrical power dynamics by presuming a fixed centre into which 'others' are brought. Likewise, participation—despite its progressive connotations—can risk becoming a hollow gesture if not supported by deep structural change and genuine redistribution of authority (Bodo, 2024). In response, scholars and practitioners have advocated for a more radical rethinking of museum roles and practices.

Raicovich (as cited in Bodo, 2024, p.37) calls for museums to reimagine collections, challenge categorisations, and reintroduce narrative fluidity—to become incubators of possibility and collective ethical endeavour. This vision positions the museum not simply as a service provider, but as a shared space co-constructed by the diverse knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of those who engage with it. As Bodo (2024) argues, the question is not merely how museums can serve communities, but how the capacities and desires of communities can reshape the museum itself (p.37). This reconceptualisation also involves recognising the narrative nature of all museal and educational practice. Narratives—whether in literature, exhibitions, or educational encounters—are never neutral or closed; they must be proposed with an ethical openness that invites reflection, resonance, and response. Ethical narrative practices seek not to impose meaning, but to foster interpretive dialogue, making room for uncertainty, difference, and transformation (Lizzola, 2024).

In this light, museum education emerges not as a neutral service but as a deeply *pedagogical endeavour* that shapes identities, constructs meaning, and positions individuals within broader political frameworks (Trofanenko & Segall, 2014). Every educational act within the museum carries political implications, shaping how knowledge is structured and whose voices are legitimised. Thus, critical museum education is essential—not only to make marginalised narratives visible but to cultivate independent, socially conscious thought that can challenge systemic inequities (Janes & Sandell, 2019). The role of the educator is particularly significant in this framework. Inspired by Freire's notion of *conscientisation*, museum educators are called to develop a critical awareness of power, language, and positionality (Semedo, 2020). Mediation becomes an active, situated, and conversational practice—one that creates space for transformative encounters and negotiates authority and visibility within the museum (Semedo & Freitas, 2017). According to Sandell (as cited in Huang & Liem, 2022), to enact this practice ethically, educators must cultivate cultural humility, acknowledging the limits of their own perspective and striving to decentre dominant narratives. This epistemological and pedagogical orientation has

profound implications for school–museum collaboration. Rather than treating the museum as a supplement to the classroom, this framework conceives of both as interconnected educational environments committed to the development of democratic and critically engaged citizens (Alderoqui & Pedersoli, 2012; Almagro Lomichar, 2020).In this sense, evaluation itself is rethought not as a summative act, but as a form of collective inquiry—a shared process of reflection aimed at improving practices and deepening relationships (Alderoqui & Pedersoli, 2012, p. 182). Such collaboration demands sustained dialogue and shared responsibility between teachers and museum educators. These qualities are most clearly exemplified in long-term educational projects that integrate multiple components—such as workshops, guided visits, exhibitions, and student-led productions. By requiring continuous commitment and close coordination across institutions, these initiatives promote deeper engagement and enable educators to accompany and support students' learning over time (Celi et al., 2013, pp. 14–15). *The Power of Words* recognises language as a central site of both oppression and liberation. Language, as Prottas (2023) reminds us, can either obscure or illuminate truth; it can reinforce hierarchies or disrupt them (p. 2-3). Museums, therefore, must be mindful of the rhetorical and ethical dimensions of their language practices—in exhibitions, programming, and educational activities. Thoughtful language use is not only a matter of accessibility, but a political and pedagogical act in itself.

Finally, this framework embraces the vision of a museum that *listens* as well as speaks—a space open to alternative ways of knowing and being (Bodo, 2024, p.38). It challenges the universalist foundations of the museum and embraces instead a plural, contested, and situated model of cultural engagement. In this context, *The Power of Words* is particularly attentive to the educational needs of adolescents, who are growing up in environments saturated with language—both online and offline—where words often carry strong emotional, social, and political weight. The digital era, characterised by rapid advancements in information and communication technologies, has profoundly reshaped the way young people interact and express themselves. Social media, as a key product of this technological shift, has introduced new modes of communication that are immediate,

abbreviated, and often emotionally charged. This has led to significant changes in language use among teenagers, influencing not only vocabulary but also attitudes toward dialogue, argumentation, and listening (Rianto & Juliarta, 2024). While adolescents may show a heightened awareness of identity, inclusion, and justice, they are simultaneously exposed to polarised, decontextualised, or even violent forms of expression. Museums, as reflective and dialogic spaces, have the potential to counterbalance these tendencies by fostering critical awareness of language and its ethical implications. By creating conditions where young people feel safe to speak, to be heard, and to explore alternative, non-verbal or poetic forms of expression (Dysthe, 2021), museums can help cultivate more mindful and relational approaches to communication. This is not only a pedagogical necessity but a cultural responsibility.

Methodological Approach

This section outlines a three-phase methodological proposal for implementing the *Power of Words* toolkit in school–museum partnerships. The toolkit is conceived as a multi-session programme that unfolds over a series of 4 encounters alternating between the school and the museum. This structure supports a sustained collaboration and gradual development of critical awareness, rather than a one-off intervention. Each phase is designed to translate the theoretical foundations of the project—grounded in care, multivoicedness, and critical language awareness—into a concrete and collaborative learning process.The proposal follows what Liu (as cited in Chen, 2007) defines as a Museum-Oriented Interactive Model, in which the museum takes the initiative in educational planning and invites teachers to co-design learning activities. This structure supports a participatory dynamic while ensuring a cohesive vision and meaningful alignment with the institution's resources and pedagogical mission.The methodology does not offer a rigid or prescriptive structure, but rather a flexible and reflective model that can be adapted to different educational and institutional contexts. The focus is not solely on delivering content, but on co-creating meaningful and ethical experiences with adolescents,

encouraging them to reflect on the power of language in shaping identities, relationships, and collective imaginaries. The three phases proposed—Collaborative Groundwork: Building a Shared Pedagogical Horizon, Contextualised Implementation of Educational Activities, Reflection and Evaluation—are conceived as interconnected moments in a participatory journey. Each phase involves different actors (teachers, museum educators, students) and specific activities, but all are united by a commitment to dialogue, mutual recognition, and transformative learning.

Phase 1 — Collaborative Groundwork: Building a Shared Pedagogical Horizon

The first phase of the toolkit focuses on establishing the ethical and pedagogical foundations of the collaboration between schools and museums. Before any co-design or implementation of learning activities can occur, it is essential to cultivate a shared understanding of the project's scope, values, and transformative potential. In particular, schools must clearly recognise the educational relevance of the programme and its contribution to students' critical and relational development.

It is at this early stage that the museum takes an active role in presenting to the school the specific issue that the programme intends to address—namely, the problematic use of language among adolescents, particularly within digital contexts. By clearly articulating this challenge and its potential offline consequences, the museum helps to frame the educational need and invites the school to engage as a proactive partner rather than a passive recipient. This initial step ensures that the initiative is not perceived as an external or marginal intervention, but rather as a co-owned learning space rooted in reciprocity, care, and mutual listening. The phase begins with the formal recognition by the school institution of the project's pedagogical significance, thus ensuring coherence with curricular goals and institutional priorities.

Following this recognition, one or two co-reflection sessions are proposed, involving museum educators, teachers, and, where possible, cultural mediators, psychologists, sociologists, or other professionals with expertise in youth communication and digital

cultures. These figures can offer critical insight into the misuse of language on social media platforms and its often underestimated consequences in the offline lives of adolescents. Given that some teachers may belong to a different generational context, they may not be fully aware of the nuances and risks associated with digital interactions. The inclusion of such professionals therefore aims to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the social and emotional implications of harmful language practices, while also encouraging intergenerational dialogue and reflection. These sessions serve as dialogic spaces to:

- Identify shared concerns related to adolescents' use of language, particularly within digital environments often marked by superficial, exclusionary, or violent discourses.
- Explore diverse conceptions of language, identity, and creativity from both pedagogical and museological perspectives.
- Define a common ethical-pedagogical orientation, grounded in respect, multivocality, and care.

Phase 2: Contextualised Implementation of Educational Activities

Building on the ethical and conceptual groundwork established in the first phase, the second phase focuses on the implementation of learning activities developed by the museum. This phase marks the transition from shared reflection to pedagogical action, emphasising the museum's responsibility in translating the project's values into meaningful experiences for students across multiple sessions.

Preliminary Classroom Exploration

Prior to the delivery of museum-led activities, teachers are encouraged to introduce both the core theme—critical awareness of language use—and the museum context in which this theme will be further explored. This initial classroom engagement serves multiple purposes: it familiarises students with the subject matter and the institutional setting, allows for a preliminary discussion grounded in their lived experiences, and

enables teachers to observe students' reactions. Particular attention is paid to students' levels of awareness, interest, and potential emotional vulnerability in relation to the topic. The introduction of the museum as an educational space also plays an important role in framing the experience: students are invited to consider the museum not merely as a passive repository of knowledge, but as an active and dialogic space where critical and affective learning can occur. The impressions gathered during this preliminary phase are then shared with museum educators to help them better understand the group they will be working with. Rather than altering the structure or content of the activities, this exchange allows educators to adapt their facilitation strategies—tone, emphasis, language, and timing—so as to respond more sensitively to the specific needs, dispositions, and concerns of the group. In this way, the educational experience remains coherent with the museum's pedagogical vision while also being attentive to the emotional and cognitive readiness of its participants.

Museum-Based Activities

This initial phase of classroom engagement is followed by a subsequent stage in which the dialogue begun at school is extended into the museum setting through a series of structured encounters. Students participate in multiple educational sessions designed to foster critical reflection on the power of language—its ability to include or exclude, connect or harm, affirm or undermine. These activities invite students to explore how language is never neutral but carries embedded ideologies and shapes how we understand ourselves and others. Museum educators, together with teachers, act as facilitators of an ongoing dialogic process, recognising students not only as learners but also as contributors who bring valuable perspectives to the co-construction of knowledge. The activities proposed for these sessions are described in detail later in the text.

Phase 3: Reflection and Evaluation

Post-Visit Classroom Reflection

Following each museum-based session, the conversation returns to the classroom, where teachers are encouraged to revisit and deepen the key issues explored during the encounter. These moments of reflection are not confined to the end of the programme, but are embedded throughout its duration, forming an integral part of the ongoing and reciprocal dialogue between school and museum. This continuous exchange reinforces the idea of education as a collaborative, dialogic process in which all actors—students, teachers, and museum professionals—contribute to and learn from one another. The cyclical structure—alternating between classroom-based discussion and museum-led activities—not only ensures coherence and continuity, but also fosters critical thinking and supports a gradual, layered engagement with the programme's themes. It allows students to process their experiences within a familiar and supportive environment, encouraging them to articulate their thoughts, emotions, and questions as the project evolves.

Evaluation

The final stage of the programme includes a moment of collective reflection and general evaluation, in which teachers and museum educators are invited to assess the overall coherence and impact of the collaboration. While specific tools and strategies for evaluation are outlined in a later section—following the description of proposed activities—this phase anticipates the importance of monitoring how the learning journey has affected students' awareness, attitudes, and engagement. Evaluation is understood here not as the application of rigid metrics, but as a shared and formative process, grounded in dialogue and critical reflection.

Activity Proposals

Activity 1 — The Power of Naming

Objective

To explore how names, labels, and classifications shape our perception of objects, people, and experiences, highlighting the ideological nature of language and the power structures embedded in naming practices.

Museum-based Activity

- Students are invited to examine selected museum labels, artwork titles, or room names. Through guided observation and dialogue, they consider how naming influences interpretation, emotional response, and perceived value.
- In small groups, students choose one object, artwork, or museum space and propose an alternative name or label. They then present their rationale, discussing the cultural, political, or affective implications of their choices.

Guiding Questions

- Who has the authority to name or label within institutions?
- Can renaming function as an act of resistance, care, or repair?

Activity 2 — Words that Hurt, Words that Heal

Objective

To raise awareness of the emotional, ethical, and relational dimensions of language, recognising its potential to inflict harm or foster care, exclusion or belonging.

Museum-based Activity

- Through the exploration of artworks or exhibits dealing with trauma, exclusion, or memory, students reflect on how language (or its absence) interacts with vulnerability and representation.
- Students are then invited to write a short textual response to one selected artwork using only affirming, respectful, or caring language. The focus is on experimenting with how tone, vocabulary, and intention shape meaning and emotional resonance.

Guiding Questions

- When have words made you feel included, seen, or respected? When have they caused harm or exclusion?
- What does it mean to engage in disagreement without resorting to violence? Can dissent be expressed with care?

Activity 3 — Language Across Cultures

Objective

To foster intercultural awareness and critical reflection on how linguistic and non-verbal forms of communication shape inclusion, accessibility, and mutual understanding in shared spaces.

Museum-based Activity

- Students explore exhibition texts, labels, and audio guides available in multiple languages, paying attention to what is translated, what is left untranslated, and which audiences are implicitly addressed or excluded.
- Through a non-verbal Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) session, students are invited to observe and interpret artworks using only gestures, facial expressions, or drawing—emphasising the relational dimension of non-verbal meaning-making.

Guiding Questions

- Who is language made for in public cultural spaces? Who is left out?
- What forms of communication are available to us beyond words? What are their limits and possibilities?

Activity 4 — Storytelling and Representation

Objective

To critically examine the politics of narrative within museum spaces, encouraging students to reflect on whose voices are made visible, whose are silenced, and how storytelling shapes identity, memory, and belonging.

Museum-based Activity

- Students select an exhibit and analyse the narratives conveyed through label texts, curatorial choices, and visual display. They are invited to ask: whose perspective is represented? Whose stories are absent, marginalised, or implied but not voiced?
- Working individually or in small groups, students then draft alternative or complementary label texts that foreground underrepresented, silenced, or counter-hegemonic perspectives—drawing on empathy, imagination, and historical research where appropriate.

Guiding Questions

- What kinds of stories do museums choose to tell, and what do those choices reveal about power, identity, and cultural memory?
- In what ways can we reframe or expand these stories to make space for other voices, especially those historically excluded?

Assessment and Reflection Tools

The *Power of Words* toolkit proposes a formative and process-oriented approach to assessment, centred on continuous cycles of observation, reflection, and documentation. Rather than evaluating fixed outcomes or predefined learning objectives, the focus lies in tracing the evolution of students' thinking, emotional responses, and relational dynamics over time. This perspective aligns with the broader pedagogical ethos of the project, which prioritises dialogue, ethical engagement, and critical self-awareness.

Reflective documentation practices play a central role in this model. Teachers and museum educators are encouraged to adopt documentation practices not as tools for recording final products, but as ways of making visible the often-invisible processes of learning: the questions that emerge, the shifts in perspective, the moments of tension or recognition. These materials—ranging from student journals and voice recordings to observational notes or co-created visual maps—serve both as memory aids and as shared spaces for reflection and dialogue.

Importantly, this reflective approach fosters an evolving and relational learning process through which students can gradually develop a critical awareness of the power of words, while also nurturing empathy and mutual recognition. By engaging in ongoing reflection—both individually and collectively—students are encouraged to examine their own contributions, listen openly to the perspectives of others, and consider how language shapes relationships and social dynamics. In this way, the process supports the building of deeper connections with themselves, with their peers, and with the broader narratives that influence their lived experiences. This cyclical and collaborative mode of assessment is not conceived as a summative endpoint, but as a generative process that informs and transforms practice as it unfolds. The alternating rhythm between museum encounters and classroom-based reflection enables educators to remain attuned to students' evolving thoughts and emotions, and to adapt pedagogical strategies in response. Through regular moments of shared reflection—whether through group discussions, written journals, or

creative responses—the learning process becomes a space of co-construction, where educational practices are continuously re-examined in light of lived experience. Rather than focusing on fixed outcomes, this approach embraces complexity, values relationality, and positions assessment as a dialogic and transformative element of the programme.

Final Considerations

The Power of Words toolkit is conceived as a dynamic and ethically grounded educational framework that seeks to cultivate critical awareness of language as a powerful, ideologically charged force shaping our perceptions, relationships, and social realities. Rooted in principles of care, reflexivity, and transformative dialogue, this toolkit encourages learners to interrogate how words both reflect and reproduce systems of power, inclusion, and exclusion within cultural institutions and everyday life. Importantly, this toolkit is not tailored to any specific type of museum or institution but is designed as a flexible resource for any museum educator who wishes to foster spaces of critical dialogue and ethical engagement with language. However, its implementation requires careful consideration of the specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which it is applied. Particularly in settings marked by social inequalities, historical marginalisation, or institutional tensions, educators must remain vigilant to avoid reproducing existing power imbalances or causing unintended harm. The toolkit therefore calls for thoughtful adaptation grounded in ethical sensitivity, ongoing reflexivity, and active listening to the voices and needs of all participants.

The proposed activities emphasize the relational and situated nature of meaning-making, inviting students to engage actively with museum spaces not simply as passive recipients but as co-creators of narratives. By exploring naming practices, emotional impacts of language, intercultural communication, and storytelling politics, participants develop nuanced understandings of whose voices are amplified or silenced, and the ethical responsibilities that come with representing others. Crucially, the toolkit embraces an ongoing, process-oriented approach to assessment that privileges reflective

documentation and collaborative dialogue over fixed learning outcomes. This approach recognizes learning as a complex, evolving, and relational process, where emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions are interwoven. Through cycles of reflection—both individual and collective—students and educators cultivate empathy, critical self-awareness, and mutual recognition, fostering deeper connections to themselves, to their peers, and to the broader cultural narratives that shape their worldviews.

By alternating between immersive museum experiences and classroom-based critical reflection, the toolkit supports flexible pedagogical responses attuned to the shifting needs and insights of learners. Assessment becomes a generative and dialogic practice, integral to the educational journey rather than a conclusive measure of achievement. This aligns with a broader commitment to ethical museology and education that centers relationality, inclusivity, and social justice. Ultimately, *The Power of Words* aims to empower young people to harness language thoughtfully and responsibly—as a tool for care, resistance, and repair—within and beyond museum walls. It invites educators and institutions alike to reconsider their roles in shaping public discourse and to foster participatory spaces where diverse voices can be heard, valued, and critically engaged.

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