Introduction

This paper explores the preschool as a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) and problematises ‘the excursion’ as a key pedagogical practice in early childhood. It reports on one aspect of a much larger critical case study that has investigated young children’s induction to the practices of an art gallery. The conceptual resources used to analyse preschool practices were primarily Wenger’s (1998) framework of a community of practice and Wartofsky’s (1979) multilevel analysis of artefacts of practice. Multiple data sources for this study included photographs of children, their drawings, tape recordings of their incidental talk and discussions, and results of their play activities as well as semi-structured interviews with gallery and preschool staff. I will discuss the typical early childhood practices that were used to prepare children for and to follow up an excursion to the ‘Eye-Spy’ exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia. Children were positioned as recipients of an excursion learning experience, as ‘learners’ who could be expected to observe the art gallery and learn from the experience. However, as will be discussed below, the children were never simply recipients of this process, but also contributed to the shape this excursion took and to the nature of the gallery practices that emerged later in the preschool. Children could and did resist and realign this singular positioning as ‘learners’. In the first section of the paper I focus on one major pedagogical sequence involving the children’s use of signs in the gallery, that had unforeseen repercussions for children’s overall induction to the practices of the art gallery.

When preschool children and their teachers talk about going on an excursion, what do they mean? The excursion is a specific kind of pedagogical practice. In some ways it is one of the primary mechanisms used to bring the ‘outside world’ into the protected world of the preschool. It’s not unlike a harvesting exercise. Children and their teachers venture out of the preschool in order to gather up some worldly ‘content’ through a first hand and direct experience and then process this experience for feeding the children’s minds. What is ‘out there’ becomes something to be processed and reconstituted within the preschool. The excursion is also a particular way to visit a new place, one that takes on a character different from other kinds of visiting that young children make to new places, such as when their family visits a museum or gallery for leisure purposes. When a visit is ‘an excursion’ it becomes a different order of experience, an ‘educational’ experience.

Children involved in this study were all either 4 or 5 years old and attending a university-based preschool-child care facility on a full-time basis except for one part-time child, Tom, who joined the excursion group after another child became ill. (All names are pseudonyms.) Elsie was their preschool teacher with whom I worked, at first as an aide and later as a second teacher. The children, Tom, Bonnie, Mary, Jake, Harry, Karl and Rachel, visited the National Gallery of Australia twice, once to the children’s gallery to see the ‘Eye-Spy’ exhibition and again the following week to explore the ‘adult’s’ section of the gallery. The teachers and I planned to ‘process’ these excursions by offering a range of self-directed play activities that asked children to re-present their experience of going to the art gallery, such as drawing, painting,
talking about and making an art gallery in the preschool based on their excursion experiences. These kinds of representational activities are familiar and fundamental practices in early childhood. In order to make a gallery in the preschool the children brought objects from home, such as, a Balinese shadow puppet, a Thai elephant statue, a jump rope, and a coin embedded in plastic. They made display cases and arranged their objects on tables located in a corner of the room designated as the preschool gallery.

In order to follow my analysis of ‘the excursion’ it is important to understand some of the key conceptual resources I have used, namely the concept of ‘practice’ and of ‘artefact’. According to Wenger’s sociocultural framework learning occurs through engaging in the practices of a community. The concept of ‘practice’ is not limited to interactions between people, although these are important elements of a practice. Practices become reified or congealed into fixed and material forms (Wenger, 1998, p.55) and can be thought of as artefacts of the community. Members of a community of practice use artefacts as pivot points around which to negotiate meanings. This perspective directs our attention to children’s interactions with spaces, physical arrangements, objects, use of time, use of their bodies, as well as verbal interactions.

Over time, as they participate in practices together, people develop a joint enterprise that gives coherence to and produces sets of practices or repertoires of competence. ‘The repertoire of a community of practice includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). I have added to Wenger’s framework Wartofsky’s (1979) conceptualisation of artefacts as interpretable on three levels because of its usefulness in identifying artefacts at different levels of complexity. On the primary level an artefact is interpreted literally, like a tool to be used directly to achieve some purpose. A secondary artefact mediates meaning on a more representational level, like a symbol of something else. A tertiary level artefact can be used imaginatively, no longer bound to its ‘real world’ referent.

This preschool had developed a repertoire for ‘doing excursions’ that had become part of the competence of those who participated in its practices. For example, some of the practices that made up the repertoire for excursions included a series of preparation activities such as how children sat at the group time discussion (cross legged, tightly bunched together on the carpet), how they oriented towards the teacher (facing her as she sat at the apex of the huddle on a child-sized chair), how they gained the right to speak (by adopting the routine of ‘wriggle your finger if you want to talk’), how teachers asked questions about an excursion destination and recorded what children said in the form of a brainstorm and how children generated questions to be asked while on an excursion, to mention just a few.

Being ‘Detectives’ in an art gallery
In our orientation to the excursion Elsie and I suggested to the children that they could become the ‘investigators’ who found out about art galleries for the children who weren’t going. Our choice of words, as verbal artefacts around which we tried to coordinate our practice and negotiate the meaning of the excursion, created an unanticipated context for the excursion that persisted. This is an excerpt from the taped and transcribed discussion that occurred before the first group went on to the gallery.
Elsie - Those people who are going to the gallery, they have a special job to do. They need to be investigators! Do you know what someone who does an investigation is called? Sometimes they have a magnifying glass! What might they be called?

Karl - Tectives! (Detectives!)
Elsie - What did you say Karl? Can you say that again?
Karl - They called de-tectives.
Elsie - Have you seen detectives before?
Alan - I have.
Elsie - You have. Where have you seen one Alan?
Alan - I saw one in Sesame Street.
Elsie - And did she have a hat on. Sometimes they have a funny hat on and a magnifying glass. And what do they, why do you think they need a magnifying glass?
Jake - To look, to look, to spy on, that, footprints, that that robber have been making.
Child - (inaudible)
Elsie - That’s right. So they can look very closely and find out as much as they can, about what they see, like…? (She leaves this sentence dangling, willing the children to think about what there is to be seen at an art gallery with a magnifying glass, but no one answers for a moment).
Lyn - So you do find a lot of detectives, like Jake was saying, when there are robbers. But we’re not going to go see robbers are we?
Children - No (in chorus)
Lyn - When some of us are going to go see a gallery we need to be detectives or investigators, because we’re going to come back and tell all the people who didn’t go, what we saw and what we found out!

Our purpose in using the investigator/detective metaphor was to provide the children with a common focus for going to the art gallery and an incentive to represent their experience in some tangible way, through documenting and reporting on it. However, at this point there was little for the children to ‘hold on to’ in terms of understanding what we were trying to convey. The suggestion to ‘be detectives’ was not a very familiar idea or word to the children and therefore provided an ambiguous artefact around which to negotiate a joint meaning. From the start the word ‘detectives’ was taken up by the children in a fairly stereotypical way, a way that we teachers reinforced by linking it to cartoon notions of detectives with funny hats and magnifying glasses. However, as the conversation continued it became more and more apparent that the children were attending to the excursion to the art gallery as a site primarily for investigating robbers, a literal interpretation of the ‘detectives’ artefact. We asked the children to think about some questions that they could ask when they were in the gallery. Again, this discussion was dominated by concerns about robbers. We asked the children to think of questions that they could ask at the gallery.

Alan - What about when they find (...) and robbers?
Elsie - What? What do you want to find out? What happens when they find a .. (she is interrupted)
Alan- When somebody steals something. You might find some footprints.
Elsie- And how might you find that in an art gallery?
Alan- You might see some big footprints. (I write ‘What happens when somebody steals something?’)
Elsie- You might! Thank you Alan. Well done wriggling your finger Jake.
Jake- (inaudible)
Elsie- (Elsie repeats what he said.) Um, sometimes robbers could come and steal things from art galleries. Do you think we could find, what might there be in an art gallery too, so that people know that a robber has taken something? What might we see?
Child - They might see footprints.
Elsie - They might see footprints. What about..
Child - Or we may see trails, see trails,
Child - (inaudible)
Child - See a line of crumbs.
Elsie - See a line of crumbs. Ok .I was thinking. You know, sometimes, if people try to break into a car, what happens? Something goes, something goes off.
Child - Tire?
Elsie- Beep, beep, beep.
Child- Alarm!
Elsie- That’s right an alarm. Do you think we could find out if there might be an alarm?
Lyn- So that what Jake said, doesn’t happen!.
Elsie- Yeah. So that the robbers couldn’t take anything from the art gallery.
Lyn- So I’ll put that one down. ‘Is there an alarm?’ (I write this down.)
Karl - So that people could warn us and catch the people.
Elsie - That’s right and so they’d know something was taken.
Child - In the Bananas in Pyjamas there was (...).
Elsie - In the Bananas in Pyjamas, what did you see?
Child - They had a magnifying glass.
Elsie - They had a magnifying glass. What were they using the magnifying glass for?
Jake - For, for detective things?

Seen from a ‘communities of practice’ framework the orientation discussion was bound to be confusing because there was so little shared history of interpretation around the word ‘detective’, the notion of alarms, or to a generalized idea of an art gallery. Both children and adults apparently drew on practices derived from a diverse range of communities. Perhaps these children had participated in family and other contexts where encounters with the notion of ‘detectives’ included cartoons and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation children’s television characters ‘Bananas in Pyjamas’. As adults, our familiarity with children’s television may have been much less complete than the children’s. We did not immediately recognise as legitimate the children’s contributions to the discussion brought from these sources. However, it was
clear that participation in this preschool community of practice and engagement in the joint enterprise of ‘doing preschool’ had produced a shared repertoire among the children and the adults on which they could draw in negotiating the meanings associated with going on this excursion. The word ‘detectives’, as a new and ambiguous artefact, brought to the fore a cascade of meanings different to those we had intended, producing some intended and some unintended meanings (from the adults’ perspectives). The unpredictability apparent in this example is a characteristic of the negotiation process in any community according to Wenger (1998).

Protecting the Objects in the Gallery
In this section I have described how, after our excursion to the National Gallery, the children came to focus on issues of protection, robbery and alarms in their own preschool art gallery and how important these particular gallery practices became for them. In this way we can see how the practices of the art gallery interacted with the practices of the preschool around representing the gallery. In addition I have highlighted the impact of apparently irrelevant incidents or accidents that occurred during this time and how these appeared to have been taken up by the children in their negotiation about what matters in an art gallery.

An accident happened one day when Harry brought a large Indonesian shadow puppet for the preschool gallery. He said that it wasn’t allowed to be touched, at all, because his mother said. While I was holding it up for him to show the other children its head came off in my hands! He was very upset until I was able to put it back together again with no sign of lasting damage. This incident, accident though it was, acted as a powerful demonstration of how easily gallery objects could be broken, even when an adult touched them. This accident then, as well as parent’s cautions to their children about precious home objects going into the preschool, tended to reinforce the idea that gallery objects need protection.

After this discussion we told the children about the table activities that were available. We suggested that some children might like to do a painting for the gallery and had set up a table for this purpose. Jake, Tom, and Karl chose to work at the painting table. However, instead of making paintings to go in the art gallery they made signs you see below.

![Figure 1 - No eating! Because you might leak crumbs](image1)
![Figure 2- No breaking](image2)
Figure 3- No guns, no smoking, no drinking water

Figure 4- No soccer balls, no lipstick

Figure 5- No drinking, no eating, no lunchbox and no roller skates (sic)

Figure 6 – No skateboards (sic), no paint and no throwing toy whales

Figure 7- No touching

Figure 8- No guns

Figure 9- Emergency!
Push button to get firemen.

Figure 10 – Harry’s sign
In some cases the words on these signs were dictated to a teacher who wrote what the children indicated and in some cases the children wrote or copied the words themselves. I show all the signs to illustrate the range of ‘don’ts’ that emerged in their discussions.

I asked the children where the signs should go and one child indicated that they should be put on the front of the preschool gallery on a refrigerator box that made a wall at the front of the gallery, not unlike the counter that formed the front of the cloakroom in the foyer of the National Gallery. Figure 11 is a photograph of the gallery after we had put up the signs.

Figure 11 – Gallery with signs posted

I chose this photograph to show the prominence children gave to their signs in the preschool art gallery.

One of the practices in the National Gallery to which children apparently paid close attention was the handing over of our things to the security guard in the cloakroom. They looked closely at and talked about the sign on the counter (Figure 12) illustrating those items we were not allowed to bring into the gallery.
Figure 12 - ‘Don’t’ signs in National Gallery

Context Information:
I took this photograph after our first visit when I realised from listening to the children’s taped discussions that they had paid close attention to it.

The silhouettes on this sign were iconic representations of the objects that were not allowed to be brought into the gallery. This artefact of practice obviously ‘stood out’ for the children. They tried to point out at the time that we had brought a number of the items that were prohibited, like my suitcase for carrying the tape recorders and an umbrella, showing that they had no trouble recognising that this sign was directed towards us as visitors. We adults were preoccupied with other things at the time and barely registered the children’s concern. In Wartofsky’s (1979) terms, this sign and its purpose for guiding practice in the gallery could be accessed on both a primary and secondary level, literally and symbolically. The children were able to ‘read’ it because it was a set of visual rather than word symbols and so accessible to non-readers. In addition we enacted the meaning of the symbols as I handed in the forbidden items. This sign, as an explicit statement of rules, was particularly salient to the children.

Wenger (1998) makes the point that, although they are rarely stated this explicitly, the rules of behaviour in any community of practice become apparent to outsiders because they are embodied in so many of its practices. Some examples of how these rules of behaviour were embodied in many ways in the gallery could be seen through the children’s practices in the gallery. For instance, when we were in the children’s gallery as part of my research I took photographs with the flash on, being careful, as I had been asked, not to take pictures of the artworks themselves. At one point a security guard came into the children’s gallery to see what was happening. Harry came up to me immediately after the guard left and said in a worried tone, ‘No Flashes Lyn!’ showing that although he had not mentioned the camera in the earlier conversation about the sign, he had certainly noticed it. I explained that I had permission to use the flash in the children’s gallery and he was placated.

In the adult’s section, the children ran into some of the more implicit rules of the gallery, such as not touching anything, being quiet, and moving slowly. They encountered these rules over and over when they behaved as novices and frequently needed reminders as they transgressed rules. Their whispering, their cautious approach to exhibits, and their frequent awe-infused references to the fact that they were now ‘in the adults’ gallery’ signalled that they felt their outsider status and registered the presence of these rules. Another incident occurred when I was explaining how the alarms worked in the adult’s gallery and Mary interrupted me to say in a serious tone of voice, ‘We’re in the adult’s section!’ On another occasion I inadvertently set off the alarm as my hand passed through a sensor under an Aboriginal artwork dangling from the ceiling. Bonnie and Rachel who were with me gasped in dismay. When a guard entered the room to see who had set off the alarm they literally huddled up closer to me. Overall, what the children seemed to pay most attention to in the gallery was what they were allowed and not allowed to do. Therefore perhaps it is not surprising that rules of behaviour became one of the key practices that they reproduced for their own gallery in the preschool.
It is interesting to look at the range of prohibitions that children chose to signpost in their own art gallery. This too showed an interaction of practices. All the sign makers in this group were boys. We can see that they reproduced the conventional gallery related prohibition on touching in Figure 7. We could surmise that ‘no skateboards’, ‘no roller skates’ (Figures 5 & 6), ‘no smoking’ (Figure 3), ‘no drinking’ and ‘no eating’ (Figures 1, 3, & 5) are the kinds of ‘don’ts’ associated with many public spaces that children may have experienced. The signs suggesting ‘No guns’ (Figures 3 & 8), ‘no soccer balls’ and ‘no lipstick’ (Figure 4), and ‘no throwing toy whales’ (Figure 6) seem to be taking the ‘don’ts’ into a more imaginary realm. Wartofsky (1979) might explain this as a tertiary level use of the sign artefact. From this perspective children incorporated and then took the meaning of the sign beyond it’s real world referent and started playing with the idea of ‘don’ts’ in imaginative ways. Of course, an alternative interpretation is that these ‘don’ts’ reflect some ‘real world’ rules that children may have actually experienced. I have no way of knowing this. I do recall one of our pre-visit discussions about the gallery’s rules where one child mentioned guns. The need to not ‘leak crumbs’ (Figure 1) also came up in our group discussion. It could be that these previous discussions also contributed to and guided the boys in their sign making.

The signs for the fire alarm button (Figures 9) and the sign inviting visitors to ‘Please eat and drink here’ (Figure 10) were both made by Harry. I can trace this sign to another chance occurrence. When we were in the gallery on one of our first visits we asked the guard whether we could eat our morning tea on the bench in the foyer because it was a very rainy and cold day outside. The guard said ‘no’ and suggested that we went down to the café. We did not want to have to deal with refusing to buy the children the more appealing food that we knew we would find there, and that we suspected the children would prefer to the dry biscuits we had brought with us, so we took them to the bus to eat. We had started eating when Harry suddenly shouted, ‘Oooh. Look! Lyn! It says no eating!’ He was pointing at the sign on the window of the bus, which was very similar to the gallery sign with a cigarette, a milkshake and a hamburger, each within the red circle with a line through it. I jokingly responded, ‘Oh, it’s ok Harry. We’re not eating hamburgers!’ He looked at me with an exasperated expression on his face and said, ‘No Lyn. That MEANS no eating ANYTHING!’ The issue of where we could eat and the need to give permission for eating may have become important to him because of this incident. This is a particularly interesting example of the way the children pulled in seemingly irrelevant or tangential incidents to make them part of what mattered in coming to understand practices in an art gallery.

The concern for gallery rules and attention to the signs was not limited exclusively to the boys in the group. On the same day that the boys painted their signs Bonnie made this sign (Figure 13).
Context Information:
Bonnie apparently decided to make this sign for the preschool gallery on her own. She brought it to one of the adults and asked that the words be written on it and that it be put in the gallery.

Like the other children she also seemed to incorporate a range of ‘don’ts’, some from the gallery (no bags), some from the excursion bus (no hamburgers and no drinks) and some from other places and times (no keys and no guns). The teacher wrote down what she said.

Negotiating within a Mix of Practices
From our adult’s perspective, much of what emerged during the excursion and in follow up activities seemed to be incidental and peripheral to the core business of our planned curriculum which was to represent the art gallery. Children hardly focused at all on representing ‘artwork’ or on enacting the practices of ‘display’ as we had anticipated. They became much more involved in making signs and talking about rules. The topic of robbers continued to be a feature of our conversations about the gallery. As I pondered this situation I recalled another seemingly irrelevant incident that had occurred the day after children set up their gallery. We arrived at the preschool to find that some early arriving younger children in the preschool had deconstructed the preschool art gallery. These two- and three-year-olds had quietly stacked up all of the display cases and art objects under a table in the corner of the children’s art gallery without their caregivers noticing what they were doing.

Context Information:
As Bonnie, Rachel and I stood looking at the devastation of the gallery these two-year-olds carried on with their investigations oblivious to our presence. I reached for my camera and took this picture.

Bonnie and Rachel arrived at the preschool at the same time as I did. For a moment we all just stood in dismay to find the gallery in such a state. Finally I spoke, saying, ‘The (younger
children) don’t understand about art galleries.’ Then we put the gallery back together again. I turned on my tape recorder to tape the discussion we had. Harry arrived and came to observe. He found my shoebox display case and put the beads I had brought in for the gallery back inside their case. Here is an excerpt from the tape where Harry pointed out to me how inadequate our gallery was in terms of security. He was holding my display case.

Harry - Lyn, Lyn, well someone could break that with their fist, like that. (He demonstrates punching the air in front of the plastic window of my display case to show how easy it would be to break it.)

Lyn - Yes, they could! But why would anyone do that?

Harry - Well, but,… if robbers came, they could just go… BANG!

Lyn - That’s true, but why would robbers come to take it?

Harry - Well… That would be… rare.

Lyn - You think it’s a bit rare, and that’s why they might want it? Remember we were talking about the security guards at the university?

Harry - And we could, and, and we could have a water pistol. (pointing to the ceiling).

Harry seemed to have taken up the notion that art galleries were places where rare objects were kept and that this made them targets for robbers. He was not reassured by my reference to the security guards who patrolled the university and who would, therefore, look after our gallery. He wanted more security, such as a water pistol on the ceiling. Later that day he returned to the issue of security. He asked me whether the university security guards would come on the weekends and I assured him that they did. He then took me over to our make shift gallery wall, a cardboard box lashed to a table with rope. He said, ‘Watch this’ and proceeded to show me how easily the rope could be undone. I responded by tying it back up again with a stronger knot, which he promptly undid. We went through three cycles before I finally said that I could see what he meant. The gallery could be broken very easily but we would all just have to be careful of it.

Harry continued to be concerned that our gallery was not properly secured. During the activity time he made this paper construction (Figure 15) and told us that it was a ‘chair for the guard to sit in’. Later he made some guards (Figure 16) and told us that they should be hung up in the gallery as well.
As a result of the incident in the gallery earlier in the day we had this conversation at group time with both the younger and older children.

_Elsie_ - It is an art gallery that we’ve made. And this art gallery, we thought we’d just remind people about some of the rules to do with art galleries. It’s a special art gallery where people have brought special things

_Jake_ - It’s good that I put up my signs!
Elsie - Yes, it is Jake. I was just going to say Jake, those signs they’re helpful, aren’t they. They’re reminding people of what we do in galleries and (what) we do not do in galleries. And some people brought in very special things from their houses and they want people to really look after them so people can look at them. So can you think of some things that we want people, that we might need to remember to do when we’re in the gallery?

Jake - Could we do some more painting, some more signs?

Elsie - Yes we could do that.

Tom - Because we could do it for other people so that they know that you can’t just touch something.

Elsie - That’s right Tom. Did you hear what Tom said everyone? We can remind people, with the signs, not to touch some of the things. Some people said you can touch some of their special things.

Lyn - That was Alan.

Elsie - That was Alan.

Tom - Alan said you can touch his stuff. Yeah, because it was hard plastic and no one can break it.

Lyn - But my beads are very special. Also, when Harry brought in his special puppet, remember when I picked it up, being so careful and I, and I picked it up, and what happened?

Harry - Broke it. (very sad voice)

Lyn - The head came off? It was so fragile. But we were able to put it back together. It wasn’t really broken but it was very ...fragile...delicate.

I have interpreted the children’s concern for security in our preschool art gallery as an interaction of practices between different communities. On the one hand it reflects our first discussion in the preschool about ‘being detectives’ on our excursion to the National Gallery. On the other hand it also reflects a key practice that apparently ‘leapt out’ for the children in the National Gallery, the practice of making art objects secure, through alarms, glass protection, rules and guards. This interaction of practices was not something that the teachers or I could have predicted or controlled. The forms that the children’s gallery-related practices took and the ways they continued to develop over the term of this project exemplify for me the dynamic, productive and continuously emergent nature of learning through practice. There are multiple and often-contradictory things going on in any community of practice, even within this preschool. In Wenger’s (1998) framework this is explained by the interaction of multiple communities that were always present within the identities of the people participating in the community. As such, any community of practice is a hybrid space for the intersection of multiple practices and meanings of practices.

One example highlighted in this paper was the gallery practice associated with rules, both those explicitly signposted and those implicitly encountered. To these practices the children apparently brought a range of other practices related to rules, from other experiences and communities encountered in and beyond the actual gallery visit. We can see this in their determined focus on rules, their forms and their uses. Children drew on these meanings in negotiating two kinds of rules, rules about what could and what could not be touched and what could and what could not be done in an art gallery.
Harry made a sign indicating where you could eat and another child’s insistence that his plastic dinosaur could be touched, showed this awareness. The sheer production line approach to making signs and the creation of such a diversity of ‘don’t’ signs showed that rules were of key concern and particularly prominent in the children’s enactment of gallery practices. We adults did not intend to emphasise rules nor did we suggest to children that they should make signs for their gallery. In fact, the activity that generated most of the signs was designed for another purpose, for making paintings for the gallery. Although we had seen and talked about many paintings in the gallery the children never painted any paintings for their own gallery; they painted signs telling people what to do and not to do.

Conclusion - Multiple Practices: Hybrid Communities

This paper has investigated ‘the excursion’ from within a community of practice framework highlighting the process of negotiation of gallery practices within the context of the preschool practice. For me this view of excursions challenges some fundamental early childhood assumptions about young children and how they learn. When children are understood as belonging to multiple communities of practice they can be seen as having access to multiple resources in the form of practices and discourses used in the various communities in which they participate.

Chance occurrences, or what I have referred to as accidents or incidents, happen in the course of any series of planned educational experiences. They cannot be anticipated or controlled. These unanticipated events turned out to be rather more important in building the group’s knowledge than we realised and became pivotal resources that children used in making connections between experiences. What I became more and more aware of was how the children linked up these ‘accidents’ or chance occurrences, connecting up the ‘here and now’ of the preschool world to the world beyond the preschool.

It is clear that children were never passively representing knowledge gained through their excursion. They were trying to sort out what practices were key to this new community by enacting them. This occurred through a kind of negotiation about what one does in an art gallery. They did not choose just any practices, but rather those that ‘stood out’. We can reflect on how young children, probably more than almost any other age group, are constantly being regulated by rules, made by other people, no matter where they go or what they do. We should not be surprised then that rules turned out to be one of the most salient aspects of the gallery to these children. Making sense of the world ‘out there’, an art gallery in this case, can be seen as mediated within this wider social context. No one child or adult directed or determined how the focus around rules in the gallery emerged. Rather, it unfolded gradually and gained momentum through a process of ongoing negotiation. Having to eat morning tea in the bus in the glare of signs prohibiting such actions, finding the preschool gallery destroyed by the younger children, my inadvertent breaking of the puppet and so on were not part of any sequence of planned ‘learning experiences’ for understanding an art gallery, but, nevertheless, became pivotal incidents in directing children’s attention, once again, towards rules. For these children the art gallery came be more about its rules than perhaps any of its other practices. This was clearly a profoundly social and dynamic process, productive and discursive in nature and drawing on a complex history of practices that included those outside and beyond the current situation as well as those within it. The learning that occurred through this excursion was not a result of simply being exposed to an art gallery and then representing that experience in a direct and uncomplicated way back in the preschool. Rather the learning process seemed to be more about negotiating and
contesting what counted as worth paying attention to in the gallery, in other words, what counted as knowledge worth drawing into the negotiation.

References: