
**Children's
Construction of National Identity
and Museum Education
in Cyprus**

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Structure of Presentation

1. Background information - Context
 2. Reasons for conducting research
 3. Theoretical background
 4. Preliminary findings
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- The Republic of Cyprus is a member of EU
 - Cyprus is close to reaching a solution to the Cyprus problem

Time-frame: Vital to the future of the **island** for:

- it engages the perception of national identity of every Cypriot and
 - it prepares its people for new challenges.
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As a primary school teacher and a museum educator:

- **I experienced first hand difficulties and tensions inherent in:**
 - the history curriculum;
 - the way museums are used;
 - the political situation in Cyprus.
 - **I increasingly felt the need to reflect upon my professional practices, since it was unclear to me:**
 - what kind of 'history' I taught;
 - what sort of power structures were implicated in my work;
 - what role did the museum play in the construction of national identity.
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**The relationship between
museums, history
and the
construction of national
identity
is considered through
three inter-related themes:**

1. The history and politics of two particular museums and the intentions of the Ministries' policies

The two museums are:

- The Cyprus Archaeological Museum
- The Museum of Struggle

■ [Both museums are in the South]

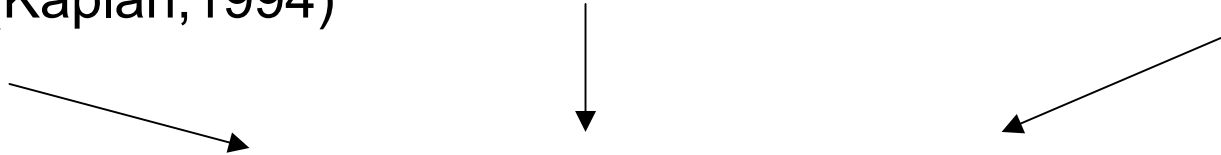
2. The role of mediators (museum educators, curators and directors; teachers and school inspectors) **in both enabling and constraining children's museum experience.**

3. The museum experience and children's constructions of national identity.

Nations, museums and the construction of national identity

- The nation as an imagined political community, consists of a group of people who will never know nor meet one another yet share the belief that they all belong to the same community. (Anderson, 1983)
 - National identity is a culturally constructed category, and nation is not only a political entity but also something that produces meanings - a system of representations. (Hall, 1997)
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- The rise of nationalism and the urge to project on exhibits a sense of national identity led to a proliferation of museums. (Kaplan, 1994)



- A museum, particularly a national or a war museum, is the **storehouse of a nation's culture** that associates the past with the present and future through unfolding narratives of heritage.

However, narratives are not imposed uncritically on the individual.

The past is encountered in museums
through its material relics,

however

constructing interpretations of the past relies on
connecting what is **visually experienced**

to

ideas and preconceptions

brought **into** the museum,

which are representative

of the **individual's identity**.

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- We do not construct our national identities in isolation but against a backdrop of **shared understandings, practices, language and representations.**

As this is so, then...

What is the role of the
historical and socio-cultural context in
children's construction of national identity?

Cognitive developmental approaches

Children's identity development is driven by deeper underlying **cognitive developmental changes**...

- changes that occur to the way in which children are able to conceptualise and reason about the social world.

(e.g. Piaget & Weil, 1951; Aboud, 1988)

Socialisation theories

Children's identity development is driven by influences from children's **social environment** especially parents, schooling and the mass media.

(see for example: Spencer, 1988; Emler, Ohana and Dickinson, 1990; Cross, 1991; Sheets, 1999)

**Is the study
of national identity
in children
therefore polarised?**

Complementary approaches:

- Recognise a need to consider both
 - the ways in which children are able to **conceptualise the world at different ages**
 - the **social influences** that operate in that conceptualisation.
- **Barrett** drawing from both cognitive developmental approaches and socialisation theories, sees national identity as consisting of affective and cognitive components.

(Barrett et al., 1990; Barrett, 1993, Barrett et al, 1994, 1995; Barrett, et al., 2002)

Sociocultural theories of development

- Articulate the construction process of both identity and meaning.
 - Attempt to bridge macro-structural and micro-cultural constraints.
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Sociocultural context of museums

“The contexts in which museum visitors operate are not static, pre-existing configurations. Rather, they are **constantly changing** and are actively **constructed** and **transformed** by those **participating in** them...

... yet, museum exhibitions act both to ‘**afford**’ and ‘**constrain**’ certain interpretations.

The dynamics of this process mean that, even though museum visitors may not interpret objects in the way that museum people had intended, **the setting** nonetheless fundamentally **shapes their activities**”.

(Rowe, 2002: 116)

Some preliminary findings



Fieldwork:

October 2003 - March 2004

My preliminary findings, based on a quasi-experimental design, come from the analysis of:

- Drawings made during the museum visit
- Narratives/stories written before and after the museum visit
- Questionnaires completed before and after the museum visit
- Focus Group Interviews before and after the museum visit

548 children participated:

9-10 year old Greek-Cypriot children from 15 primary schools in urban and rural areas of Nicosia (including schools serving refugee accommodation).

Findings from Questionnaires

(before the visit)

- The majority of children identified most strongly with **Cypriot identity** reporting that they felt very happy for being Cypriots and that this was very important to them.
- Their Greek-Cypriot identity was placed second, followed by their European identity. The strength of identification with **Greek identity was the weakest.**

No significant difference between children's feelings on Greeks and Greek Cypriots (a blurred picture)...

Who is Greek-Cypriot?

- 'The person who was born in Cyprus/Greece but lives in Greece/Cyprus';
- 'The person who has one Greek parent and one Cypriot';
- 'The person who has Greek parents but was born in Cyprus';
- 'A person who speaks both Greek (civilised language) and Cypriot (χωρκάτικα: peasants' language)'.

Stereotypes and Attitudes towards ethnic groups

Children have:

- **The most positive feelings, and attribute the most positive characteristics** towards what they consider as their in-group, that is Cypriots;
 - Positive feelings/ attitude/stereotypes towards Greek-Cypriots and Greeks;
 - A negative attitude, and attribute negative characteristics towards what they consider as their out-groups: Turks, Turkish Cypriots, and English.
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The scores for each group differ from the other group:

⇒ Children distinguish between the three out-groups.

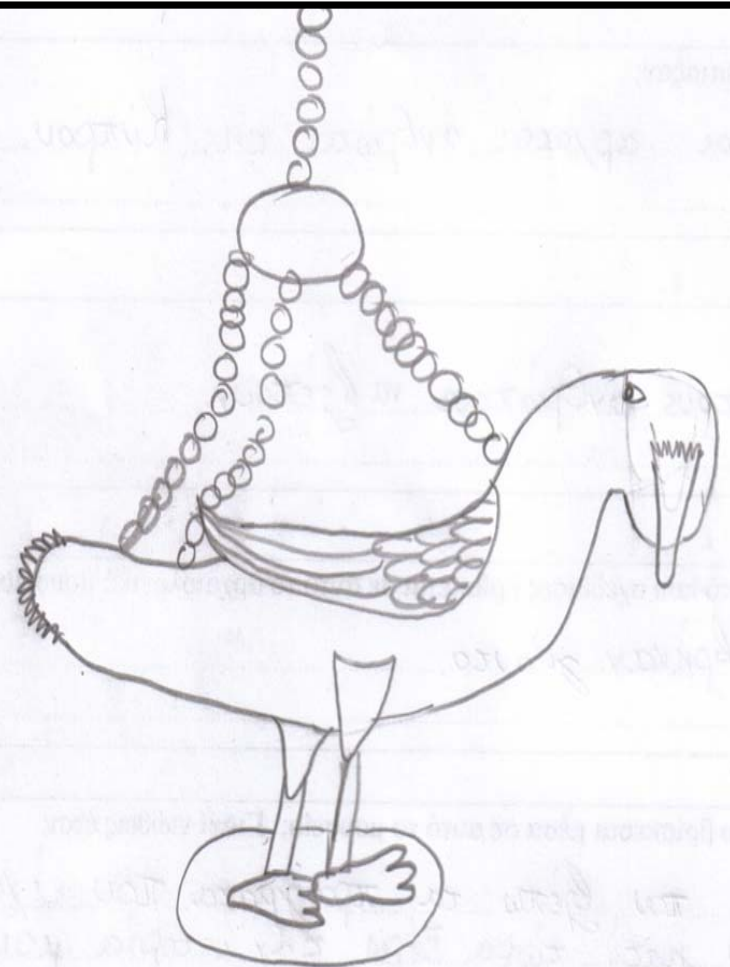
⇒ Particularly, they have more positive feelings towards, and attribute more positive characteristics to Turkish Cypriots.

Σχεδιάσε προσεκτικά κάτι που σε εντυπωσίασε περισσότερο.

Μόλις τελειώσεις το σχέδιό σου, μπορείς να απαντήσεις τις ερωτήσεις στο πίσω μέρος του φυλλαδίου.

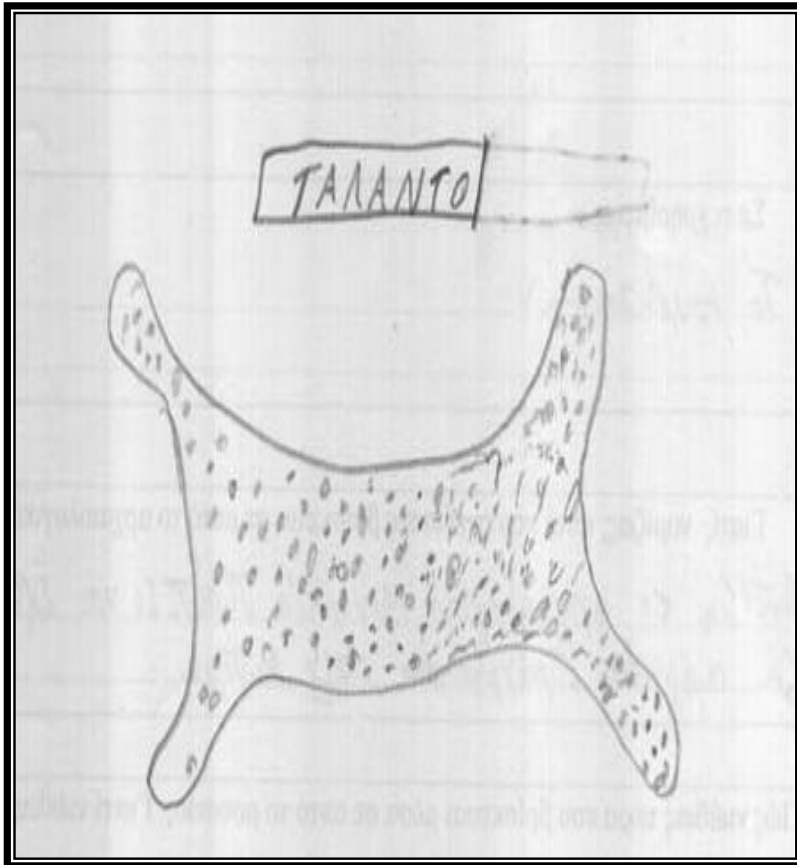


Michalis

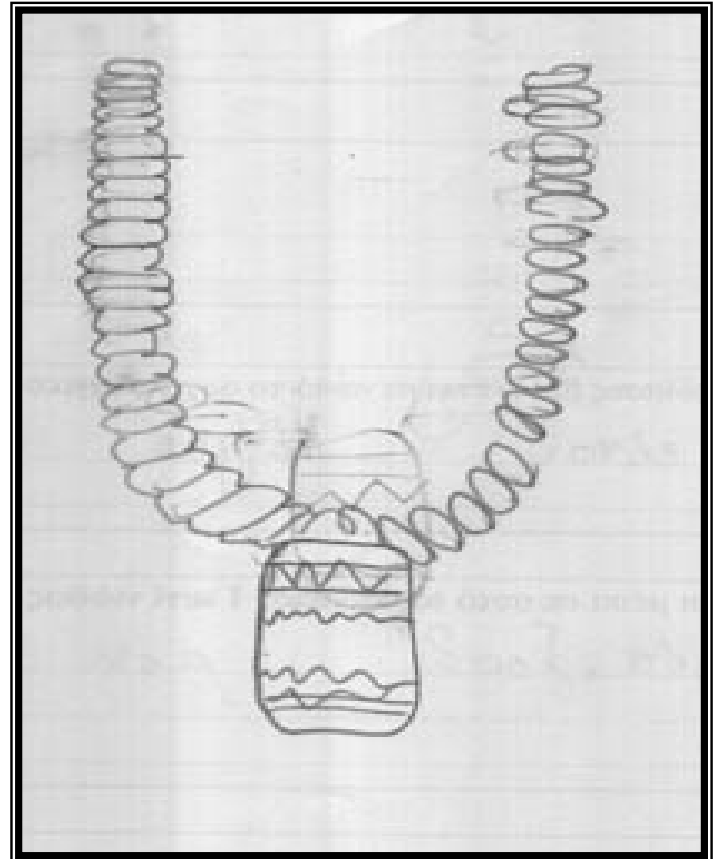


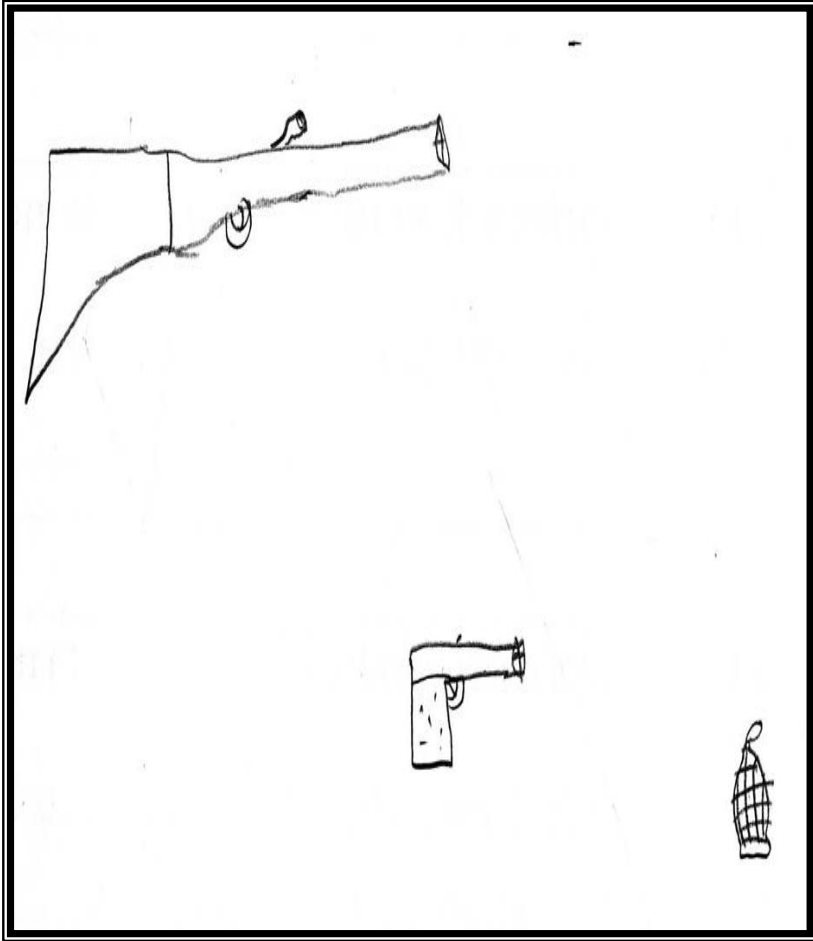
Irini

Manolis



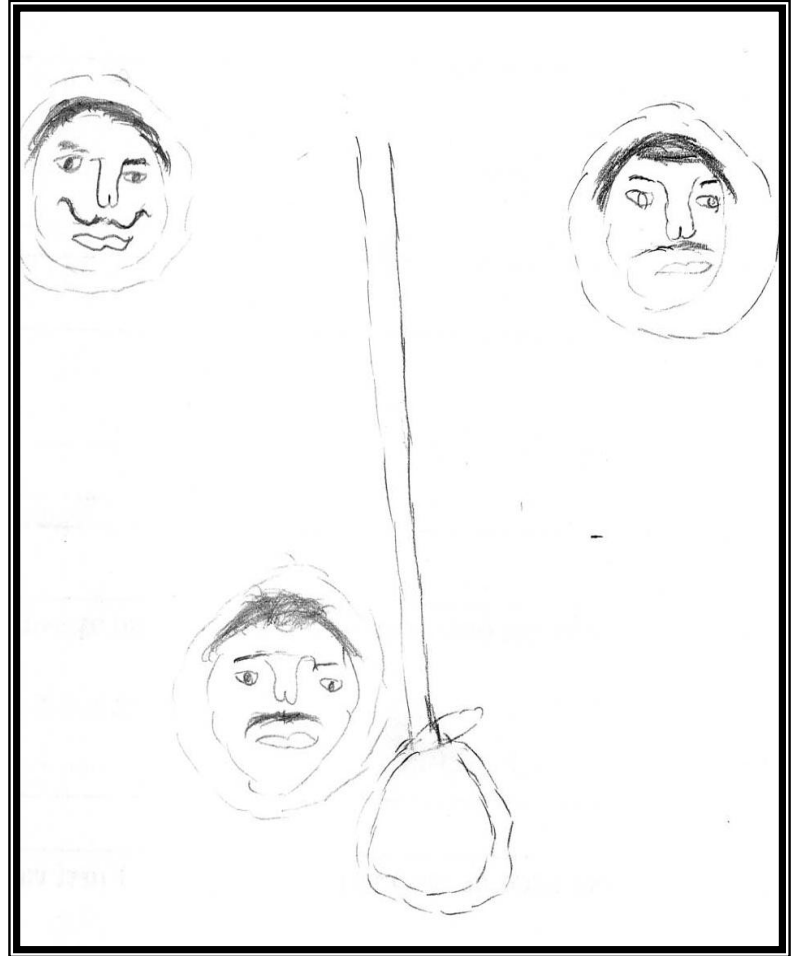
Dimitris

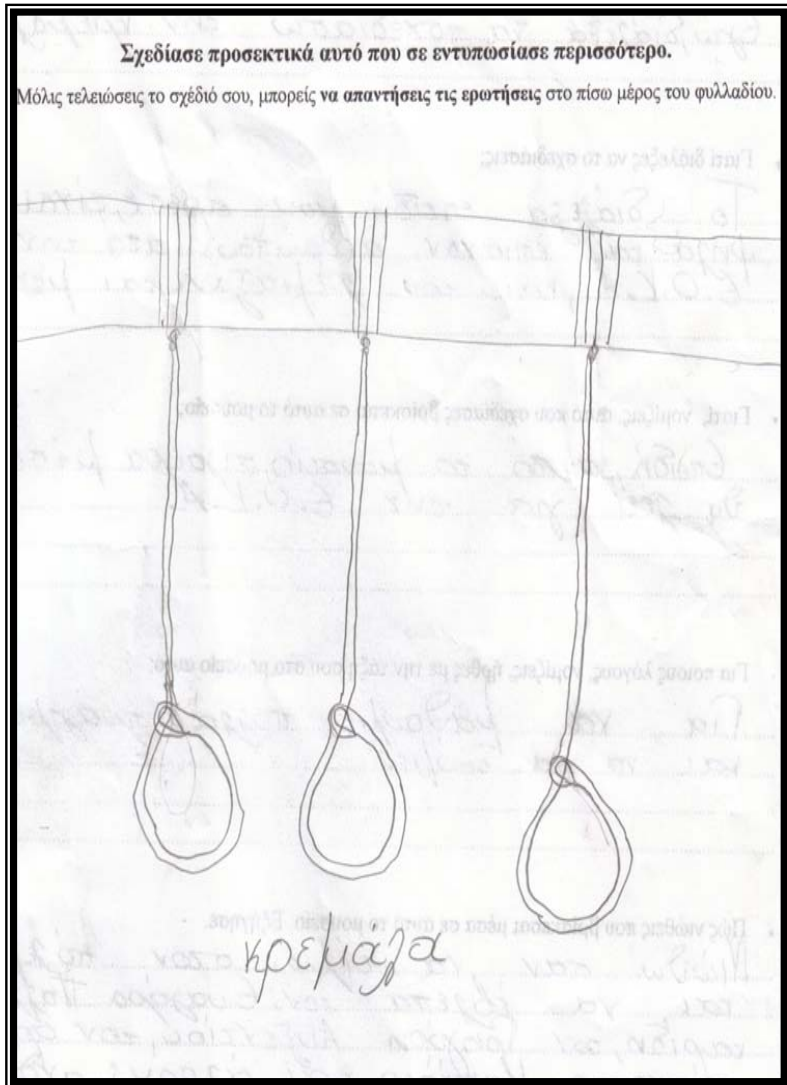




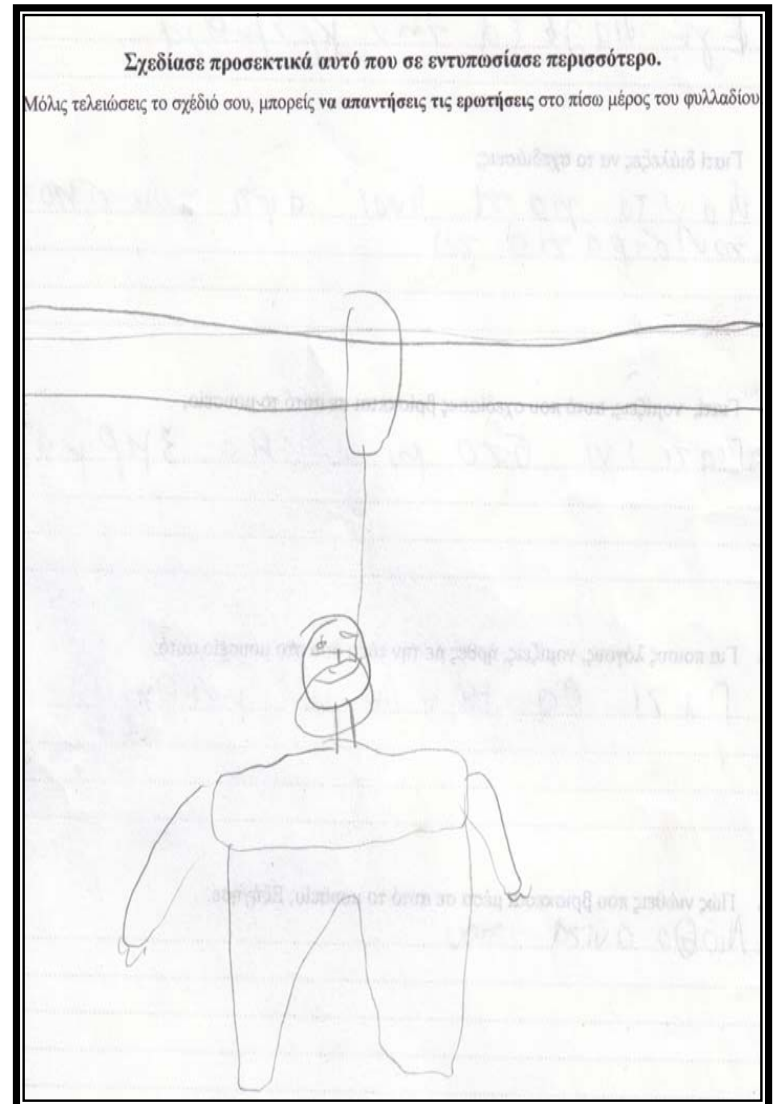
Andreas

Elena





Maria



Stefanos

**Did the visits to the two museums
have any effect on children's national
identifications and stereotypes about
relevant national groups?**

**Preliminary Findings from Questionnaires
(Comparisons between the two museums
after the visits)**

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- The Archaeological Museum experience:
 - **decreased** negative stereotyping regarding English, Cypriots and – marginally – Greeks;
 - **increased** the degree of internalisation of **Cypriot** identity and the degree of identification with **European** identity.

 - The Museum of Struggle experience:
 - increased the already negative picture towards English and Turks.
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Findings from Narratives

- Differences were found both within and between responses to the two museums.
- As expected, children who visited the **Archaeological Museum** appropriated information on **copper** and **ancient daily life** significantly more than the children who went to the Museum of Struggle.
- Children who visited the **Museum of Struggle** showed an appropriation of information directly relevant to **Heroes of the EOKA Struggle** as well as the **mythical formation of Cyprus**.

Pre - visit narrative

Museum of Struggle

My homeland is Cyprus. It is a **pretty** island! In the very old times Cyprus was **enslaved by** English. It is 1956. A few years ago our Cyprus was **enslaved by** the English; it was Turks who **gave our Cyprus** to English. Also, now Cyprus is **enslaved by** the Turks, our **pretty island is sought after** them. So, I wish Cyprus to become **free** and enter **Europe!**

(Girl from urban school, 506/529, Date: 8/3/2004)

Post - visit narrative

Museum of Struggle

My homeland is Cyprus. My homeland is pretty! In the old times, in 1956 Turks **didn't need Cyprus** as much, thus English **bought it**. After 1955, Greek-Cypriots had once again war against the English. With Makarios and Grivas Digenis as leaders. Then something happened and Turks **attacked us**. This is my homeland, **pretty** Cyprus. Also, the towns of Cyprus are 6.

(Girl from urban school, 506/529, Date: 10/3/2004)

- Should children visit museums? Why?
 - What kind of citizens do we want our children to grow up to be?
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- Do we want children:
 - To comply to an account *or* question accounts?
 - To conform to a particular perspective *or* come to grips with multiperspectivity ?
 - To learn how to sympathise *or* empathise?
 - To memorise 'significant' historical events *or* evaluate historical significance?
 - To obediently recount the 'official' interpretation *or* construct their own interpretations through disciplined argument and debate?
 - Do we want a monological or a dialogical approach to the history of the Cyprus?
 - Do we want to promote tolerance, justice, peace, human rights?
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- **THANK YOU!**
 - **Teşekkür ederim**
 - **Efharisto**
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