Is it real? Children’s understanding of museum taxidermy and implications for education

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This talk presents preliminary data from a project conducted with the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. The aim of the research is to determine how children perceive museum taxidermy - as real and valuable artefacts for learning or as man-made objects for display or entertainment? Understanding taxidermy from a psychological development perspective is particularly complex because it can be judged as both real (an authentic animal) and not real (not alive). The full project will test 90 children aged 4-10 years to find out how they perceive a taxidermy animal (e.g. a rabbit), and whether comparing it to a toy one helps them understand the significance of the taxidermy. Real authentic artefacts are thought to 'speak' in ways that replicas do not, thus the findings of this project will help us understand how to increase children's appreciation of the real nature of taxidermy to improve their museum learning experience.