MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MUSEUM VISIT

Resource for early childhood teachers
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Visiting museums and art galleries, or any trip outside the early childhood setting, can provide exciting learning opportunities for children, families and teachers.

Our Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) projects with Tai Tamariki Kindergarten have helped us develop ideas about how museums can provide rich learning for children and teachers in particular. We have designed and trialled this resource with an early childhood centre not located in a museum in order to make it as useful as possible for both early childhood centres and schools.

We know that different settings have different policies around excursions and managing trips, but we hope this resource has taken account of a variety of contexts and offers useful suggestions. In our discussions with a variety of early childhood teachers, it appears that the most meaningful learning from excursions occurs in small groups with children who are interested in something in particular. Many early childhood settings are thinking about ways in which they can extend children’s interests through visits to museums, galleries, farms, marae, bushwalks etc and how this can be achieved with small groups.

We think that the principles outlined in the resource, such as: getting ready, being there, making meaning, and children teaching their families/others are transferrable across a range of learning experiences outside the setting.

In the following pages we outline three significant conclusions from four years of research with the children, teachers and families at Tai Tamariki Kindergarten.

Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips and Margaret Carr, University of Waikato
1. MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERIES PROVIDE RICH OPPORTUNITIES FOR MAKING MEANING, GROWING KNOWLEDGE AND STRENGTHENING IMAGINATIVE CAPACITIES. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT CHILDREN’S LEARNING IN MUSEUMS CHECK OUT THE REFERENCES AND LINKS BELOW.

2. LEARNING FROM MUSEUMS IS MAXIMISED THROUGH:
- RESPONSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS,
- RICH CONVERSATIONS AND DIALOGUE WITH OTHER CHILDREN AND ADULTS, BOUNDARY OBJECTS OR ‘CROSSERS’.

RESPONSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- Joint decision-making between children and adults
- Co-constructing understanding
- A variety of open-ended resources are readily available and accessible
- Children can choose their level of involvement
- Resources invite exploration and collaboration
- Children have uninterrupted time to complete projects
- Teachers recognise learning opportunities
There is a great deal of research that highlights the importance of sustained and meaningful conversations for enriching learning.

Teachers have multiple opportunities everyday to engage in dialogue with children and listen attentively which enables a deep knowledge of individual children.

Taking children outside the early childhood setting opens up opportunities for dialogue about different things.

Boundary objects or boundary ‘crossers’ are tangible and abstract things that connect one place with another, i.e. the early childhood setting and the museum. Boundary objects that the teachers at Tai Tamariki have used to help children to make connections between the kindergarten and the museum, revisit their learning, re-contextualise and make meaning are:

- laminated photographs of a particular exhibition placed around the kindergarten (such as the art area),
- non-fiction resource books,
- models of objects similar to those in the exhibition,
- sketchbooks for children to make observational drawings while visiting an exhibition,
- small individual laminated flipbooks of artefacts and aspects of an exhibition that the child was interested in accompanied by words or story from the child,
- learning stories that document children’s learning.
Our research has also reinforced for us the value of children learning skills associated with art. Although it may be that early childhood teachers have been encouraged to take a ‘hands off’ approach to ‘doing art’ for children, teaching or modelling art techniques to children as well as providing opportunities for appreciating art are as important as children learning the syntax and grammar of language. Children need to have opportunities to learn about different media used by artists to convey ideas, alongside the elements, principles and language of art. Acquiring these skills and knowledge will enhance children’s creative abilities and ways of expressing themselves.

If teachers are not confident and knowledgeable themselves about different art processes then there is the opportunity to explore and discover with children to co-construct learning. We have experienced the teachers and children at Tai Tamariki learning and experimenting with different media as they have explored a range of creative arts and we would encourage teachers and children in other centres to use their 100 languages for creative expression.

REFERENCES.


GETTING READY
A TEACHER VISIT

Ensure you think about how you will manage taking children to the toilet while you are there and where you might eat if you are intending to have a ‘food stop’ during your excursion.

Teachers visit chosen exhibition or collection. Take photos if possible.

Determine how much and what kind of information is available at museum about the collection or exhibition.

Back at the centre use photos and information from exhibition or internet to make a laminated book for talking with children about the artifacts.

Find out what specific protocols and rules apply to the exhibition or collection.

ENSURE YOU THINK ABOUT HOW YOU WILL MANAGE TAKING CHILDREN TO THE TOILET WHILE YOU ARE THERE AND WHERE YOU MIGHT EAT IF YOU ARE INTENDING TO HAVE A ‘FOOD STOP’ DURING YOUR EXCURSION.
HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Make a laminated book using photos taken on pre-trip or from the internet.
- Have any other resources available for conversations with children.

eg. storybooks, non-fiction books, puzzles, laminated photos etc. of similar or same objects/artefacts as exhibition or collection.

“I took photos at the exhibition and got some from the web to make the book – the creatures in the exhibition are all white because they are dead.”
GETTING READY
TEACHING AND LEARNING THE RULES

Use quiet voices and walking feet

Look after each other like holding hands

You get everything you need to know from the signs. You can look for some signs – don’t touch or here’s the toilet

There are some places where it’s okay to touch and some places where it is not okay

Sometimes we are allowed to take photos but not really all the time
**PRACTISING**

Clipboards and paper with a pencil attached are a useful tool for children to draw their favourite object and artefact.

If children are not familiar with observational drawings, introducing this strategy and practising it at the centre before the museum visit will be helpful.

Make flip books of photos of museum entrance etc for children to look at and become familiar with what they will see.
BEING THERE DURING THE VISIT...

Audio record conversations if possible, or take note of what children say.

Encourage children to draw favourite artefacts or objects.

CONVERSATIONAL STRATEGIES

- Using open-ended questions
- Asking for clarification
  - where, where, which one?
  - I wonder if/how/what etc?
- Expressing own surprise at the exhibit
- Responding to a child’s question with an explanation
- Admitting uncertainty
- Asking for recall: who can remember…?
- Encouraging possible stories and explanations
- Modelling expressing an emotional response
MAKING MEANING
AFTER THE VISIT…

Display photos on centre wall of:

- Exhibit
- Children at the museum
- Children’s drawings

Provide reference books and artefacts for prompts for conversations and representation

Provide multi-modal resources for children to represent and create their own artefacts

Provide opportunities for children to rework their drawings

Write Learning Stories – children may dictate these

Use flip books for recall and further interests. Ask children what they would tell others about the visit and their interests
CHILDREN AS TEACHERS: FAMILIES AS LEARNERS

- Continue to build on children’s interests. Visit museum again if possible.
- Invite whānau to visit museum and let their child be the guide.
- Ask children and families about their second visit. Write Learning Stories about child as guide or teacher.
- Make flip books based on children’s interests to go home with families.