

At The DAM Door

- Observed moms and toddlers
- Experimented with drop in program, Create Playdate
- Big success (still is)
- Explored other family options
- Determined there was an underserved audience



History: 2009, Informal observation resulted in ‘Create Playdate’ a drop in program for the stroller crowd. Consisting of a gallery experience with a story and a related art making project. Education, under the direction of experts, conducted focus groups of parents and grandparents to determine appropriate use of museum resources. Result = more evidence that this was an underserved population.

Fast Forward to 2014

- Time to put a pre-school tour on the books
- Received a grant to explore the world of pre-school age children
- Seek out the expert advice (one of which happened to be SEEC more on that later)
- Develop and pilot the tour
- Train docents
- Get to the business of having fun



Staff and docent task force formed. This group laid out a plan to move forward.

Expert Advice



Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center SEEC

- Never too early
- early exposure to the arts = positive brain development

Teacher Panels

- hands on experiences
- self-selection
- freedom
- play
- movement
- authentic - materials and situations

Community – early childhood expert Denver Public Library

- science behind learning
- how and what to implement successfully

October of 2014 – staff and docents participated in a multiday summit on early childhood conducted by SEEC (Smithsonian Early Childhood Center). Pre-school teachers and child care providers were invited to participate in panel discussions about successful curricula for the young child. We then engaged the advice of Denver Public Library early childhood specialist. The latter fleshed out the science of learning and how we could use that information to create the best tour for the 3-5 year old visitor.

RESEARCH

“Neuroscientists tell us that the type of learning that occurs in [libraries and museums] - self-directed, experiential, content-rich, - promotes executive function skills that can shape a child's success in life. The experiences, resources and interactions provided by libraries and museums build brains and fuel a love of learning success in life.”

Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Growing Young Minds* Report, 2013



We reviewed a number of scholarly papers about learning and the young child. (IMLS mission ...to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation life long learning and cultural and civic engagement. Provide leadership through research, policy development and grant making.)

MORE RESEARCH

“Young children make personal connections to what they see in the museum, and they respond especially well when stories and the use of their imaginations are part of the experience. Children value being part of authentic dialogues about what they are experiencing and what it means to them, and they appreciate humor.”

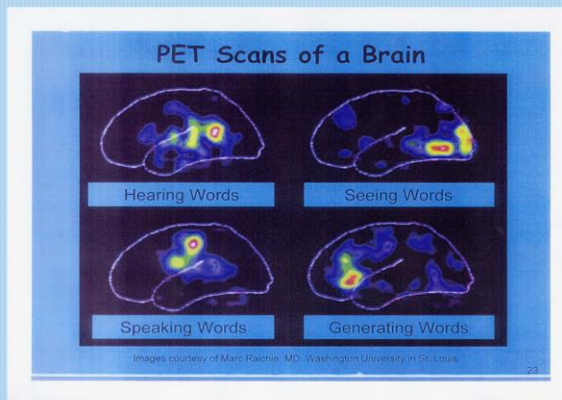
Early Learning in Museums

Report prepared by MEM for the Smithsonian Institute



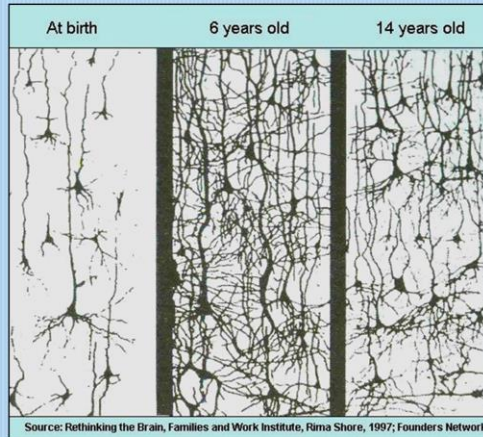
MEM (Mary Ellen Munley)= a consulting group dedicated to enhancing the role of museums in the lives of people.

BRAIN “WORKS”



Looking at the different parts of the brain that have to work almost simultaneously when processing language, children need us to be patient and give them time to respond.

MORE BRAIN “WORKS”



Source: Rethinking the Brain, Families and Work Institute, Rima Shore, 1997; Founders Network

Each time a child hears smells tastes touches or is touched the paths get built and get stronger. Strength increases if experiences are shared with others that are loving and positive. 90% of the brain's learning pathways are developed between birth and four years old. It's never too late to learn but it gets harder as we age. To debunk the notion that babies are born with a "blank slate", section one on the slide shows the brain pathways of a newborn.

Section two is the brain of a 6 year old with tons of connections. The third shows the brain of a teenager that has undergone a process called neuro-pruning. Connections that are no longer needed are removed from the brain so that the brain works more efficiently.

AND EVEN MORE BRAIN “WORKS”

WHEN WE ARE HAVING
FUN OUR BODY RELEASES
SEROTONIN A CHEMICAL
THAT HELPS US LEARN.



WHEN WE ARE STRESSED
OUR BODY RELEASES
CORTISOL A CHEMICAL
THAT BLOCKS LEARNING.



Fun is a crucial component of success!

WE DISCOVERED THAT THESE ARE OUR BELIEFS

- art can make a difference for young children
- the years between 0-5 are pivotal years for a child 's development
- our spaces provide a place for imagination, curiosity and innovative thought to grow and thrive
- The experiences we provide empower young children to try new things , build confidence and direct their own learning
- Our programming gives adults the opportunity to see their children in new ways and to interact with their children in ways that differ from other settings



After exhaustive research and numerous conversations we drew up a statement of what we, at the DAM believe and that our tour for the pre-school crowd needed to reflect these beliefs.

FIELD TRIP GOALS

Spark

Visit will spark curiosity to learn more and use the tools gained on visits

Comfort

Students, teachers and chaperones feel comfortable and have fun.

Develop tools to foster independence

Self-directed

Students will have a chance to direct their own learning.

World Cultures

Exposure to cultures around the globe

Creativity

Open ended interactions with artworks that allow for their own experimentation with the creative process

Practicality

Tour components must work with any work of art

The tour needed to foster each of these goals – in order to accommodate a large number of children and docents flexibility of location was a must!

TOUR AND TRAINING

Based on research and expert advice, tour components were developed .

Staff and docents conducted docent training which included:

- Readings
- Educational theory
- Technique
- Practice

Once tour components were in place training of docents was conducted by members of the task force and staff. The initial training consisted of four 2 hour sessions.

OFF ON OUR ADVENTURE



The tour is one hour long. Student/docent ratio ideal is 1-5, travel games are played while moving from place to place (see manual for ideas).

The first order of business is an introduction to the museum and museum manners (many have never been to the museum/many are non-English speaking). Because play is universal and necessary for comfort, all activities are rooted in FUN.

BUILDING ANTICIPATION



Mystery and surprise build anticipation.... Very important to remember that not all learners look the same... often children look like they are not participating but when engaged in art making/story/postcard show that they were totally with us.

VISUAL AGENDA



From teachers we learned that this age group is more comfortable knowing what is going to happen. We use a visual agenda to show what is going to happen and as a task is complete it is recorded.

EXPLORE AND SORT



Key Ideas:

- Build student's ability to sort and classify things, an important building block of curiosity and learning.
- Explore together how artists use a variety of colors, materials and shapes in the art.

Explore and Sort – time is spent exploring together how artists use a variety of colors, materials and shapes in the art. Children discuss what they are seeing (often quite hysterical exchange – embrace it). A box of materials is then shown to the children and they select objects that they associate with the art object. Once that is complete the choices are sorted by size/shape/color. If time, a sculpture is built by the children using their materials. You know you are successful if students are looking closely and making connections between materials and the art object.

STORYTIME



VOC Jellyfish Fry: Christian Rex van Minnen

Key Ideas:

- Build early literacy by reading and enjoying a story.
- Support student's understand that the imagination can be a tool that helps you to look at materials in unexpected ways.
- Emphasize how artists make choices about the materials they use.

An object is chosen to support the selected story, story is read and connected to the art object. You know you are successful if: Students enjoy the story, making predictions, observations and connections. In addition, students see how the artwork connects to the story and how creative thinking applies to them.

READING OPTIONS

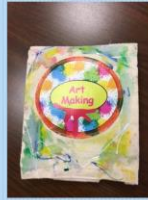


There are other choices of stories. Each encourages creative thinking and imagination.

ART MAKING



Inspiration



Supplies

Key Ideas:

- Empower students to make their own choices and think creatively about how they can use materials.
- Create wearable art inspired by what they have seen.

Students make their own selection of materials and create an object unique to them. You know you are successful if: Students make their own choices and think creatively about how they can use materials. In addition students create wearable art inspired by what they have seen.

POSTCARD ACTIVITY



Key Idea:
Help students bring it all together and make it more likely that they will remember and share their visit with friends and family.

Students are given a collection of materials to choose from that remind them of their visit. The materials are glued to a postcard that can be taken with them. They are encouraged to use the postcard to share their memory with others.

GOALS MET???

- ✓ **Spark!** Explore and Sort: experience authentic works of art, examining materials and associating with objects on display
 - ✓ **Comfort!** Storytelling, mimicking works of art and story components, having fun
 - ✓ **Self-directed:** Art Making, Post card activity, selection and application of materials
 - ✓ **Creativity:** being the artist
 - ✓ **Practical:** The tour components can be done anywhere in the museum and is always the decent choice
- (We get to be creative and self-directed = comfort and spark.)

Each of the activities address the goals.

SUCCESS?

Soft launch:

- January 2015 – May 2017
- 2,679 participants in the Creative Explorer Tour at the DAM.
- January of 2017 it was necessary to train additional docents.



That is a lot of three and four year olds visiting the DAM.