

Integration of Play, Learning, and Experience: What Museums Afford Young Visitors

Overview

The focus of this research was to look at important factors in maximizing children's empirical learning within inquiry-based children's museums. Learning is viewed in the contexts of physical, social, and interactive which is best accomplished in play-based inquiry. The research not only explores the subject of play-based inquiry but also finds recommendations for implementing and making the most of children's learning and social interaction.

Play as a Situative Affordance for Learning

Play is viewed as a mechanism of social development, allowing for cognitive challenges, development of creativity, problem-solving, logic, social knowledge, and language. Play is considered children's work, because through play children learn to act and think cognitively rather than behaviorally. Play also allows children to mediate sociocultural influences on development and allows them to try out behaviors, thoughts, experiences, roles, and skills in a safe environment.

Environments for Play and Learning

The environment outside of the classroom is just as important as the one inside. Some factors that influence the environment include the number of students in a classroom, child to adult ratio, materials provided, arrangement of the classroom, age of the children, and the socioeconomic status of the children. It is important to understand that in order to create an environment that encourages play the emphasis needs to be on the experience and the learning process.

Museums as Environments for Learning

To enhance the intrinsic motivation to learn, many museums are utilizing activities that promote the perception of choice and contexts that allow the learner to pursue their interests. These inquiry-based museums are appealing to teachers who are looking to link the classroom with natural learning experiences. Research has found that individuals remembered more educational information and had a more enjoyable experience on museum field trips that integrated hands-on participation than those that did not. When opportunity for play is given, children are capable of becoming deeply engaged in an activity and are gaining a greater understanding of that activity.

Encouraging Play

Recent research has found that the intrinsic motivation to learn is declining, with external motivators as the driving force behind school. It is important that children see their parents, teachers, and friends joining in on play in order to encourage the learning process. Parents can also use open-ended and person-centered questions to help the child further their exploration of the environment and play experience.

Conclusion

It is through play that children develop the capacity to be creative, solve problems, use logic, socially interact, communicate, practice self-regulation, develop cognitive processing abilities, and

develop socially. Through inquiry-based museums opportunities for children, parents, and teachers are provided to enrich the learning environment for children through the exploration of math, science, art, music, history, and social studies. Play motivates children intrinsically, which is important for lifelong learning.

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