

A magnificently playful day

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Hi all. It was the most magnificently playful day today! Lots of photos were taken and a great opportunity for VSAs to see how a play day can work. Nick (Director) was also doing VIP tour today so got to see it in action- possibly not what he would have hoped for but amazing for him to see how the Playful Museum works and the Living Worlds gallery was full of laughter and fun.

This weekend, Karen and the VSAs set up a few playful prompts. There was a giant box with a face drawn on and long cardboard arms that children were encouraged to draw on, stick post-it notes to, play with as they wished. There were also some cardboard rings looped together in a chain and they got the lily pads out that are normally used in the Discovery Centre for children to sit on. Luke made a noughts and crosses board from masking tape on the floor. Someone had made a giant cardboard dice.

I arrived on the Living Worlds gallery today at 1.30pm and all of these things were still on the galleries. Aimee and Andy were on the gallery. Aimee asked me what the box was for and we started talking about what had happened at the weekend. At the same time a group of 2 mums and about 7 children (probably aged 4-8) came up to us while Aimee was drawing on the box and asked what it was. We told them they could do whatever they wanted with the box. They started drawing on it, some of them using post-it notes, others drawing directly on the box.

I started to take the lily pads out of the basket they were in, and started dropping them on the floor. One of the boys asked what they were for and started picking them up one by one, stacking as many on his arms as he could carry. I showed him he could roll them and they all started to join in. They all tried different techniques to move them, sliding on them using their hands, flipping them, throwing them. The oldest girl started to collect blue ones (her favourite she said) and keep them for herself. Aimee tipped the large box on its side. The children got really excited as the pencils and post-its on the top fell off and made a noise (Aimee just left them- acted as if she didn't care). She prompted them to crawl inside and soon they were all scrabbling to get in (along with as many lily pads as they could carry). Two other boys, separate from the first group, started trying to put the lily pad basket on each others heads.

We took some photos using the tablets which was great but I think the most important thing was for the VSAs to realise they could get away with quite a lot. If the lily pad throwing got a bit hard or the children got a bit excited, it was easy to ask them to calm down as it was so far removed from what they were expecting, they didn't mind having to tone it down a little bit, if it meant they got to carry on with what they were doing.

Louise and Christian later arrived on the gallery to take Aimee and Andy's places after half an hour and continued prompting the children using the materials there. Other children started to join in and by the time Nick arrived on the gallery there were about 10-15 children involved.

I spoke to 3 different parents about what was going on and about both the Happy Museum and the Playful Museum in particular. Louise told me one mum told her it was her first time in the museum and said it was amazing to be somewhere where children were allowed to have fun and not be told off. The parents of the children playing on the galleries mostly left them to it and sat down to observe.