

Observations and reflections upon children and play
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30/01/15:

Living Worlds Gallery:

Children look visibly excited when coming down the stairs into the gallery (smiling, looking around in awe, gasping etc). Many children seem to run around the space in groups.

The skeleton of the sperm whale attracts a lot of attention from children. One example of this is where a boy and a girl presumably brother and sister come into the gallery and see the skeleton. Whilst the boy, around seven, shouts 'it's a dinosaur!', his sister about nine argues 'no it's not!' They continue this argument getting louder and louder until their mum tells them to be quiet and to keep walking.

Nature Discovery:

This is a space in which parents seem to know that it is okay for their children to run around and touch things.

The interactive toys such as the binoculars are popular with children. A small boy for example after he walks in uses the magnifying glass to get a closer look at the animals in the glass cases. His mum watches this, and then whilst laughing, asks 'you're like a mini detective, aren't you?'

Fossils:

Three small children, all of around three years old come into the gallery with their mothers and immediately all run to the dinosaur. One of the girls shouts 'I want to take a picture!' excitedly, to her mother who is already on her mobile, presumably texting. Her mother carries on texting for a while, ignoring the girl and then hands her daughter the device. The girl is very excited, smiling and gasping as she tries to figure out how to use the camera. After a few minutes of tapping and 'zooming' in motion, she is able to take a few photos. The other two whilst this is going on entertain themselves by playing hide-and-seek and so hide between the glass cabinets and spaces. Their mothers talk amongst themselves.

28/2/2015:

Living Worlds:

Boy of about four takes particular fascination with the wolf, pointing and involving his dad to look at it also. His dad tries to steer him away to look at the dodo but the

boy is uninterested, and he then sees the tiger. He runs towards the tiger and starts to roar very loudly, at which his dad tells him off for being too noisy.

Parents let children run around the space and often allow themselves to be led to whichever display their children are most interested in.

Two boys of three and four lead their mum to the 'connect' section to look at the baboon. They press themselves up to the glass and shout 'it's Rafiki from the Lion King!'

Manchester Gallery:

The elephant attracts most of the attention of the children. A common trend is for children to cluster around Maharaja.

One girl when coming up the stairs, with her parents, sees Maharaja and is unwilling to go any further. Her parents after noticing her reluctance, encourage her saying 'it's only an elephant; you're not scared are you?' After thirty seconds of trying to coax her in which the girl looks visibly confused (she bits her lip and screws her face up a little), she finally grabs her dad's hand and goes up the stairs.

Fossils:

Children are particularly interested in the globe, and run around it.

One boy pretends to be the dinosaur and tells his friends, 'I'm the dinosaur and you have to run away from me before I eat you!', and then chases them around the gallery. His friends all shout and scream when running away from him.

Nature Discovery:

As everything in this gallery is accessible to the children, parents do not have to do much in the way of lifting them up to get a closer look at displays.

Children like rearranging the pouffes to suit them and to sit or lie across the floor to get a closer look at the displays, and they seem more visibly relaxed (slower breathing, less changeable movements and some children lie on the floor for up to ten minutes.)

A little boy and girl enter the space wearing hats that have been made from worksheets. After looking around, they pretend to be a King and Queen. They sit on the pouffes, which they call their 'thrones' and pretend to be in charge of the space. They often shout commands to the taxidermist animals, such as 'mouse! You stand over there!' Their parents watch, amused but let the children to carry on.

25/2/15:

Money Gallery:

A brother and sister have races around the gallery, and their attention is only diverted when one of the VSA's engages with conversation with them and takes them for a tour around the space and they seem responsive (pointing, looking, standing on tiptoes to get a closer look) with the objects.

Manchester Gallery:

A group of schoolchildren seem to enjoy the uncarpeted floor spots, and frequently jumping from spot to spot all following each other.

Egypt Gallery:

The mummy draws most of the attention in children; a girl presses herself up to the glass and then asks her parents 'why does she have a blanket? Is she cold?' the mother replies ' Yes, it gets cold in this museum sometimes, and you need to wrap up warm!'

One boy pretends to carve one of the inscriptions on the stone tablet with his imaginary sword. He makes his own sound effects as he does this, and his family watch on, amused.

28/2/2015:

Siberia Exhibition: (These are observations as seen by a VSA team member whilst on his gallery shift in this exhibition.)

Prolonged looking at objects such as the moose head and spiders.

Children re-imagine the spaces as caves, castles, forests, even from movie scenes such as 'Frozen'

Running, climbing, walking under/over/ around cases and fixtures

Reinterpretation through commentary for parents, carers and peers.

Open questioning (what is this? / why? / where?/ who?)

Imaginative re-interpreting unencumbered by strict attention to formal identity of objects/ displays and spaces.

Anxiety/ fear/ tearful/ weepy reactions to the large taxidermy (classic phobia-iconic objects?)

Living Worlds:

A group of children play games such as catch with any extra items of clothing that they may not be wearing i.e. coats, hats etc. Other games include hide-and-seek, I-spy, and improvised games.

Other games that were played in this gallery were family games that were undecipherable to the observer.

A small boy with his grandparents comes to the gallery, where he leads them to look at the taxidermist animals. As he looks at them visible signs of enjoyment include smiling, laughing and giggling especially when looking at the animals. He does not vocalise how he is feeling, but the expressions convey this.

Manchester Gallery:

Children seem to hold hands with friends, siblings or parents a lot in this gallery. Is this a sign that they will/ have wandered away from their parents?

Older children in this gallery generally explore their interests with their parents whereas younger children will be taken around the cabinets and will be shown all of the displays, such as the Roman altar, which they like to touch as well as the taxidermist animals.

In this gallery, perhaps as it is the main entry/exit into the museum there have been a few instances of tantrums from the younger children:

A young girl of five starts crying upon leaving, but to assure her, her parents tell her that they 'will be back soon'.

When hungry, children will generally tell their parents to give them some food, only to be told 'no you can't eat in here', which they get visibly upset (tears, screaming, and shouting).

18/3/15:

Living Worlds:

A child followed by a teacher enters the gallery somewhat reluctantly; she tries to pique his enthusiasm by showing him exhibits she thinks he would like, such as the ape and the other animals but he looks unperturbed. His friends try to show him

other displays at which he seems to cheer up slightly and partake in the group activities until they leave the gallery.

In the 'Disasters' section a girl takes particular fascination with the dog. She peers at the exhibit for about five minutes, trying to decipher what exactly it is. After figuring it out, she asks her friend who is standing next to her, 'is that a dog? I have a dog like this, but it's smaller!'

Money Gallery:

A mum chases her daughter around the cases of the gallery. They stop and look at some of the coins, but the daughter quickly loses interest (she starts looking away, getting visibly restless and fidgeting) until her mother puts her down again and starts chasing her around again.

2/4/15:

Manchester Gallery:

Two boys and a girl play 'the floor is lava' game, and so hop from spot to spot trying not to 'burn' themselves on the carpet.

Two young girls come up the stairs and see the elephant. They then, when in the gallery, grab maps from the stand and start asking 'is that an elephant?' Their mother responds 'what do you think?' so they then walk around the skeleton and try to figure out whether it the skeleton of an elephant or mammoth.

Visitor Team observations and stories:

Money Gallery: A girl and her friends come into the gallery, and immediately run over to the gap between the cases, and one of the girls pretends to be the 'shopkeeper' while the other pretends to walk around the cases 'buying objects'. She then takes her 'basket' to the lower case and the 'shopkeeper' scans the items and asks if she would like a bag. This space has also been observed as being an ice cream shop.

Some children even like sitting on the lower case between the two displays but have been warned off doing this as the case is alarmed.

Vivarium: Children usually have competitions to see who is the fastest at spotting the frogs, or the snakes

Rapa Nui: Many children usually cannot resist touching the large statues, or running around them. In one instance, a little boy comes running in, and runs his hands over the statues asking 'why does this one have no eyes?'

Some children even pretend to be the statues, and imagine if the statues could talk what their voices would sound like (deep, gruff, booming or loud etc.)

Manchester Gallery: A child pretends to be Maharaja the elephant and starts to trumpet and pretends to have a trunk and 'walk to Belle Vue' as the real elephant did. He did this after being read the story of Maharaja by his parents from the screen.

Storytelling about Maharajah and his travels from a little girl to her parents

Archaeology Room: A father and his young son play peek-a-boo through the glass cases of the gallery.

Egypt Room: Some children often see the granite (vase?) as a cauldron and pretend to brew potions in, or even drinks like coffee!