

The Missing dinosaur and other stories

12 May 2014

Set up

A large sign made from a piece of cardboard was put out on a bench by one of the columns at the entrance of the dinosaur gallery. The writing on the sign said that a dinosaur was missing – and invited people to make one in its place. There was a large pile of folded newspapers and some sellotape left on the benches. There was a lot more space on the bench left clear for seating.

Simultaneously there were also some shapes taped in black, and in a kind of long course – onto the floor, including squares, oblongs, diamonds and triangles –all leading along the open space from the entrance to the dino gallery to under Stan. Andrew had put this down and had tried jumping this course out as I arrived. He said that it felt pretty odd (good odd!) moving and jumping and then suddenly arriving under Stan's head!

There were also a few blue ropes left around loose on the floor of the gallery towards Stan and alongside the course.

The entire set up was done with intent to explore what might happen, and how each playful object/material or activity might be used by children, family groups and adults.

Observation - over approximately 45 minutes

Ropes

-One boy ran off with one of the ropes to another part of the gallery

-Andrew invited people to take the tightrope course to the dinosaur, and I observed 4 children take the challenge – 2 did the whole rope and the others fell on and off, but still stuck to it and moved through the gallery in this way. One girl was held by their parents hands and did some high-wobble-pretending along the way.

-One dad walked past and shuffled the rope to the side of the walkway with his foot. On returning from the other end of the gallery he picked up the rope, wound it around his arm, tied it up and left it on the bench.

Newspaper dinosaurs

1. Observation of 1 boy around 4 yrs, with mum. They then engaged with another parent and her son, also aged around 4. They then engaged with gallery staff and other adults in the gallery.

On arrival, the mum was making a second dinosaur from newspaper. The first had been a good construction and quite lifelike shape, and the boy was holding it and talking about it. The boys started chatting and boy 2 asked for a dinosaur to be made. The mum made a poor looking dinosaur, so asked – would you like a dinosaur egg? One of the boys then asked for another egg, and then a nest. They ran off to find places for their nest and eggs, then kept running back and asking for more eggs and more nests each time, until about 15+ nests were hidden and lots of eggs and dinosaurs inhabited one of the areas behind a display case. The first boy did not leave his dinosaurs but held onto them all the while. After about 20 minutes interacting and attending the nest and dinosaurs and running around, the initial boy went off further afield, talking with other adults and with dinosaurs in hand, periodically coming over to check in with mum and monitor progress of next creation. Some of the conversation/noises/action by children:

“Mine is scary.”

“My egg is nearly hatched.”

“Come and look at my nest.”

Growling noises

Biting actions

Creeping

The running around the gallery (with newspaper dinosaurs in hand) went to and from the nest, to mum, and then off to show others – staff – and other adults and children and between the two nest piles on opposite sides of the gallery. These boys demanded or asked continuously for more props. – were not interested in making things themselves.

2. Second family group – mother father and girl

This family played together in a group at the bench and floor. Dad and daughter mainly worked together on making a dinosaur. Lots of laughter and quiet talking in the family group, stayed together as a unit the whole time. Took creation away with them, smiling and seeming proud of it, and had photo taken.

Course

This was used a bit by children probably about 6,7,8 or older. Of the 10 or so children observed, none of the children had a prompt from staff, and about half of the children jumped in some of the course. 2 jumped or moved through all of the course, including using the rope.

Observation of Museum staff

During my observation here Andrew was on duty and had set up the tape on the floor. Initially he invited children to join in the course and onto the tightrope, which worked to set the scene and encourage playful behaviour. He was invited by the children to watch and investigate the dinosaurs and nests, and chatted to the family groups making and playing. Andrew did quite a lot of observation and reflection, commenting that it felt really good and coming up with ideas for more interventions in the future (including a proper trough for feeding the dinosaurs).