

The Revolving Baby

An account by Ailsa Strachan, Deputy Head of Visitor Services, 2012

During busy holiday periods, we normally organise a day where we set up prompts for play in the galleries. On these days we ask staff to come in early to come up with ideas for these prompts and so the project is lead by them, and not by the management team. We also arrange for extra staff to come in to focus on observing and recording the play going on in the galleries.

During one of these playful days I had a VSA approach me to show me a photo she had taken of a baby sitting on one of our empty handling tables with a revolving circle in the middle, normally for showing objects. The baby has been sat there by her mum and was being spun round.

The VSA who observed this, let it happen, and even took a photo of it, had really struggled with the idea of play on the galleries at the beginning. During an early play day, she had spoken to me about how the hopscotch pattern on the floor was annoying her as no one was playing the game properly. She didn't like the fact that there were rules for the game that weren't being adhered to. Her observing the baby on the handling table the way she did, without getting involved to break the moment of play between the mother and baby or being concerned about a 'Health and Safety' issue that didn't exist, well, this signified a huge breakthrough in her understanding the concept of what we were trying to do with the project.

She recognized that moment of play and was able to step back and let it happen, a stage I wasn't sure she would ever get to. She said it was because she realised there was fun to be had if she relaxed and let it happen. For me though, it wasn't just a case of letting fun happen, it was that she recognized the moment of play, its significance and she shared it.