



Why Partner with Museums?

Strengths that Museums Bring to the Community

Children's and science museums have evolved from their collections based beginnings to provide hands-on multi-sensory learning environments that support the development of foundational skills that promote a lifelong love of learning for children and adults.¹ Important context for early childhood science learning include "Designed informal learning environments" such as a children's museum or science center^{2,3,4,5}; Rigney & Callanan, 2011). Many early childhood initiatives in museums are focused on providing learning experiences specifically for young children. But, there is also an opportunity to help adults - parents and teachers - to see the learning that is happening when young children are exploring through everyday activities such as block play, manipulating puzzles, and engaging in sensory experiences. Many museum educators are able to share current research in child development, for example, when seeing families playing with blocks, there is a great opportunity to mention that using blocks and directional language can help children develop their spatial skills, which are linked to success in math.² One model for sharing current research into how young children learn is that of the NSF funded National Living Lab initiative which invites museum guests to participate in ongoing research and engage in one-one-one conversations with scientists. (<http://livinglab.org/>)

Many early childhood classrooms also provide similar experiences and materials, but early childhood teachers are not always as ready to make the connections between everyday play and science process skills. Museums are in a great position to help teachers and other adults make those science connections because they facilitate learning experiences for adults and children alike.

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