

“WHICH WAY SHALL WE GO?
OK, I’LL FOLLOW YOU....”

Providing resources that help parents
and carers support pre-school children
to engage with museum collections and buildings

RENAISSANCE SOUTH WEST



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1. Introduction

This report is the culmination of a programme of partnership projects in six museums across the South West. The projects were devised to explore the characteristics of resources that effectively support parents as educators of pre-school children in museums and galleries. Each museum worked with a group of parents or carers and a practitioner working with families. Although each project was self contained, staff from each project came together as a team to agree guiding principles and to share understanding and skills.

This report brings together the findings from the projects and sets out a series of recommendations for museums, based on the findings. This report is a summary of a more comprehensive report that details the evidence gathered and the evaluation methods employed. The full report can be requested from the South West Hub (contact details in Appendix 1).

2. Executive Summary

This research focused on supporting parents to engage with their children and with museum collections and buildings. Working with parents on the project and listening to their feedback it is clear that this is only one aspect of a successful family visit for them. Parents bringing young children to a museum need support in structuring the experience, tools and resources so that adults and children can take turns at leading activities and opportunities for children to play or explore independently. Families with babies need safe, engaging sensory resources and a baby friendly space where they can sit, lay or crawl independently, even if this is just a rug or set of cushions.

The projects worked with a wide range of families with children under 5. Although this included families who were confident and regular museum users, the majority of parents involved were not museum visitors and many were from communities who find museums difficult to access. Practitioners working with families found that those who find museums most difficult to access needed a number of visits to familiarise themselves with the resources and gain confidence



in the space. However as they grew used to the museums, families had such positive shared learning experiences that many were considering visiting again.

The project museums contained a wide range of collections including art, archaeology, social history, world cultures and natural history. The learning environments also varied widely from a Tudor Priory, where everything can be touched, to a historic house where only looking is allowed. There was remarkable consistency in the findings despite such variation in the testing conditions. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) states that the most effective early learning combines active learning, creative thinking and play. The resources that most successfully enabled parents to act as children's educators in museums were those that provided this combination. Family learning requires communication (verbal and non-verbal), a positive relationship, experiences to share and confidence to participate. Active investigation, exploratory play and creative expression provided the right context for this to happen.

One of the project museums is a "please touch" space: a restored Tudor Priory full of replica domestic objects for visitors to handle and use. Providing for active investigation, exploratory play and creative thinking and expression was unlikely to require many additional resources in such a setting. Nonetheless, the museum team felt that the addition of some simple activities and resources encouraged families with young children to make full use of the replica collections together, where previously families had struggled. A permission to play was key in this situation.

Most of the other museums involved have more traditional settings, with a mixture of art works, displays and interactive exhibits. In these settings, providing for active investigation, exploratory play and creative thinking and expression was more of a challenge and required more additional resources. Providing the multi-sensory experiences needed for active investigation was particularly difficult and the need for more tactile experiences was clear in the findings.

Nonetheless, all six museums developed resources that provided some part of this ideal balance and contributed interesting insight to the overall picture. Interestingly, the projects in which parents were most involved in developing the ideas for the resources seemed to get closer to an optimal balance.

Simple exploring tools such as torches, magnifying glasses, binoculars and cameras proved especially effective at encouraging active investigation and exploratory play. Families had choice over how, where and for what these were used, which seemed to result in children taking the lead and parents and carers talking with them about their discoveries. These resources helped children to investigate visually rather than through touching and provided natural prompts for family conversations. Where families felt confident to play together, the tools enabled humorous exchanges and sometimes pretend play. The tools also enabled children to investigate independently, for example experimenting with moving a torch closer to an object.

Whilst for some parents, this open-ended exploration was sufficient many preferred a stronger sense of "mission" and a task that could be achieved. The most successful of these in enabling parents to support their children's learning were hunting or matching games. These took various forms but were usually pictures, shapes or toys to match to specific objects or building features. Open-ended versions of these were also successful, for example a challenge to find the best home for some toy farm animals in the museum.

Whilst many of the resources trialled were highly successful in prompting family interactions it became clear that parents had to rely on their existing knowledge for the content of these conversations. This report therefore recommends that in addition to providing resources for active investigation, exploratory play and creative expression, museums find family friendly ways to provide information about their collections and buildings. This need for collections information in a user-friendly format highlights the importance of involving a range of museum staff in supporting parents and the role that museum learning staff can play in deepening the understanding of colleagues about the needs of families with young children.

The project findings demonstrated the importance of front of house staff (paid or voluntary) in:

- welcoming families and making them feel secure
- providing information at the beginning of a visit
- offering families a choice of resources
- encouraging families to actively explore together
- low level maintenance (tidying up) of playful resources in gallery spaces

For staff to carry out these roles, they need to understand how important their contribution is to a successful family visit and the value of the family interactions they are supporting. This report, therefore, recommends that learning staff are given time to work with colleagues to raise awareness, share skills and deepen understanding.



3. Main findings

3.1. Providing the right kind of resources can enable parents to support their own visits

- some kinds of resources can give parents the tools to support their children’s learning in museums independent of a staff-led event.
- no single resource is likely to suit all families with children under 5 all of the time. Having a range of resources enables choice and encourages repeat visits.
- parents felt most comfortable when they “had a mission”, something to frame their visit. Parents who were regular museum visitors tended to feel slightly less strongly about this were able to have a more “open-ended” view of what a mission might be.



- most family interaction happened when parents felt they had a clear role.

although parents want their children to be busy, engaged and happy, observations showed that there was a limit to how long



they would allow children’s independent play to last where they had nothing to do themselves.

- whilst resources can help parents and carers support their children’s learning on their own, they are unlikely to provide a strong enough access route for families who are unfamiliar with museums. For families who find museums difficult to access, an initial supported group visit is likely to be needed before they can consider using resources independently.
- setting aside individual family preferences, the kinds of resources that support parent-facilitated learning are much the same, whether families are regular or first time museum visitors.

3.2. Exploring tools and resources put children in charge

- torches, binoculars, magnifying glasses and cameras (pretend or real) were universally popular and resulted in visits where children determined the visit route, and what was examined and discussed.
- wearing or carrying explorer tools seemed to provide a role play context for families. This was amplified where children also had the choice of explorer hats, backpacks or bags which acted as ‘costumes’.
- the exploring tools seemed to act as a non-verbal indication of children’s interest for parents. Parents would notice what their child shone their torch onto, or see their child peering through their magnifying glass at something and talk with them about it. Parents frequently asked children what they could see through the binoculars or commented on things they thought children could see.
- exploring tools prompted parents to model learning behaviours to their children. Lots of parents explained what magnifying glasses and binoculars did and demonstrated how to use them.
- exploring tools tended to focus the family interaction on the museum collections or buildings with both parents and children talking about what they could see.
- although the resources went a long way to engaging families with collections, they still felt that they wanted more opportunities to touch and hold objects.



Parent

“Having the torch made her focus much more on the exhibits.”

Parent

“I would like to see more things he could hold.”

3.3. Picture trails and carry-round challenges give parents a sense of purpose

Parents asked for trails: some called them ‘quizzes’, some referred to having a ‘mission’.

- the trails provided were just pictures of objects to find. Pictures were not ordered and did not prescribe a route. Although a closed task, searching provided plenty of opportunity for choice: where to go, what order to find things in, where they might be, what kinds of objects they were. It was this choice that prompted family interaction.
- the carry-round challenges were open-ended. That is, there was no correct answer, although they offered the same satisfaction in having completed a task. Challenges involved children making choices, for example, finding a suitable home for some toy farm animals. Considering different options prompted interaction about the collections.



- both trails and challenges provided some opportunities for parents to model learning behaviours, although this tended to be “leading by example”.
- in specific spaces, matching games, for example, matching a plastic animal to the displays, prompted family interaction. This was usually adult directed and the conversations were short, but both children and adults found the tasks enjoyable and parents praised children’s efforts and affirmed their knowledge and understanding.

3.4. Intuitive but intriguing hands-on activities prompt parents to facilitate and explain

- hands-on activities that needed no instructions for adults, but where children were not immediately sure what to do, encouraged parents to facilitate. For example, brass rubbing, grinding with a pestle and mortar and using a kaleidoscope.
- many parents were drawn towards intriguing resources with simple written or pictorial instructions such as the Talking Tins.
- these kinds of activities often prompted parents to explain to children, how a quill is used, what binoculars do or the most effective way to use a pestle.

3.5. Some activities build confidence, even if they are not immediately focused on the collections

- some activities using familiar toys encouraged families to interact and helped them make connections with home. Tea sets and pretend food for example were universally popular and encouraged imaginary play. Parents modelled how to use the toys to encourage children who were reluctant to join in. Unless an explicit link was made however, this kind of play did not link to the collections. Its main value was in building relationships and increasing confidence in the learning environment.
- drawing and mark making were also popular and appeared to put families at ease. Both regular museum visitors and those less familiar with museums were attracted to drawing equipment, especially if there was family seating. Where parents sat alongside children they modelled drawing and writing, praised children’s efforts, skills and outputs and facilitated their learning. However drawing and mark making mainly



seemed to relate directly to the collections only when it was portable or part of a challenge.

- not all familiar resources were equally good at prompting interaction. Parents often chose puppets, but were then a little stuck with ideas for how to use them. Dressing up was not one of the main activities on offer, so observations may not reflect its full potential. Where children did dress up, it tended to lead to the child pretending independently. Interaction was limited to parental comments on how nice children looked, although this did provide positive affirmation and the photo opportunity it provided may have led to further interaction after the visit.

3.6. Some activities are better for children

- small world play and light/shadow play were attractive to children but most adults did not want to join in. Usually this play was curtailed as adults wanted to move on, unless the group dynamics offered a chance for family members to be independent for a short while, for example, a parent might take the chance to play with a younger sibling or chat to a friend.
- dens and crawling tunnels, although accessible to adults, tended to separate adults from children.
- boxes of toys and handling objects related to nearby displays often provided children with opportunities to play with siblings or friends. Sometimes parents joined in, but often they observed and facilitated instead.



3.7. Books got a mixed reaction when there are more active learning options

- although relevant picture books were provided, in most of the museums parents did not choose to use them. Some parents, seated in activity areas, did share books, mainly with children under two, but there was little interest from the children overall. If story books related to displays are going to be provided therefore, careful thought needs to be given to comfortable seating, quiet corners and placing books away from more physical activities.

3.8. Group dynamics are important

- the number of adults and children in a family group will affect the amount of parent: child interaction possible and the kind of resource that prompts it.

- the presence of a “toddler” in a family group with an older child/children can dominate a group, severely limiting the amount of interaction possible between parent and older siblings. Where two parents visited, or friends joined forces, this dynamic was mitigated. Resources that sometimes helped included giving the toddler a torch, magnifying glass or binoculars or mobile toys such as a push along miniature shopping trolley, doll’s pram or cup and ball.
- parents with a child under one as well as older siblings needed resources that encouraged verbal interaction and an element of adult direction, but child activity. They welcomed gallery-based resource ‘areas’, where they could sit, allow the younger child some freedom and play, as well as free-up their hands to interact with the older child.
- younger children often had to spend some time in their buggies as a practical response to managing a family safely. Having resources that could be brought to the buggy kept all the family members involved.

Parent

“He looked at more things when we were on our own.”



3.9. Families tended to choose a balance between active learning and play

- parents liked the idea of exploring round a museum, looking together at displays and then finding activity places.
- when feeding back what their children enjoyed parents tended to mention exploring and drawing or mark making.
- when children chose to play, parents tended to step back to a facilitating role or even do something else allowing the child to play on their own or with a sibling or peer.

Parent

“I liked the set-up. I loved the way there were different toys at different places.”

3.10. Parents tend to rely on their existing knowledge

- parents were clear that the resources provided enabled them to interact with their children in a meaningful and enjoyable way. Parents already knew how to use most of the resources and had the skills to use them to facilitate their children’s learning.
- the biggest difference between groups of parents was in the content of the conversations. Overall, parents who were regular museum users either translated labels for their children providing age appropriate snippets of information, or appeared to have a deeper existing knowledge from which to draw.
- parents who find museums difficult to access rarely read gallery text, unless it was a single phrase identification label. Where one parent did try to answer her child’s question by reading the label she had barely finished the first sentence before he had lost interest.



Parent

“Dylan wants to know what the writing says but isn’t patient enough to stand and listen, as it goes on a bit.”

- relying on existing knowledge meant that some parents provided incorrect information and many interactions didn’t go beyond simple identification.

4. Implications and Recommendations

4.1. No single kind of resource is likely to meet all the needs of the wide variety of families visiting museums

Needs and interest vary between families and also vary over time. Many of the families involved in developing resources for this project visited their local Museum more than once and chose to engage with different resources on different visits.

The needs of families from disadvantaged communities are not always the same as the needs of those from more advantaged backgrounds. Their perception that cultural experiences in general, and museums in particular, are not for the likes of them has to be addressed to ensure participation. Some activities do not necessarily offer the richest collections-based experiences, but do act as effective “ice-breakers”, providing a familiar and comfortable starting point for families who may not feel immediately comfortable in a museum environment.

All families responded well to being given a choice of resources, whether choosing what to carry round, or finding boxes with a variety of resources as they went round. Choosing what to take with them involved good levels of family interaction right from the start and appeared to ensure that families used a wider range of the resources they took with them, in comparison to families who took pre-packed explorer packs. This has implications for the kind of staffing needed in providing the resources.

Since the most successful carry-round resources were predominantly visual and giving more to carry is not really practical, more multi-sensory resources should be offered in gallery spaces. A combination of resources to explore on the move and places to stop and play was successful in allowing a well-paced visit, often longer than many families originally envisaged. This combination also enabled families to balance playing and learning cooperatively and independently.

Parent

“I liked having boxes of resources, where you can choose what to take with you.”

4.2. A museum visit needs to offer families the chance to learn together and independently

Although the focus of this study was on supporting shared learning experiences, observations showed that the level of sharing needs to vary across the visit to give individual family members space and to vary the intensity and pace of the learning. Providing resources that allow families to engage at varying levels of togetherness also enables individual families to engage at their own level. A torch can allow a child to independently explore and investigate or it can be the start of an intrepid family adventure. It can even be both things in the course of one family visit. Providing resources that can be used by children alone or with parents and carers, means that families have the choice.

Some resources seem better suited to children learning alone or with other children, for example dexterity toys, small world play, role play toys and dressing up. Putting these resources in areas where parents can rest comfortably and watch their children continues the physical closeness of family learning and means the link is not completely broken even during periods of independent activity.

Seating and comfortable floor spaces are important for wider social learning. Where drawing and craft type activities were offered at communal tables and chairs families talked both amongst themselves and to other families.

Of the resources piloted, the most successful at prompting families to learn together in museums were those based on active investigation and exploratory play. Crucial ingredients were:

- giving choice
- enabling the lead to be shared between parent and children
- giving parents a clear role.

Parent

“It was good to be able to do it at our own pace and not structured as they were all focused on different areas.”

4.3. Simple exploring tools enable a child-led, playful family learning experience

The exploring tools on offer varied across the museums. For a full list see

section 7.1. Whether children chose a full set of explorer hat, backpack or bucket, torch, binoculars etc, or just a magnifying glass, being an explorer was a great hit, even with the very youngest.

Giving the explorer tools to the children put them in charge and parents seemed happy to follow their children’s lead. They would still suggest things to look at or ask questions, but with children determining the pace and focus of the visit families were better able to interact and enjoy each other’s company and the museum. Magnifying glasses at specific activities such as looking at bones or mini-beasts also prompted families to talk about what they could see.

Including tools that could also be role play resources such as hats and binoculars led to many families treating the whole visit as a sort of game. This was even more explicit for some families who took toy cameras, with children pretending to take photos and parents joining in the imaginary game.

Parents responded well to more structured exploring resources, such as picture trails and matching challenges. Indeed parents involved in developing the resources suggested simple themed activities that gave them a sense of what to do. Although these resources were task based their format was often playful. Families used these resources to provide a loose structure for the visit and a sense of “having finished” when all the things were found. These hunts and trails were often combined with other activities, following children’s interest. This could be the use of an explorer tool, playing with toys in a gallery, drawing or using a museum interactive.



Parent

“Having the Explorers’ Pack was brilliant. She loved using the torch in the tunnel etc.”

“I like it here. I’m an explorer.”

Child -
2 years 6 months

4.4. Hands-on, sensory or playful activities should always be part of the mix

Explorer tools are excellent for families to learn together but they don't, on their own, provide for all facets of the highest quality visit. To an extent, these mainly visual extension tools, are making up for the fact that families can't explore the buildings and objects using more of their senses.

Tactile experiences should also always be offered, therefore, and these should not just be toys. Natural objects, replicas and authentic handling objects all prompted family interactions and parents' feedback indicated that many would like more of this. Observations showed that families were unsure what they could and could not touch in all of the museums. Staff need to be aware of this confusion and understand that it is the museum environment that needs to change. More things, clearly designed or labelled for touching would help.

Where hands on activities already existed in the museums, families were keen to use them but sometimes needed "permission" if they looked too adult. Having playful resources in the galleries tended to encourage families to feel confident that their young children could use the interactives. Adding playful touches to existing activities also signalled accessibility for example a variety of coloured paper at a drawing table or a "chicken" in the hen hut, so that children could pretend to feed it.



4.5. The chance to represent or create offers opportunities for modelling and praise

Drawing and mark making was popular with families and was observed to result in a lot of praise for children. Parents often joined in drawing activities, usually doing their own drawing but sometimes working jointly with children. Drawing together, side by side, seemed a very natural way for parents to model learning behaviour for their children.



When parents were given notepads as part of resource development, it was observed that children wanted to use them. Children who subsequently chose to take drawing equipment round a museum with them tended to use it to represent things they'd just been looking at. These carry-round drawing resources offered children a very immediate chance to express their thoughts in an alternative to talking.

A small number of children chose drawing equipment and then directed their parents to write or draw things that the child noticed.

Whilst families did not carry this activity on for as long as other forms of exploration, it did result in some extended family conversations and a lot of parental modelling.

4.6. Providing the right resources is only part of the picture

Whilst providing playful resources that encouraged active exploration certainly helped parents to act as their children's educators, it highlighted another way in which museums can be difficult to access. Parents successfully engaged their children with the collections and buildings and then struggled to access information to fuel their conversations.

Some building features or collections' stories were well known and parents could draw on their existing knowledge to keep their children interested. This however meant the potential learning opportunities for children were determined by whether parents happened to have existing knowledge relevant to the museum.

Where gallery text existed, some parents did try to read it, but it was usually not appropriate for them to either read aloud to children or to quickly read and easily glean relevant information they could pass on. Written text, of course, carries its own accessibility issues, so any attempt to address this need for more information should bear in mind the range of ways information can be made available using both text and images.



4.7. Staff are important

The projects demonstrated the importance of a personal contact with staff in encouraging families who would not have previously considered coming to a museum to visit. Enabling and encouraging multi-sensory exploration is vital to supporting parents and this is not always how museums have traditionally worked. It is likely therefore that some level of staff development to deepen understanding of active learning, exploratory play and parent-facilitated family learning will be necessary.

4.8. Recommendations

What resources should museums provide?

- a range of resources that families can choose between
- portable exploring tools like magnifying glasses and torches. Containers for carry-round resources need to be small enough for children to carry. Ideally children should have a choice of what to take with them. Small backpacks worked better than larger bags. Small buckets worked best of all.



- picture matching resources that enable parents to have a clear role. Short “trails” seem to be the most easily recognised format for parents.
- resources linked to other senses in galleries to ensure accessibility, especially tactile experiences that satisfy families’ desire to touch, for example pieces of the same material that statues are made from may help visitors to understand not to touch statues. (It should be noted that in observations, other adults visiting were seen to touch objects more than the project families).
- opportunities for drawing and mark making. This could be a communal drawing table or portable resources. Families will spend more time drawing if seated. Portable gel pads and styluses used in one of the project museums could be offered in spaces where pencils might be a conservation issue.
- some familiar toys or activities, preferably in areas with seating, to build confidence and relationships.
- playful activities that relate directly to the collections, in gallery spaces.

Ideally these should have a defined space, so they are not overlooked and parts don’t get spread too widely. However this might simply be a rug or a see through/into box.

- a quiet comfortable corner if offering books. Chose quick and easy to read books with attractive pictures that are related directly to the museum.
- “packages” to Early Years groups from communities who find museums difficult to access. These could include a familiarisation visit modelling the use of resources, a second visit where families are greeted and resources provided and then advice or support for families to make independent or small group visits, using resources generally available to families.

What information should museums provide?

- clear information at or near the entrance to tell families what resources are on offer and possibly take-away information so that families can “re-visit” their museum experience - this “re-visit” information could be online.
- information that families want at the points of most interest to them, perhaps linked to a trail. Individual museums will need to work with families to identify what this is.
- collections related information for parents close to seating as they may be able to read it whilst children play. This will be most effective if the information provided relates to the things children are playing with.
- information that doesn’t require an overwhelming amount of text. Using formats that families find familiar may help, e.g. images with captions, photos that provide real world context, picture book formats.
- specially designed pictures and information on line. Families did try to use computers in the museums and clearly assumed that there might be appropriate content for their young children. A museum website could provide information to bring along to a museum or to look at back at home, to reflect on, remember and share their visit with other family members.

What should museums do to maximise the learning potential of the environment?

- maximise visual access for young children. Cases that start from floor height, potentially interesting objects displayed low in cases and some paintings hung low can all help. Try to avoid breakable objects set on the floor as this sends mixed messages about touching.
- locate seating near related displays, with activities taking place directly adjacent to the seats to ensure the physical closeness of families is maintained, even if children play independently.
- make existing interactives more accessible to families with young children
- consider offering child-appropriate information at certain displays or parts of the building to support parents' own knowledge and provide a talking point if children are interested. This should only ever be as well as open-ended exploration.
- use design, location and signage to make it clear to all visitors what can and can't be touched.
- use familiar toys as ice-breaker activities in an exhibition which families can then immediately begin to access and use a trail or exploring tools for more difficult galleries.



Appendix 1

Museums	Community Partners
Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives	Southmead Children's Centre
Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum	Rowanfield and Hesters Way Children's Centre
Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery	Families from "The Imaginators"
Russell-Cotes Museum and Art Gallery, Bournemouth	Boscombe Children's Centre Families from 'Fun for Under Fives'
St Nicholas's Priory, Exeter	West Exe Children's Centre
Torquay Museum	Homelands Primary School and Nursery

For a copy of the detailed report on this project please contact:

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www.renaissancesouthwest.org.uk

Appendix 2

Below is a full set of characteristic of an effective family resource, pulled from the EYFS and from the experience of Jo Paterson of the National Strategies Team in creating high quality parenting resources. The bullets immediately below are the key features and formed the simplified observation framework for museum use.

Successful resources

- encourage babies' and children's communications, both non-verbal and verbal
- build the relationship between children and parent/carers
- encourage parents to listen actively to their children

- provide opportunities to explore, play and learn.
- ensure families feel sufficiently secure and confident to explore and participate
- encourage parents to act as facilitators, extending children's learning rather than always leading it.
- provide the opportunity for a balance between child initiated and adult initiated activities.

A resource built on effective practice

- encourages babies' and children's communications - non-verbal and verbal.
- builds the relationship between children and parent/carers.
- encourages parents to listen actively to their children.
- provides opportunities to explore, play and learn.
- ensures families feel sufficiently secure and confident to explore and participate.
- encourages parents to act as facilitators, extending children's learning rather than always leading it.
- provides the opportunity for a balance between child initiated and adult initiated activities.
- is physically accessible and safe.
- is intrinsically interesting (materials, sensory, shape, intuitive, familiarity).
- provides for developmentally appropriate activities that stimulate and follow children's interests.
- develops positive self image.
- acknowledges the different ways in which babies and children learn, and that learning is a process that cannot be rushed.
- encourages learning and motivates children through accentuating the positive, praising effort and celebrating success.
- promotes equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice.
- offers additional support and equipment where needed/meets all needs.
- enables families to communicate in any language.
- makes links with home languages, words or expressions.
- makes families feel welcome.

- keeps children engaged with their parent/carer.
- encourages parents to model being a learner for their children.
- responds to parents ideas and needs.
- offers different levels of involvement built on varying degrees of sociability and energy.
- maximises the chance of success for children by pitching activities at just the right level.
- connects with children's existing knowledge and extends it.
- emphasises museums as places where learning happens and staff as learners, as well as families and children.
- allows babies and children to do the things they can, helps them with the things they cannot quite manage and does things for them they cannot do for themselves.
- facilitates children as independent learners and co-learners with parents.
- maximises all learning opportunities, even those that weren't originally planned.
- uses the experiences children bring from home and their settings as starting points for new experiences.
- gives children control over the environment wherever possible.
- provides points of familiarity as well as intriguing novelty.
- gives unambiguous messages about what behaviour is expected and is as intuitive as possible.
- provides pre-visit information so that everyone knows what to expect.
- provides information or resources to enable children to tell everyone involved in their learning about their visit.
- makes the most of children being out of their regular setting.
- provides open-ended play resources that can be used in many different ways.
- values childrens' own play preoccupations, e.g. superheroes.
- offers a variety of different kinds of play experiences to suit different preferences and cultural approaches.
- stimulates play in different ways, including using stories as stimuli.
- provides a measure of control over, and ownership of, the learning experience by children.

- enables children to take control of the physical environment.
- documents children’s learning to facilitate reflection, and sharing with family adults.
- provides models of adults being creative and taking creative approaches to problem solving.
- tries to include content and topics from across the six areas of Learning and Development.

The team agreed three headline principles

- **useable**
- **based on active learning**
- **meaningful and relevant**

These are explained below:

Useable:

- not too much: overwhelming
- visual
- culturally inclusive
- physically accessible to all
- open-ended
- offers choice
- age appropriate
- enables parent and children to use together
- enables child to lead
- multi-sensory
- intuitive to use, doesn’t need much explanation
- not much writing
- physically transportable or able to be visited

Active learning:

- exploratory
- play based
- promotes conversation
- encourages interaction between parent and child
- is enjoyable for parents and children (could be humorous, surprising, intriguing, messy)
- enables children to make links transferring understanding to new contexts

Meaningful and relevant:

- connects to the Museum collection or building
- connects to parent/child shared interests
- links to children’s interests
- connects to the familiar
- introduces the novel
- links to likely further experiences at home

Appendix 3

Resource	Good For	Logistics
Binoculars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child led shared activity • Choosing/decision making • Modelling • Prompting communication about collections or building (at a distance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Younger children can’t usually see through them • Check safety of neck cord • Needs handing out and collecting back in

Resource	Good For	Logistics
Magnifying Glasses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child led shared activity Choosing/decision making Modelling Prompting communication about collections or building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suitable for even very young children (toddlers) Best if chunky: small ones too fiddly Needs handing out and collecting back in
Torches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child led shared activity or independent exploration and problem solving Choosing/decision making Prompting communication about collections or building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suitable for even very young children (toddlers) Wind up version are most economical and don't "fail" on visitors Some wind up torches aren't chunky enough and winding mechanism is too fiddly or stiff Needs handing out and collecting back in
Kaleidoscopes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modelling Prompting communication Engaging with the building if the design allows users to see through, e.g. looking at highly patterned wallpaper or stained glass windows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires manual dexterity to turn Only works in certain spaces Can be more of an individual activity Could be made more social with 2 or more different scopes provided
Toy Cameras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child led shared activity Choosing/decision making Prompting communication about collections or building Pretend play Praise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose a camera that is obviously a toy, so children don't expect an actual photo. A "Say cheese" or shutter noise compensates for no picture.
Digital Cameras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child led shared activity Choosing/decision making Prompting communication about collections or building Modelling Praise Facilitating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose a robust version that can be dropped. May need to take some security to ensure return of camera. Setting a challenge can help conversations along. Projects found cameras worked well when asking families for feedback.

Resource	Good For	Logistics
Pocket Dice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active exploration: usually adult directed Prompting communication about collections or building Praise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The soft square ones used didn't roll very well. Still used for playful matching.
Toy Animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child led shared activity Active exploration: usually adult directed Prompting communication about collections or building Feeling secure and confident Praise when matching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If left with no instructions, animals will tend to be used to match to collections. Can also be good for "finding a home" or "find me a friend" challenges, with instructions. Plastic are more robust than cuddlies, but cuddlies very good for security
Portable Drawing Things	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child initiated independent activity Child led shared activity (where adult was scribe) Praise Modelling (where adult was scribe) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gel pads don't have the conservation issues that pens and paper may have Suggesting a role for the adult as scribe also worked well.
Drawing Table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child initiated independent activity Parallel shared activity Prompting communication Prompts social interaction with others Modelling Facilitating Praise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having same height table works best. This can be child height or wheelchair accessible height, if appropriate chairs provided for children
Brass Rubbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parallel shared activity Modelling Facilitating Praise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversation value is increased if the rubbed image is recognisable and linked to display within easy sight
Books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult initiated shared activity Modelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works best in a quiet space with comfy seating. Choose simple, quick books with bold pictures. Most value if obviously linked to displays.

RENAISSANCE SOUTH WEST

Renaissance is the Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) Council's widely supported and successful programme for regional museums. In the South West, £23.2m has been spent between 2006 and 2008 and the Government has committed to a further three years of investment. Renaissance in our region is focused on five Hub museums:

Bristol's City Museum and Art Gallery

Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro

Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth

The Hub museums work with MLA South West to deliver improvements based on the key themes of education, collections and exhibitions, workforce development and the wider museum community.

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