CultureCase

Using talk to affect learning in museums

This research was conducted by **Jennifer DeWitt and Jill Hohenstein** at **King's College London, UK**

Summary

This paper examined the quality of children’s talk to better understand the ways in which children learn in a museum setting. The research was based upon four separate school visits to the Science Museum in London and the New York Hall of Science. Conversations between children in the museum (and in subsequent lessons) indicated a high degree of co-operation which make for productive learning experiences. It also showed that the children were cognitively and emotionally engaged with the subject matter, especially while in the museum setting: a degree of engagement that was thought to enhance the learning potential of the visit.

Visiting a museum is a social experience for a child: an excursion away from their normal surroundings in the company of their peers

The existing evidence suggests that the more interactive a child is with their family or peers on a museum visit (asking questions, sharing ideas), the more effectively they learn.

The children in this research were aged between nine and 12 years old, from a variety of schools (all state schools from urban or suburban settings)

The conversations between a small sample of the children were recorded using audio devices, before being later transcribed and analysed in detail by the researchers. Students were given lessons relating to the content of the exhibits before and after their museum visits. The pre-visit lessons oriented the children in relation to the subject matter and set up the trip to be structured and focused in a way that would encourage interaction and collaboration. During the visits they worked in small groups to investigate specific exhibits in the galleries. They gathered material, which they subsequently worked up into presentations or posters in the classroom after the visit.

Keywords

UK **museum** **observation** **education** **talk** **learning** **children** **USA** **classroom**

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