

Weds AM  
Special Needs  
Program

Sadeber



## SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AT THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM BOSTON, MASS.

Museum Wharf  
300 Congress Street  
Boston, MA 02210  
(617) 426-6500

Each Wednesday morning during the school year, two groups of thirty children or adults from special education programs visit the museum reservation. Visitors are paired with Museum interns on a one-to-one basis. The intern, as companion and guide, accompanies the visitor through the participatory exhibits, encouraging interaction, at whatever level is possible for the visitor, interpreting information, and supporting success. In "Computers", for instance, a visitor with reading skills can play games like Hangman, or U-Guess, while a visitor without reading skills can have the directions read to him/her. An intern also has the option to switch to "type" in order to do name-spelling or simply to watch the letters and numerals appear on the screen. Because most of the exhibits are participatory and depend less on directions than on exploration, many different levels of interaction can prove satisfying for the visitor.

Anything from touching a snake for the first time, to comparing a live snake to a snake skeleton, to learning factual information about reptile life, is possible, depending upon the interest and abilities of the visitor, in our Living Things exhibit. Grandparent's House can provide a simple role play setting, fascinating tactile experiences, a quiet space for an excited child, or a place to physically and verbally investigate the technology of the past.

Staffing on a one-to-one basis allows us to individualize this interaction, and therefore permits us to accept visitors of any age - from the learning disabled child in a classroom setting to the mentally retarded adult in the institutional setting - and any kind of disability - physical, emotional or intellectual.

The interns are trained for the special education visits on a continuing basis through orientation programs and weekly support meetings. Conducted by the Special Education Coordinator, the meetings allow the interns to share problems and successes, and to ask specific questions

about various disabilities, and educational methods. A weekly one-hour sign language class is an optional part of the program.

This program has proved a great success over its seven year history for our visitors and staff. It has allowed us to serve groups who, in some cases, might otherwise find the museum experience a very difficult one.

Call 426-6500 as soon as possible after Labor Day to make a reservation for your group. Although the Museum will be open to the public, there are no school field trip reservations on Wednesday mornings. This will allow your group the opportunity to explore the Museum with less noise and competition, and much more attention from our staff.

U36 leaders  
Program  
feedback

636 MEETING - JANUARY 16, 1979

Attending: Sylvia, Sue, Karen, Marion, Kaki, Jeri, Sonnet, Lenny, Pat,  
Nancy, Diane

Agenda:     -Teacher Involvement  
              -Parent Participation  
              -Documentation  
              -1979-80 Programs

### Teacher Involvement

What has worked:

- The longer you work with teachers the better the relationship.  
It helps even if teacher has worked with someone else at the Museum.
- Program works better if it has relevance to teacher's curriculum--specifically if the topic is being taught at the same time in the classroom.
- When teachers know the variety of resources and have access to them they feel less threatened by the "experts."  
Workshop orientation could include resources.
- Camera technique: Having teachers photograph sessions often helps them observe kids and feel part of the session.
- It is important to define teachers and museum staff roles--during each class and to set limitations on sessions in terms of time, etc.
- It helps in the orientation if you discuss children's behavior and let them know we are comfortable with a higher level of noise and activity than they are used to . "Good Kids!"

Problems:

- Lack of involvement of teachers--the feeling that the specialist does the program.
- Different idea of "discipline".
- Teachers being selected by principal rather than choosing program.
- Feelings when teachers scream at kids or put them down.
- The programs design as primarily direct service does not include enough time to work closely with teachers.

Follow up: (of Museum programs in the classroom)

- Some teachers do it --use activities as motivation for other subjects.
- One issue to think about: is the activity self contained?  
That is, is it complete at the end of the session or have you built in a way for teachers to follow up?
- EXAMPLES: Kaki and Marion left seeds--the class planted them...literally!
- A Blackstone teacher made an exhibit in classroom -- used calligraphy "numbers" in his math lessons.
- One teacher followed up weekly using the museum topic for writing lessons.
- We need to find out if they use the discovery boxes left at the McKay School.
- Museum staff need to differentiate between preceeding activites which prepare the class for the next Museum session and follow up activities.
- Some teachers feel peer presure in participating in programs and in workshops.

#### Parent participation

- I. In solociting parents, Nancy talks to REPC's, the school principal and teachers involved for parent suggestions: both strategies and names. Nancy sends a letter home prior to the program with a tear off for those interested in participating. In addition, a letter is sent home during each specific course to invote them to observe.

Jeri suggested the Free Friday Night-Open House for parents as a good way to advertise the program and the Museum.

- II. In working with the parents as classroom assistants the following strategies have been used:

1. materials preparation;
2. Observers;
3. Special skills they contribute-recipes and cooking  
-calligraphy for calendar;
4. Help with "hands-on" activites;
5. Photographers;
6. Follow-up -reading books when Museum staff is not there  
-individualized work when Museum staff is not there.

Parents feel most comfortable when invoved in the planning sessions or an orientation workshop where they could be taught specific skills and/or learn about the activities that will be happening in the class sessions...as long

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as their role is clarified for them.

III. Parents have also served as liasons with other parents by writing articles for a school newsletter or local newspaper or by putting together small exhibits or displays at the school's Open House.

IV. Follow-up parent work is being done this year by Nancy in the form of a letter asking for parents to find out how their child liked the course and filling in a simple form. Attached to the letter is a family pass inviting each child's family to attend the Museum together for free.

#### Documentation

The next idea is in the form of documentation where we might put out single sheet back-to-back flier with photos and short course descriptions describing the program that just occurred. This could be sent home to all parents as well as used for Museum PR. This idea depends on cost factors.

#### 1979-80 Programs

A form was handed out to staff to ascertain their ideas about next year's programming: changes they foresee, what topics they want to do and with what schools and grade levels.

A follow-up meeting will be held in March to discuss the 1979-80 programs and allow further discussion of teacher/parent issues.