

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

CREATED IN 1925. MOVED TO CURRENT LOCATION IN 1946.

Educational Innovation at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

Education is at the core of all programs, exhibits, and initiatives of The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. The museum is charged with creating extraordinary learning



experiences across the arts, sciences, and humanities that have the power to transform the lives of children and families. In fact, as the world's biggest and best children's museum The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is a leader in many areas of education—both informal and formal—from early childhood education, to science encounters in the galleries, to National Common Core Standards-based Units of Study (curricula) for K–8 educators, to cutting-edge research on family learning.

Here are a few highlights of the museum's unique and varied educational initiatives.

Interpretive Programs

Interpretive and facilitated programs are increasingly common in children's museums, but The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is unique in the extent to which it actively engages visitors in museum experiences.

In 2010, the museum presented 57,700 interpretive and facilitated programs (averaging 169 programs per day), and more than 40 percent of all museum visitors took part in a gallery program. To achieve this level of engagement, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis employs nine full-time actor-interpreters and more than 25 gallery facilitators to enrich the experience of museum's exhibits and programs.

The museum's actor-interpreters bring the stories behind its immersive galleries alive. For example, families and children participate in a 30-minute participatory program exploring the *sebou*, a traditional Egyptian ceremony for welcoming a new baby, which is offered daily in *Take Me There: Egypt*. In *The Power of Children*, the program *Waiting for Good News* helps visitors understand the anguish of Otto Frank, who learns that he lost his daughter Anne at Auschwitz, but finds some solace when he learns that Anne's diary was rescued from the Frank's hiding place in the Secret Annex by their friend, Miep Gies.

Facilitators engage children and families in exhibit and program content, whether performing fingerplays for toddlers in the early learning gallery *Playscape*, conducting science demonstrations in *ScienceWorks*, or engaging children in active play during one of the museum's PlayFit events, which focus on health, wellness, and the importance of physical activity.

The Children's Museum Preschool

Launched in the fall of 2010, The Children's Museum Preschool is a place "where learning comes into play." The program is based on the principles and practices of Maria Montessori and Reggio Emilia as well as the research of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Each day includes guided exploration and discovery in one of the museum's immersive galleries, and then children return to their classrooms build on the experience in their state-of-the-art classrooms.

—more—



Beginning in the fall of 2011, The Children's Museum Preschool will adopt the Museum Magic Curriculum as developed for Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center (SEEC), with its focus on object-based learning, which combines guided inquiry about museum objects with complementary examples from children's literature and the world of art.

Iterative Family Learning Research

Under the leadership of Barbara Wolf, Ph.D., associate vice president of family learning evaluation and research, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis has been engaged in ongoing, iterative research to assess the educational impact and effectiveness of its exhibits and programs. (Wolf had a 20+-year career at Indiana University, teaching first in the Honors Division and then in the School of Education, while also serving as a consultant to The Children's Museum. She joined the museum's full-time staff in 2007.)

In 2010, the museum's research and evaluation staff published *The Evolution of Family Learning at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis*, a report that traces its pioneering Family Learning Initiative from the conceptual phase in 2004 (with the opening of *Dinosphere*) to the establishment of standardized measurements and methods that are unique in the field during the creation of *Fireworks of Glass* (2006) and *The Power of Children* (2007).

By defining and measuring family learning interactions over time, the staff can test, improve, and replicate interactive elements, increasing family learning exchanges across all exhibits and expanding family learning interactions into interpretive performances within the galleries.

School Services and Units of Study

The museum supports teachers and schools in the State of Indiana, and through its online resources (including its Teacher Community of Inquiry), across the country.

The School Services division offers a variety of programs for schools and teachers, including customized school visits that address National Common Core and Indiana State Academic standards. In 2010, 74,842 students, teachers, and chaperones visited The Children's Museum, exploring its immersive exhibits, participating in programs such as the museum's award-winning *Curious Science Investigators*, and experiencing SpaceQuest® Planetarium shows and Lilly Theater performances.

The School Services staff also offers workshops and other professional development opportunities for K–8 teachers, helping them to attain new knowledge and teaching strategies; teachers can also earn up to three university credits and points toward certification renewal.

Another critical service offered to schools is the museum's Units of Study, which connect the content of exhibits to curricula for Grades K–12. There are currently more than 30 Units of Study available for download from the museum's website. The units cover topics from health and fitness to the Civil Rights Movement, to biotechnology and more. All Units of Study are connected to National Common Core and Indiana Academic standards.