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Field Trips: How Teachers and Chaperones Can Elevate the Educational Experience

It might seem self-serving for a children's museum to write about the many reasons field trips can be so beneficial, but the truth is, there is both scientifically-based and anecdotal research that clearly show many out-of-classroom experiences are motivational, inspirational, educational and of course fun for students.

But even the best field trip venues can be tremendously enhanced by well-prepared adults. Adults can facilitate powerful interactions with and among the students, challenging them with thought-provoking questions and comments. They can help students make connections between what they see in the exhibits to what they have learned in the classroom.

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is five floors full of interactive, fun and imaginative exhibits. However, how can a large group of youngsters thoroughly explore and experience if they have to get through every exhibit? They can't—it's impossible. This is why thoughtful and selective pre-planning is a must.

The museum helps teachers customize visits so that students can delve deeper into the subjects and topics they are learning about in their classrooms. Free, grade-appropriate School Visit Guides enable teachers to pick and choose the exhibits, experiences and performances. Take for example the museum's *Flight Adventures* exhibit. Students discover the physics of flight, create their own model aircraft, test flight dynamics, see a real scientific test model from NASA, and enjoy a planetarium show. Teachers are encouraged to extend the experience back in their classrooms or at home through additional units of study provided by the museum. Perhaps former NASA astronaut, Dr. David Wolf, the museum's Extraordinary-Scientist-In-Residence may be onsite to talk with students about his experiences in space.

According to director of early childhood education, Cathy Southerland, learning is richer for students of all ages if the activities are engaging, hands-on, and inspire an emotional connection in the students. Whether they experience a feeling of awe while watching a planetarium show, amazement as they walk into *Dinosphere*, or inspiration in *The Power of Children*, the Museum of Indianapolis touches emotional chords in students as they visit with their classmates and their teachers. Those shared experiences and emotions solidify a sense of community within a class that is hard to achieve from mere textbooks and classroom materials.

In these days of testing and time constraints in schools, it is important for educators to seize every chance they can to enrich and enhance the learning that takes place in the classroom. A museum provides just that opportunity.

To learn more about The Children's Museum's field trips, visit <http://www.childrensmuseum.org/fieldtrips>. Families with children (infants through five years old) are encouraged to learn together through interactive play based upon the latest brain research at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis' *Playscape*. The permanent exhibit opens August 31, 2013.

This article first appeared in Indy's Child Magazine.