Field Trips For All

youngstar
Wisconsin's Child Care Quality Rating & Improvement System

Field trips and excursions are an important (and fun) part of the learning process in early care and education programs. The places you visit become extensions of your learning environment. As a result, field trips require the same careful planning to insure quality learning experiences are accessible to each child.

Observe the children in your program with a location in mind.

- Observe children's interests to create meaning in the field trip.
- What are children talking about as they arrive each day?
- What kinds of themes are emerging in their play?

Does the location fit with your program's curriculum and philosophy?

- Determine goals for the children.
- Observation may sometimes show children's interests match your goals.
- Meet the needs of *each* child.

For instance, you may choose to pass over an emerging interest in bugs and a possible trip to the local entomology lab because a child in the group is dreadfully frightened of insects.

Explore important realities by visiting the location first.

- Is the walking distance reasonable for young children?
- Will it meet the needs of all of the children, including those with disabilities or special needs?

- Are restrooms readily available?
- Will there be enough for children to see and do?
- Does the space accommodate the size of your group?
- Describe the developmental level and attention span of the children.

Once you have visited a field trip site, define your list of key experiences:

- What do you want children to explore and learn?
- What do you have planned for meaningful experiences in the classroom to follow-up?
- What adaptions are necessary to better meet individual strengths, needs, and interests?
- Brainstorm ways to promote hands-on experiences.

Use what you've learned about the site to plan for individual adaptions for the trip:

- For a child who has difficulty with transitions, spend time with him planning and preparing for the trip.
- For a child who has limited attention span, bring some topic-related manipulatives.
- Invite a child with a strong interest the topic to co-host the trip and share some of her knowledge.
- Change the actual site to make the trip physically accessible for a child.

Field trips are for everyone, plan excursions that meet the needs of each child– just as you plan activities within your program.

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A Parent's Story

Last Spring our child care program sent home a permission slip for an upcoming field trip to a local bottling plant. My child has severe disabilities and uses a wheelchair, and I could not imagine that the staff would want to take him along nor could I understand how he would benefit from such a trip. It made me sad to think of all the other children enjoying this trip knowing that my son was not aware enough of his surroundings to benefit from the experience. And it made me more than a little angry that the teachers were insensitive enough to send home a permission slip as if it were possible for Adam to go along.

I sent it back the next day with a note saying that Adam would not be joining the group. The director of the program called me that afternoon to say they were disappointed that Adam would not be going on the field trip. I thought she was joking, but she was serious. Apparently, the staff had already made special arrangements with the local bus company to accommodate the wheelchair and were convinced that Adam would enjoy the trip– especially since his so tuned in to sounds. She even invited me to join the group.

Adam did go to the bottling plant, and I went too. It was quite an experience. No one knew exactly how to use the chair tie-down in the bus, and it took all hands (including the bus driver) to get Adam on the bus. No one counted on the extra time it took to get everyone else buckled in, and I certainly could not have predicted the joy and excitement as all twenty-two kids screamed and laughed throughout the tour. Adam may not have been aware of everything that was going on, but he was clearly delighted with the loud clanging noises and loved it when the children got "accidently" sprayed with a hose. It wasn't easy to include Adam in this field trip, and I know that it took time and planning on the part of the staff and the director, but it was worth it!

RESOURCES

- **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning** http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/
- **Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards** http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/wmels-about.php
- **Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices** http://www.dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- **The Registry Training Calendar** https://www.the-registry.org
- **WI Early Care Association (WECA) Training Calendar** http://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/
- **MECA Special Needs Support Program (SNSP)** http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/meca/snsp/default.htm

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