8 Top Tips: Communicating your science with young children and family audiences

BES Public Engagement Training at the Eureka! museum
Training led by Chris Snowden, STEM and Public Engagement Manager at Eureka!

1. **Teaching tip:** Your goal as a teacher should be to engage a child and make a lasting memory that will inspire them to do something amazing with their life.

2. **Teaching tip:** Information will stick in a child's head long term if it's something different, unusual, or something they wouldn't normally experience.

Make a Memory:

Can you think of a science/learning related memory from your childhood that really stands out? A question to consider while thinking of a memory is, 'Was the memory an unusual experience?'. This departure from the normal (or how something 'normal' is presented) can make a big difference to how it will be remembered.

Not the norm: Memories are unreliable but it's about how someone feels that's important. You want to create an experience that will be a lasting memory.

3. **Teaching tip:** Identify your audience. Your audience can be made up of different groups (kids, parents, etc). Craft your approach around them.

4. **Teaching tip:** People are more likely to engage when they can relate to what they are learning about. Make it relevant and meaningful to your audience.

Who is your Audience? Why should they care?:

Identify Audience: Make sure you know who you are talking to and who is involved in a lesson. Consider specific details about your audience and how to include everyone involved in different ways, not just your target audience. (i.e. Eureka! audience are kids of different age groups, parents, guardians)

Give them a reason to care: You will want to persuade your audience to care about the subject. You personally knowing the subject is important isn't enough if the audience can't connect with it. The subject should be relevant and personal, or you need to help the audience feel like it is.

To discuss your ideas for engaging activities, please email chrisj@britishecologicalsociety.org

5. **Teaching tip:** For shows, always uplift your audiences' spirits and make the whole engagement experience positive. Especially when using volunteers, never humiliate them. Give volunteers an applause at the end!

There are many types of interaction environments. Main types include:

Shows: traditional setting where audience attendees sit and watch the performer.

Busking/Drop In: Busking is a flexible interaction where the visitor decides how much time is spent interacting with you. You must attract them to come to you.

Outreach: Outreach tends to be demonstrators going to the attendees instead of the attendees coming to the trainers. This allows for an exciting opportunity for the person teaching to interact with attendees in their comfort zone/home turf.

6. **Teaching tip:** Tell a story to communicate your message. Start with a hook, hold for dramatic effect, and reveal at the end to create excitement in the lesson.

7. **Teaching tip:** Sometimes silence and non-verbal actions can be the most powerful tool. It gives your audience a chance to process information and stay engaged.

Story telling or a Narrative:

Story: Your narrative should include a beginning, middle and end.
   - Beginning: **hook-** Immerse your audience into your overall experiment with something interesting, different, or unusual.
   - Middle: **hold-** Build up to the main point of the story and try a pause. 'What's going to happen?'. Leave them filled with anticipation. Maintaining a logical path of explaining your experiment (narrative) draws people in and makes them interested.
   - End: **reveal-** Keep it plain and simple, and don't over explain.

8. **Teaching Tip:** Keep it simple, because less is more. Even if there's a lot of information you want to tell your audience, you will lose them if you say to much. Summarise and condense and drop technical jargon.

Universal Language: Make your words accessible so others understand. Try explaining your research/job without jargon AND in 140 characters or less.

Overall Tip: remember the big three key points when developing your ideas:
   o Make memories (something that will stick - not the norm)
   o Who are your audience and why should they care?
   o Story telling (make your message simple and compelling!)

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