

SparkLab: Developing a visitor-centred, inquiry learning Science Centre

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Developing a new science centre exhibition within 12 months was both exciting and daunting. After a rapid review of current and emerging trends in science engagement, consideration of the skills and knowledge needed by our target audience of 6 – 13 year olds in the future, and building on the focus of natural phenomena in the previous Sciencentre, this led to a new approach for Queensland Museum.

SparkLab invites visitors to be a scientist, developing and applying science inquiry skills. Through play, our visitors are free to be curious, ask questions, test their ideas, make observations and share their thinking about their world. In addition they can develop their STEM knowledge as they explore 40 interactive exhibits.

To encourage being a scientist, experienced and knowledgeable Learning Officers are tasked with supporting curiosity, facilitating inquiry, challenging thinking and connecting concepts to real world examples. Staff also encourage risk taking through the development and delivery of visitor led investigations at the Science Bar and create opportunities for visitors to design solutions to real world challenges at the Maker Space.

The big questions are how successful have we been in meeting these objectives and what is the impact of the SparkLab experience on our audience? What are the lessons we have learned through this development process and the first 12 months of operation and where do we need to head towards?