

## **A REAL SIZE MODEL CAVE: A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO ELEMENTARY GEO-SCIENTIFIC TEACHING**

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Children usually have difficulties to learn in a theoretical way. Trying to teach geo-scientific facts in the classroom suffers from a lack of material to touch and look at. The ideal way of making children understand these things is to take them on excursions, which is usually time-consuming and expensive. One very successful alternative was built at the Museum of Natural History, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. A low-cost real size model cave of 40m<sup>2</sup>, built at the cost of materials (concrete, gypsum, and wire-netting) of about US\$2.000, that contains the important features of calcareous caves was set up and integrated into a mineralogical exhibition. Children can walk through this cave and touch the walls and different forms, thus experiencing these aspects exactly on their level of understanding, in the vicinity of their schools. Excursions to this model cave have been used by about 180.000 pre-college students and teachers for the last three years as a complementary means of their science education curriculum. We experience that children are very excited with the realistic atmosphere of the model cave, and feedback from teachers shows that this learning experience was successful. Thus, a visit to this model cave substitutes expensive excursions to real caves.