

# RESEARCH AGENDA PROJECT (2)

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**Children's Museum Research Network  
Summary of SIG#2 Study Results**

**Nov. 14, 2016**

*(Updated April 2016 with the follow-up study results)*

REVIEW

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP #1

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# Purpose

- Focused on the Research Agenda question, *What are children's museums beliefs about learning?*
- Looked specifically at institutional learning frameworks
- Three research questions:
  1. What major vocabularies do these frameworks share? Where do they diverge?
  2. What constructs do children's museums use and prioritize in their learning frameworks?
  3. What learning theories do these frameworks implicitly and explicitly reflect or endorse?

# Methods

- Document analysis and interviews
- Sample of 5 network museums, including:
  - ✓ Houston
  - ✓ Indianapolis
  - ✓ Minnesota
  - ✓ Pittsburgh
  - ✓ Providence

# Results

- Three key themes:
  1. Play
  2. Learning outcomes
  3. Learning approaches

# Dissemination

## 1. **CAISE blog**

- Foutz, Martin, Rehkamp, Swank

## 2. **Hand-to-Hand issue**

- Ashton, McKenney
- Letournea, Meisner, Tonsgard
- Hahn, McCallum, Sturgis
- Rivera, Thoma Emmons

## 3. **Curator article**

- Luke, Letourneau, Rivera, Brahms, May

RESULTS

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP #2

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# Purpose

- Builds on results from SIG#1
- Focuses more specifically on play and learning within a larger sample of children's museums
- Aims to describe how children's museums conceptualize play, and how they position themselves and their work relative to play



# Methods

- Stratified random sampling of institutions (size, geographic region, location)
- Identified one staff member at each institution, staff in senior positions overseeing the design and/or implementation of learning experiences
- Conducted semi-structured interviews by phone

# Interview Questions

- Role of play in mission statement
- Importance of play for mission
- Definition of play
- Types of play
- Indicators of play
- Relationship between play and learning
- Measuring play
- Benefits of play

# Description of Sample

Region	Our Sample	ACM Membership
Northeast	13%	15%
Midwest	40%	36%
South	29%	30%
West	19%	19%

# Description of the Sample

<b>Location</b>	<b>Our Sample</b>	<b>ACM Membership</b>
Rural	11%	8%
Suburban	27%	30%
Urban	62%	62%

# Description of the Sample

Budget/Size	Our Sample	ACM Membership
Less than 1 million	50%	46%
1-2 million	17%	16%
2-3 million	8%	7%
3-4 million	8%	10%
4-5 million	8%	6%
5-6 million	2%	3%
6-7 million	2%	2%
7-8 million	2%	1%
8-9 million	-----	-----
9-10 million	-----	-----
More than 10 million	2%	8%

# Description of the Sample

Study Participants' Role in the Museum	Our Sample
Exhibits	27%
Education	44%
Executive Director	27%
Board Member	2%

# Description of the Sample

Museum Longevity (Date Founded)	Our Sample
1974-1979	16%
1980-1989	23%
1990-1999	49%
2000-2005	12%

THEME#1

PLAY IN MISSION

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# Play in Mission

- Three key aspects to this theme:
  1. Visibility of play in the mission statement
  2. Importance of play to the mission
  3. Role of play within the mission

# (1) Visibility of Play in the Mission

- 59 responses from 49 respondents

Visibility of Play	Number of Responses	Percent of Respondents
“Play” is in the mission	28	57%
“Play” is in other statement	7	14%
Play is implied	15	31%
Other	9	18%

## (2) Importance of Play to Mission

- 49 respondents
- Lowest rank used when respondent gave multiple ranks

Rank on scale of 1 to 7	Number of Responses	Percent of Respondents
7	41	84%
6	3	6%
5	5	10%

### (3) Role of play in the mission

Code	Example
Play as learning process	Exploration, discovery, imagination, engagement, learning, inquiry
Play as socio-emotional development process	Cooperation, collaboration, conversation, peer-to-peer and intergenerational
Provide space for play	Play as outcome, exhibit design and museum atmosphere foster play, provides welcoming space for families
Institutional culture of play	"Part of everything we do," a "way of doing things," all programs/exhibits "play focused"
Elevate awareness of play's importance	Advocate for play's significance to museum staff, board, and visitors
Other	

## (2) Role of Play in the Mission

- 89 responses from 49 respondents

Code	Number of Responses	Percent of Respondents
Play as learning process	35	71%
Play as socio-emotional development process	7	14%
Provide space for play	17	35%
Institutional culture of play	21	43%
Elevate awareness of play's importance	5	10%
Other	4	8%

THEME#2

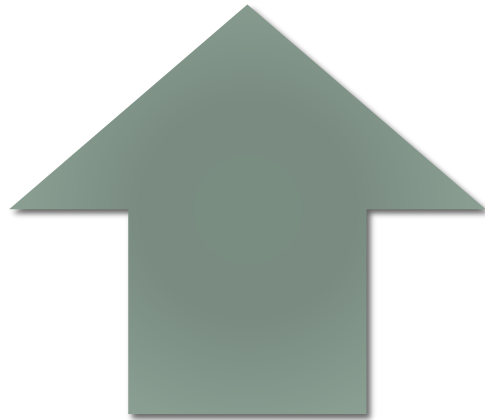
DEFINITIONS OF PLAY

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# Definitions of Play

- Four aspects to this theme:
  1. Presence of a definition
  2. Instantiation of a definition
  3. Nature of the definition
  4. Relationship between play and learning

# (1) Presence of a Definition



**Yes**

29% (14)

But many are general values/belief statements, not definitions



**No**

71% (35)

Small museum, no need for definitions

Play is anything, everything



## (2) Instantiation of a Definition



Only 5 of 49  
(10%) have a  
written definition  
of play

# Sample Information for Museums with Written Definitions of Play

Museum	Region	Location	Budget	Longevity
Chicago Children's Museum	Midwest	Urban	7-8 million	1982
Discovery Children's Museum	West	Urban	1-2 million	1984
Minnesota Children's Museum	Midwest	Urban	5-6 million	1979
Omaha Children's Museum	Midwest	Urban	2-3 million	1976
Providence Children's Museum	Northeast	Urban	1-2 million	1975

### (3) Nature of the Definition of Play

Code	Example
Characteristics of play	Fun, intrinsically motivated, free-choice
Play as learning process	Engagement, exploration, discovery
Benefits of play	Social growth, skill development
Types of play	Creative play, object play
Broad value statement or tagline	Play is crucial to learning, play with purpose
Practices that support play	Providing space to play; play is what the museum provides
Other	

# (3) Nature of the Definition of Play

- 65 responses from 49 respondents

Code	Number of Responses	Percent of Respondents
Characteristics of play	16	33%
Play as learning process	20	41%
Benefits of play	3	6%
Types of play	7	14%
Broad value statement or tagline	6	12%
Practices that support play	11	22%
Other	2	4%

## (4) Relationship b/n Play and Learning

- 54 responses from 49 respondents

Code	Number of Responses	Percent of Respondents
Play is learning	9	18%
Play is the process through which we learn	35	71%
Play is both a process and an outcome	8	16%
Play and learning are different things	2	4%
Other	0	0%

THEME#3

BENEFITS OF PLAY

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# (1) Benefits of Play

Code	Example
Social development	Communication, cooperation, family bonding and relationships
Emotional development	Self-confidence, self-control, comfort, and feelings
Cognitive development	Content knowledge, critical thinking, and creative thinking
Physical development	Motor skills, and fitness
Self-direction	Ownership of own play and learning, child-driven, exploration
Other	

# (1) Benefits of Play

- 121 responses from 49 respondents

Code	Number of Responses	Percent of Respondents
Social development	33	67%
Emotional development	29	59%
Cognitive development	32	65%
Physical development	12	24%
Self-direction	8	16%
Other	7	14%



# Social Benefits of Play



# Cognitive Benefits of Play



# Emotional Benefits of Play

A word cloud illustrating the emotional benefits of play. The words are arranged in a roughly circular shape, with the most prominent words being 'emotional', 'happy', 'confidence', 'skills', 'joy', 'encourage', and 'empathy'. Other words include 'stress-relief', 'control', 'practise', 'confident', 'therapeutic', 'socioemotional', 'understanding', 'self-reliance', 'help', 'feel', 'deal', 'patience', 'comfort', 'fears', 'capable', 'positive', 'calming', 'normalcy', 'independence', 'learn', 'joyful', 'frustration', 'vulnerable', 'trauma', 'world', 'proud', and 'feelings'.

empower control  
proud encourage practise  
world trauma confident  
feelings joy therapeutic  
vulnerable skills socioemotional  
frustration understanding  
confidence self-reliance  
joyful help  
learn emotional feel  
independence happy deal  
normalcy patience  
calming stress-relief comfort  
positive empathy fears  
capable

THEME#4

MEASURING PLAY

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# (1) Presence of a Measurement

## Yes

20% (10)

Record types of play

Seek feedback on nature of visitors' experiences

Observe how visitors use exhibits

## No

77% (38)

Lack of resources for evaluation

Evaluation measures other things



## (2) Indicators of Play

Code	Example
Child-directed	Self-directed, free choice
Enjoyment	Smiling, laughing, fun, joyful
Engagement	Concentration, focus, determination, curiosity, creativity
Interacting with People	Asking questions, parent involvement, role play
Interacting with Objects/Exhibits	Using props/costumes, climbers
Other	

## (2) Indicators of Play

- 121 responses from 49 respondents

Code	Number of Responses	Percent of Respondents
Child-directed	10	20%
Enjoyment	17	35%
Engagement	21	43%
Interacting with People	34	69%
Interacting with Objects/Exhibits	35	71%
Other	4	8%

# FOLLOW-UP STUDY

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# Follow-up Study: Overview

- Conducted via SurveyMonkey in Feb 2017
- 30 respondents, a sub-set of those who were interviewed
- Purpose was to gather data on:
  1. The age of the museum's current mission statement.
  2. Activities (with co-workers or solo) that were prompted by participating in the interview.
  3. Awareness of and suggestions for the CMRN.

# After the Interview: Talking to Co-workers

57% reported speaking with a co-worker about play and their museum after participating in the interview. Conversations commonly covered:

- The need for a more explicit position on play and its value for communicating impact to visitors, collaborators, and funders.
- A heightened mindfulness of play as a result of interview participation—how they think and talk about it, how it relates to their mission, what they currently do and things they may wish to change.

*“It prompted us to have a conversation about what we think about with play versus what we think our visitors think about it. In particular, for our museum, we discussed how to talk about play in our grants so that we can properly convey its importance.”*

# After the Interview: Other Activities

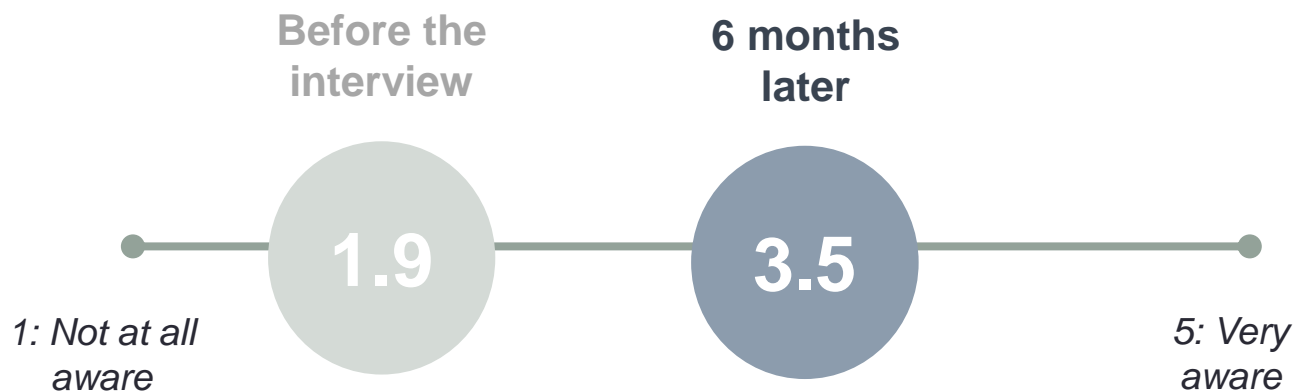
58% reported doing something *other than* talking to co-workers as a result of participating in the interview which included:

- Seeking out more information on play, using journals, blogs, websites of ACM and other children's museums, etc. (50%).
- Individual reflective thinking about their institutions position on play, often in relationship to training, growth, and program and exhibit design (31%).
- Reviewing, updating, and/or sharing their own institutional documents (25%).

*16 responses, multiple codes per response.*

# Reflections on the CMRN

Respondents reported an increase in awareness of the CMRN from before the interview to the date of the survey.



# Reflections on the CMRN

*What type of information, if any, do you think the Children's Museum field would find helpful with regards to the Research Network and its work?*

- CMRN research results and application (47%)
- Unpacking and supporting Play (35%)
- Leverageable evidence of the field's impact (24%)
- How to reach/support a specific audience (18%)
- How to get involved with research and/or the CMRN (12%)
- Other topics (18%)