Children’s Museum of Houston

Founded in 1980, the museum currently serves more than 800,000 visitors annually with a mission of “transforming communities through innovative, child-centered learning.” The museum articulates a focus on serving community needs such as the development of Houston’s child population, supporting parental involvement and formal learning, reducing the impact of poverty, supporting multicultural, multilingual programming, and the development of 21st century skills. The learning framework reinforces these values through a statement that “children will build confidence in their learning, apply basic math and reading skills, communicate their ideas, become skilled in scientific inquiry, use problem solving, and experience connections to the world.”

DuPage Children’s Museum

The DuPage Children’s Museum was founded in 1987 by two early childhood educators. The Museum helps develop curiosity, creativity, thinking, and problem solving in young children through its mission: “DuPage Children’s Museum ignites the potential of all children to learn through hands-on exploration by integrating art, math, and science.” Interactive exhibits and programs make learning fun for children and adults playing together. DCM serves over 300,000 visitors annually representing all 50 states and 575 zip codes in Illinois. DCM’s reach and support represents well beyond the Chicagoland area. The Museum’s impact extends across cultural, financial, and educational boundaries. It touches the lives of children from all regions, providing the building blocks for success in school and life. Grounded in constructivist learning theory, the core beliefs of DCM are “respect for all children and their ability to learn, the power of play as a basis for constructing knowledge, and the importance of the child-adult learning partnership”.

The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis

The world’s largest children’s museum, which opened in 1925, serves more than 1.2 million visitors per year. The museum stresses a sociocultural view of learning with a specific focus on family learning which is defined as “cognitive (related to knowledge, application, or content, etc.) or affective (related to relationships, emotion, attitudes, etc.) and occurs when family members interact with each other verbally and/or physically.” Family learning is further described as being influenced by the museum context and dependent on the family’s history of shared experiences. After exploring family learning for a number of years, in 2006 the museum initiated a two-year process of formalizing the structures used to design and evaluate exhibits and programs. This effort resulted in the Assessment of Learning Families in Exhibits (ALFIE) Inventory, which includes forty-five specific behaviors in three categories: participation, problem-solving and collaboration, and enhancement. The behaviors include references to adult/child play, including parallel play and role play.