Co-creation: Cultivating Relationships with Local Autism Communities
Presenters

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Today’s Agenda

What is co-creation?

What does it look like? How do we do it?

It’s hard, but we’re learning A LOT!

Products of co-creation with autism communities

- sensory resources

- sensory-friendly events, programs, and spaces

Evaluating a co-creation project using Team-Based Inquiry
What comes to mind when you hear “co-creation”?

Warm-up Activity: Graffiti Board

Discuss with your table.

Use the markers and flip chart paper at your table to write, draw, flow chart, etc. your ideas and thoughts about co-creation. (~5 mins)

- What is co-creation?
- Do you have any experience with co-creation? Examples?
- What does successful co-creation look like? Feel like?
What comes to mind when you hear “co-creation”?

Warm-up Activity: Graffiti Board

Please elect someone to share a couple ideas from your table.

Common themes?
Broken Squares Activity

Goal: At your table, make five equal-size squares

Rules:

• No talking, pointing, or any other kind of communicating with your tablemates.

• You may give pieces to your tablemates, but you may not take pieces from anyone (unless they give them to you).

• You may NOT simply push your pieces into the center of the table; you must give individual pieces to specific people.

• You may give away ALL or NONE of your pieces.
Broken Squares Activity

Goal: At your table, make five equal-size squares

Discussion Questions:

• Did your group struggle? Why or why not?
• Did anyone get especially frustrated? Why?
• Was it hard to follow the rules and not communicate? Did it get easier?
• What could you have done differently to make the experience more satisfying and/or successful?
• How does this experience relate to co-creation?
What is co-creation?

- working WITH instead of for your community
- listening and responding to community needs and aspirations
- building meaningful, trusting relationships with families, advocates, and professional partners
- open communication and a willingness to learn and act on what you hear
How did we start?

Coordinated a series of formal listening sessions with various groups like therapists, families affected by autism, teachers, and other museums.

Listening sessions based on the “Community Conversation Workbook” from the Harwood Institute.
What we’re learning

• Co-creation can be HARD!

• But it’s worth it!

• Building trust is essential.

• Getting to true co-creation takes time.

• All partners need to be open-minded and willing to learn.

• Assumptions are tricky!

• Listening sessions are powerful, enlightening events; not nearly as negative as some partners anticipated.

• User input creates extra community buy-in.
What we’re co-creating

- Sensory-Friendly Hours
- Sensory Toolkits
- Maps, Social Stories, visual schedules
- ASD-specific camps
- Sensory Hours
- Sensory Toolkits
- Social Stories
- Autism Nights
- Sensory Toolkits
- ASD-specific programs by grad students
- Sensory Map
Movement Break

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQ9q4U2P3ig
Sensory Toolkits

A clear stadium bag makes it easy for visitors to see what they’re getting and easy for staff to inventory!

In our initial toolkits:
• headphones
• gloves
• sunglasses
• Time Timer
• various fidgets
Other Sensory Resources

Social Stories

visual schedules

sensory maps

sensory recovery kit
Collecting Feedback

We collect feedback using:

• Interviews
• Comment cards
• Sticker voting walls
• Surveys
• Review meetings with therapists

Changes made based on feedback:

• Added slime or putty
• Allow people to take just what they need instead of the whole bag
• Sell fidgets in our store
Sensory-Friendly Events

Key features:

• Low attendance
• Sensory break rooms or calming spaces
• Calm environment
• More signage, like “stop” signs
• Transition items as kids leave
  • bendy straws
  • flubber
• Lower noise
  • May turn off or lower the volume on exhibits
• Low-light environment
  • Turn off some fluorescents
  • Lower blinds

These events are usually held when the museum is not typically open to the public, like early open mornings or a later close.
Sensory-Friendly Programs

Types of programs:
- ASD-specific camps
- ASD-specific semester programs and field trips
- Intentionally inclusive camps, programs, and field trips
- Family Science Nights for special education programs
- autism society or other advocacy group events and outreaches

Key features:
- sensory resources
- sensory break rooms or tents
- specific Social Stories and visual schedules
- activities in stations instead of linear
- more adults
- fewer students
- More conversations with parents – info gathering and relationship-building
- Staff training on sensory needs
Types of things to consider:

- Sensory rooms can be stimulating, focusing, or calming. In our museums, visitors typically need a relaxing/calming space.
- Movement – crawling, rocking, bouncing, spinning, pulling/pushing, jumping
- Light – want dim, warm lighting; fluorescent lights can hum
- Pressure and compression can help! Look into weighted blankets or vests.
- Stimulate ALL the senses in different ways. Make tactile boards with a variety of items that look, feel, smell, and sound different. Plus, include chewy items that kids can keep!
- Location – Easy to get to when needed? Noise and/or crowds nearby?
Collecting Feedback

We collect feedback using:
• Interviews
• Comment cards
• Sticker voting walls
• Post-it note feedback walls
• Surveys
• Staff debriefs

Changes made based on feedback:
• Offer events on different days/times
• Don’t turn off many (or any exhibits)
• Include take-home transition items
Team-Based Inquiry

An approach to empowering professionals to get the data they need, when they need it, in order to improve their products and practices and create successful educational experiences.

- Systematic
- Led by non-evaluation professionals
- Collaborative and team-based
- Small scale and focused
- Embedded in work
How we’re doing TBI

- Using team meetings to come up with goals and questions, to analyze data and use it to drive the project forward, to reflect on and plan improvements to events and resources
- Recording and sharing meeting notes
- Regular online staff surveys to track change in attitudes and comfort over time
- Internal website and Google Drive for storage and archiving
- Staff debriefs or surveys after events to share stories, observations, and ideas for improvements
- All of the feedback collection methods mentioned previously!

“It pulls our whole team in so they feel like they are helping out.” - OCM