The Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum provides children with the tools and inspiration they need to be explorers and creators of the world.
FIRST STEPS: REAL TOOLS
Chapter One: A Brief History of Making

Chapter One: An Insanely Brief and Incomplete History of Making

I do not think there is any thrill that can go through the human heart like that felt by the inventor as he sees some creation of the brain unfolding to success. Such emotions make a man forget food, sleep, friends, love, everything. — Nikola Tesla

Making things and then making them better is at the core of humanity. How can one turn on light? Light as a shared idea for all, humans know hundreds of years. Making, changing, improving, the meaning, and becoming were always part of our human experience. We have been inventing, creating, and making new ideas, designs, and tools for development. Throughout history, art and science, math and engineering, analytic thinking, and personal experience have contributed to communities, industry, culture, consensus, academia, and the forces of creative change. Engaging history has been a part of the creation since the invention of the universe, and we are a part of that history. If you are an educator who chooses engagement for making and inventing in your school or classroom, then you are a good company. These are noble things that must be known and passed down to the next generation. Our work is to make meaningful our representation of the natural world and knowledge construction. Who is going to make the monumental jump of new knowledge for making the future better? The parent, the teacher, the student, the computer? The answer lies in the next generation, the future. We need you, as a parent, educator, or innovator to bring together learning, teaching, and engaging with your classroom, believe in your students.
“We have had finished projects hanging on the walls in Real Tools since I’ve been here. Kids come in and say, “I want to make that.” While that’s pretty cool to see, what we want for that space is a completely open-ended prompt for kids, to make them think about how things are going to go together.

“I recently started taking down [the finished projects and replacing them with] materials, like a piece of foam or a plastic jug or an egg carton, so they can see some of the things we have in stock. I might ask them, ‘What does that shape remind you of? If you cut this part off, what could this become?’ It’s like looking at cloud formations.

“It’s an experiment to see if it challenges kids to spend more time on a project, and from the get go to have to problem solve.”
EXPERIMENTS IN STAFF ENGAGEMENT

TOOLS:
- Professional Development
- Communication

GOALS:
- Empowering experimentation and individuality
- Ownership
- Staff retention
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
-presenting ideas
-explicitly encouraging experimentation

Playwork:
A FREE PLAY REVOLUTION FOR CHILDREN’S MUSEUMS

Play Therapy
Peoria PlayHouse 10/9/18
“The staff trainings that we have had give us more power. We know that we are someone who can say something, and we can give creative ideas for the museum.”
“The training inspired me to get more creative in thinking of ways to interact with kids. One example: on a slow day there was a little one in the tot area and I took some puppets and some fake wood and built a little rabbit house for them. I was inspired by the idea of taking toys from where they belonged and putting them somewhere else, coming up with something different to do with them.”

KATIE
In Fall 2019, the PlayHouse will pilot a playgroup for young moms and their young children, which will be facilitated by licensed child/family therapists supported by Playhouse staff and staff from Cottenton Centers. Playhouse staff will be trained and supported by therapists so that they are comfortable coaching and supporting families during the group, and in future PlayHouse visits. Therapists will serve as “Play Coaches” and not offer clinical services during the group. Playhouse staff will be paired with the same families each week, and offer consistent motivation, encouragement, and support to parents during playtimes.

This is a partnership with Cottenton Centers, which is identifying and recruiting young mothers to participate, OSF, which is supporting the project, and Meredith Messina and Emily Hagman, two local play therapists.

The program objectives are:
- Parents will feel equipped to set limits with their child so that both child and parent feel safe.
- Parents will learn how play is a form of communication, and how to respond so their child feels heard.

PlayHouse Report – February 11, 2019

PlayHouse Story

When Vanessa Gideon lost her job, she and her four children moved to Peoria to live with her father, trying to save enough money to afford a place of their own. When they discovered the PlayHouse, and the museum’s Explorer Program which offers subsidized museum memberships, Vanessa said, “It was a blessing – we were literally in one room in that house.”

At the PlayHouse her children have learned to collaborate and socialize. The oldest boy loves Real Tools, and brings in found materials to make things. The four boys do not have dolls at home, so Valeria loves to see them enjoy care-taking in the Day Care area of For Town. At the Be Anything preview event one child decided he wants to be a policeman. And Valeria has had the opportunity to see how all of her children transform and grow through imaginative play.
“We use our daily meetings to bring staff strengths to the table, taking their knowledge and pulling from that, trying to use their experience. And also asking them, what do they think?”
“[We have started] conversations about what is working or what is not working at the PlayHouse. I feel like as floor staff our voices are being heard, which has helped us to realize that our feedback does matter. We are all in this together to create the best space we can for kids to learn in.”
The Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum provides children (and others, including staff) with the tools and inspiration they need to be explorers and creators of the world.

GOALS:
- Empowering experimentation and individuality ✓
- Ownership ✓
- Staff retention ?
Take-away: If staff are empowered to share their ideas and make them happen, you need to be prepared to move quickly to support these ideas.
DRESS UP DAYS: WORLD BOOK DAY

Take-away: Our floor staff can quickly create engaging programming, and they love having the opportunity to do this.
Take-away: When floor staff become change-makers, communication gets more complicated – they need to inform you about what’s new.
“I do think that us starting to have more themed days, having staff dress up for something, makes us excited... those are a little bit more fun because we are creating something. We can add something to the tree. It is exciting to point out something that you put in a tree. You notice it if you and your peers have had that input.”
Peoria PlayHouse
children's museum
A Peoria Park District Facility