How Rewarding is Risk?
Play, risk-taking, and building capable children
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## How Rewarding is Risk?
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stats</th>
<th>KidsQuest Children’s Museum (Bellevue WA)</th>
<th>Hands On Children’s Museum (Olympia, WA)</th>
<th>TCM Southern Oregon (Medford, OR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SF Indoors/Outdoors</td>
<td>16,000 SF 1000 SF Gallery</td>
<td>28,000 SF ½ acre outdoor space</td>
<td>10,000 SF 1 acre outdoor space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Population</td>
<td>150,000 - Bellevue 2 Million - Area</td>
<td>58,000 - Olympia 298,000 - County/Metro</td>
<td>87,000 - Medford 325,000 - Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Stats</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2 preschool classrooms 7 satellite classrooms</td>
<td>5 preschool classrooms</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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Welcome! Thank you for being here!

Who is in the room?

What words come to mind when you think of kids and adults taking risks (at your museum!)?

How likely are you to include "risk" in your exhibit planning?
How important is risk-taking in play?

Pretty important…

1. Overview - High Risk vs. High Stakes
2. KidsQuest Danger Days
3. Kids Can Do Hard Things! (TCMSO)
4. “Safe Risk” as a Foundational Philosophy (HOCM)
Strong kids, safe kids, happy kids

Hands On Children's Museum, Olympia WA
Growing and Exploring
If kids are going to TRY THINGS….

…they need guidance as they

**Evaluate the risk**
- **Severity**
- **Advantages of success**
- **Consequences of failure**
If kids are going to TRY THINGS…. …they need guidance as they

Evaluate the risk
Severity | Advantages of success | Consequences of failure

Assess their own skills
If kids are going to TRY THINGS....

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Evaluate the risk

Severity | Advantages of success | Consequences of failure

Assess their own skills

Make [good] decisions.
If kids are going to TRY THINGS....

...they need guidance as they

Evaluate the risk
Severity | Advantages of success | Consequences of failure

Assess their own skills

Make [good] decisions

Feel ok [or feel ok asking for help] if they misjudge the risk.
Conquering Fears I

Happy Hollow Park & Zoo, San Jose CA

NC Museum of Natural Sciences, Raleigh NC
Learning Curves - Gentle and Steep*

* Staff need to feel competent and comfortable as well!
Philosophical Choice
If kids are taking risks for GROWTH’s sake

...we want them to:

Become (and feel) competent in many arenas
If kids are taking risks for GROWTH’s sake

…we want them to:

Become (and feel) competent in many arenas

Become good decision makers
If kids are taking risks for GROWTH’s sake

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Develop their sense of agency
If kids are taking risks for GROWTH’s sake...

…we want them to:

Become (and feel) competent in many arenas

Become good decision makers

Develop their sense of agency

Develop resilience
Conquering Fears II
High Risk vs. High Stakes
Helping kids grow!
KidsQuest Children’s Museum’s Danger Days
Risky Thinking

Stop thinking of education as something that we do to people, and start thinking of people as voracious self-directed learners.
Risk starts at home –
With your Board and Staff
Being brave can be risky even for adults – Maybe more so
Make it a party
The great equalizer
Be brave and open your eyes
What seems simple to you…
Knives, Ladders, Rocks and Fire
Look out, Danger Ahead
GEN 2022
Located in Semi-Rural Southern Oregon

- 10,000 sq ft exhibit space
- 1 acre of outdoor space
- 5 main campus preschool classrooms
- 7 satellite preschool locations
- Dearth of regional cultural opportunities for children
- Absence of Museums
- Shortage of Early Learning opportunities
- Low graduations rates
Board Division
Around “Risk” and “Danger”

- What is our obligation?
- What is our goal?
Our Philosophy

Risk = Resiliency

- Give kids challenges
- Let them have independence
- Problem solving comes before “let me help you”

“This is hard, but you can do hard things”
Navigating the Preschool Sand Play
Makery Programs
Real Power Tools, Real Materials, Open Ended Projects
Ventures in Art
Exposure to risk and challenges builds resilience while developing tools and skills to navigate the real world . . .
Hands On Children’s Museum
Olympia WA

- 28,000 square feet indoors, half acre outdoors
- Olympia population 56,000 (2021); Thurston County 298,000 (2021)
Hands On Children’s Museum

- Annual Visitors 315,000 (2019); 257,500 (2022);
- Approx. 30% served through Free & Reduced Programs

Olympia WA
Located on the tip of Puget Sound

Three Projects inspired by water & nature

- Children’s Museum & Outdoor Discovery Center
- LOTT WET Center – The Science of Wastewater
- East Bay Public Plaza & Reclaimed Stream
East Bay Public Plaza

- First in State approved for immersion in reclaimed water
- 250’ Interactive Stream
- Fed with Class A reclaimed water
What are the risks?

Common physical risks:

- Getting wet
- Getting muddy or paint-stained
- Falling
- Splinters
- Allergies
- Choking hazards
- Tool injuries and burns
What are the risks?

Other risks:

- Social risks: meeting new people, phobias, collaborative projects, trying new things,
- COVID and other germs
Outdoor Discovery Center Concept

Promote physical & mental well-being by

- Connecting young children to nature
- Providing seamless indoor/outdoor play
- Providing “Safe Danger” experiences
Puget Sound Beach

- Getting up high
- Loose logs & rough wood
- Water and mudpies!
Meaghan D

- Slick surfaces
- Rope climbs
- Sand, rocks & insects
Gravel Dig, Lighthouse & Stream

- 4-5’ high rocks
- Alpine stream
- Lighthouse with spiral stair
Hike & Trike Loop

- It’s not level or straight!
- 4’ elevation means trikes go fast!
- Padded Light Bollards
Loose Parts & Risky Play

- Bamboo branches
- Sticks, stumps & unstable structures
- Large & small rocks
Host the pros.
Get advice from the experts.
Start Small.
Do things you know.
Choose programs that staff get excited about.
Don’t be afraid to be wrong.
Prototype and practice.
Encourage the use of safety gear.
Give parents choices.
Label clearly.

ALLERGY ALERT
Alpaca Fiber is used in this project.

CAUTION
VERY HOT

Soldering Safety
✓ Follow all directions carefully!
✓ Store soldering iron in stand when not in use.
✓ NEVER touch the metal tip.
✓ Metal transfers heat - ANY metal on the project may be hot!
Learn from observations.
Admit your mistakes and move on.
Why risk it?

- Practice making good decisions
- Develops and tests skills
- Inspires tinkering, making & physical activity
Why risk it?

- Promotes discovery & independence
- Encourages problem solving, planning & cooperating
Along with milk and veggies, kids need a steady diet of sticks and worms. Rocks need skipping. Holes need digging. Water needs splashing. Bugs and frogs and slimy stuff needs finding.
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Tell us what you think:

Are you thinking differently about risk?

Now what words come to mind when you think of kids taking risks (at your museum!)?

Now how likely are you to include "risk" in your exhibit planning?
Thank you
...for building capable children!

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