

Seeing Joy and Other Social Emotional Moments in Our Museums

InterActivity 2023

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What does joy look like in your museum?

What does joy sound like in your museum?





Social Emotional Learning in Context

- Social emotional skills and capabilities play out through life
- Children experienced social isolation during the pandemic
- Museums are social spaces

Session Overview

- Greetings, Introductions, and Overview
- Starting with Joy
- Preschoolers' Social Emotional Learning in Children's Museums
- Exhibit Affordances that Foster Social Emotional Learning
- A Small Museum's Collaborative Process on Seeing Joy
- Discussion: How would you use information about children's social emotional learning to inform the museum experience?

Take-Aways

- Why social emotional learning is important in human development
- What social emotional learning looks like in children's museums and how to communicate about it
- Three approaches and processes to studying and encouraging social emotional behaviors
- Ways that museum environments can elicit and support positive social emotional moments

Understanding Social Emotional Learning

- How do we understand social emotional learning?
- What are some examples of social emotional learning?
- Why social emotional learning matters in our museums?

Places of Joy

- “Play for the sheer joy of it.”
- Joyful play and joyful learning
- Mission statements
- “Nothing without joy.” (Malaguzzi)



How can we invite and encourage children to feel and express joy in our museums?

Joy's Benefits

- Boosts our immune systems
- Fights stress and pain
- Improves our chance of living a longer life
- Is a form of resilience
- Feels good

Looking for Joy

- Seeing joy in our museums
- Reflecting on joy that is present
- Creating more possibilities for joy



Experiencing Joy

As I look back ... and recall the moments of greatest happiness, they were, for the most part, moments when I lost myself all but completely in some instant of perfect harmony. ... this ecstasy overtook me when I was happy out of doors. Was I five or six? Certainly not seven. It was a morning in early summer. A silver haze shimmered and trembled over the lime trees. The air was laden with their fragrance. The temperature was like a caress. I remember—I need not recall—that I climbed up a tree stump and had no need for words. “It and I were one.”

Bernard Berenson
American Art Historian, 1865-1959

Remembering Joy

What memory of joy from your childhood do you recall ?

- How did you feel?
- What was happening?
- Where were you?



Childhood Joy Remembered

- Crawling through and disappearing into the tall grass
- Going out horseback riding with my dad early in the morning in late summer
- Climbing on the bus and going to the library by myself to get books
- Riding my bike wearing a freshly ironed shirt my mother made. It was a perfect moment. I felt free
- Floating in the lake with my sisters
- Laying in the grass under the trees, the light would come through the leaves. I'd see all the flickering lights that reminded me of a million candles

The Joy We See

Think of:

- A child's joyful moment observed in a museum, other setting, or a photo
- A child of any age



What does this child's joy look like?

Qualities of Joy

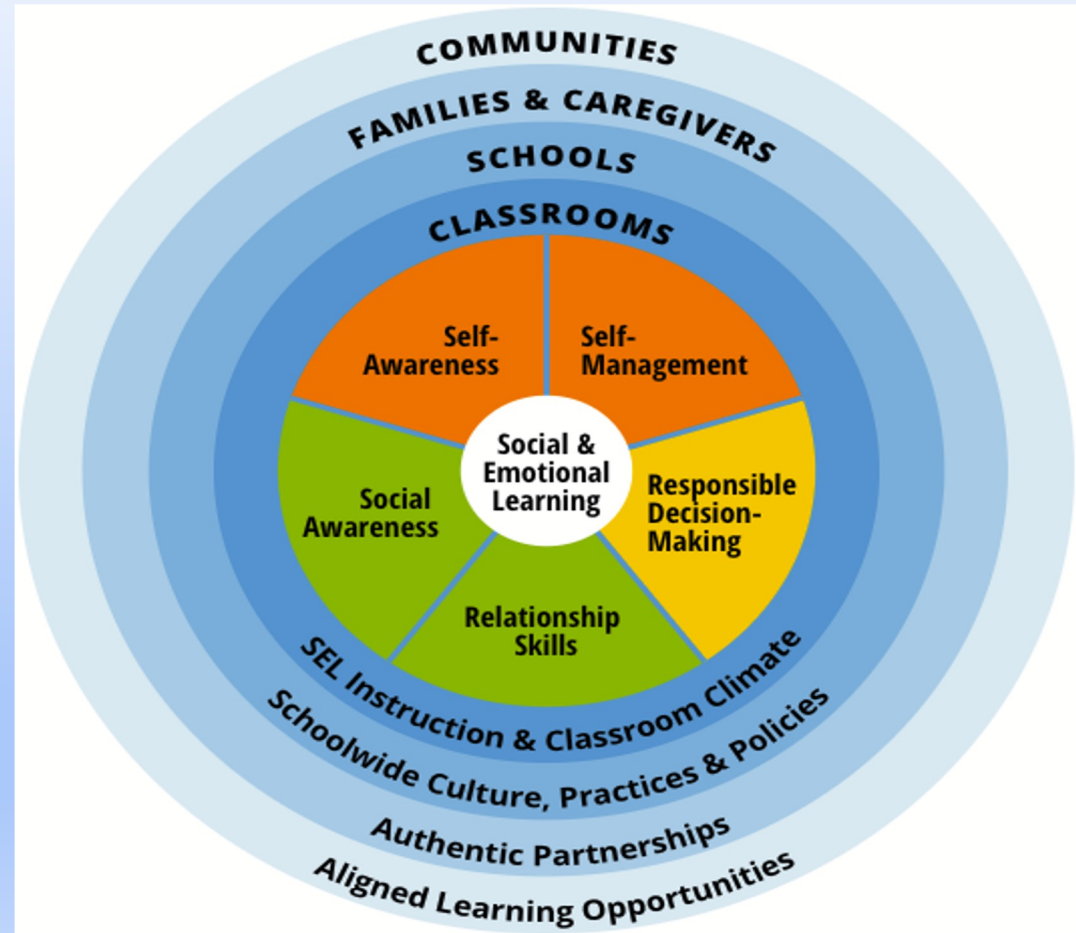
- Feeling of connection
- Contentment
- Gladness
- Purpose
- Flow, timelessness
- Thrill
- Glee
- Exuberance, elation, buoyancy
- Ephemeral, effervescent, ineffable
- Experienced both individually or shared

Preschoolers' Social Emotional Learning

Connecting joy to social emotional learning

“Joy is primarily shared with others, and can happen in response to some desire being fulfilled, or in anticipation of the desire being fulfilled”
(Johnson, 2020,p. 16)

Image source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning <https://casel.org>



Children's Museum Research Network study

606 observations collected at 14 children's museums (N=468) in the U.S. and Canada and 12 community parks, playgrounds or community centers (N=138).

Observations were completed using the Revised/Shortened Minnesota Preschool Affect Checklist (MPAC-R/S) of children ages 4-5 years old.

Observers tallied incidents of social emotional behaviors and descriptives such as the child's gender, level of parent involvement, level of staff involvement, other children in the group/exhibit, and crowd level.

Luke, J. J., Brenkert, S., & Rivera, N. (2022). Preschoolers' social emotional learning in children's museums and community playgrounds. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 20(2), 229-241.

Study Findings

Table 3. Children's observed positive and negative affect ($N = 606$) across the 10 minute observation period.

Affective behaviors	Mean instances of behavior		Significance (p)
	Museum ($n = 468$)	Comparative ($n = 138$)	<0.05
Positive affect, solitary	0.96	0.83	0.309
Positive affect, social, undirected	1.78	2.71	0.000
Positive affect, social, directed	0.67	1.29	0.000
Total positive affect	3.41	4.83	0.000
Negative affect, solitary	0.06	0.02	0.142
Negative affect, social, directed	0.28	0.07	0.003
Total negative affect	0.34	0.09	0.002

Table 4. Children's observed reactions to frustration across the 10 minute observation period (N= 606).

Reactions to frustration	Mean instances of behavior		Significance (p)
	Museum (n = 468)	Comparison (n = 138)	<0.05
Positive reaction, neutral/positive affect	0.37	0.03	0.000
Positive reaction, negative affect	0.21	0.07	0.000
Total positive reactions	0.58	0.09	0.000
Interpersonal aggression	0.11	0.00	0.000
Object-based aggression	0.07	0.00	0.000
Total aggressive reactions	0.17	0.00	0.000

Table 6. Children's observed peer relationship behaviors ($N = 606$).

Peer relationship behaviors	Mean instances of behavior		Significance (p)
	Museum ($n = 468$)	Comparison ($n = 138$)	<0.05
Leading	0.45	0.16	0.000
Joining	0.47	0.20	0.000
Listening to/following directions	0.56	0.14	0.000
Total participating behaviors	1.47	0.50	0.000
Taking turns	0.46	0.14	0.000
Cooperating	0.61	0.10	0.000
Sharing	0.47	0.04	0.000
Total prosocial behaviors	1.55	0.29	0.000
No social interaction	0.14	0.09	0.097
Interpersonal aggression	0.03	0.01	0.029
Total antisocial behaviors	0.17	0.09	0.021

Children's sex significantly influenced their observed peer relationship behaviors. Girls showed significantly more instances of leading ($p = 0.037$) and cooperating ($p = 0.019$) in both settings.

A Joyful Summary

While both children's museums and non-museums provided opportunities for children to practice and demonstrate social emotional behaviors, there were significantly more instances of children regulating their emotions, regulating their behaviors, and practicing peer relationships in children's museums.

These behaviors occurred during experiences that were not mediated by adults, but facilitated by the spaces designed to support play, exploration, and learning.

If joy is both an affective state and a socially constructed experience, the study provides evidence of the value of children's museums to create joy.

Fostering Social-Emotional Development in Children's Museum Exhibits

Findings from the earlier study made us wonder:

What are the affordances of different types of museum exhibits that foster social-emotional learning opportunities?



Loose Parts



Collaborative



Pretend


Fostering Social-Emotional Development in Children's Museum Exhibits

- 1,179 observations collected at 12 children's museums in the U.S.
- Observations were completed using the Revised/Shortened Minnesota Preschool Affect Checklist (MPAC-R/S) of children ages 4-5 years old.
- Observers tallied incidents of social emotional behaviors and descriptives such as the child's gender, level of parent involvement, level of staff involvement, other children in the group/exhibit, and crowd level.

Emotional Expression, Positive

SEL behavior	Average frequency	Significance
Positive affect, solitary	Loose parts: mean=1.85 Pretend play: mean=1.54 Collaborative play: mean=1.86	Loose parts > pretend, p=0.062 Collaborative > pretend, p=.047
Positive affect, social, undirected	Loose parts: mean=2.19 Pretend play: mean=1.99 Collaborative play: mean=1.98	None
Positive affect, social, directed	Loose parts: mean=1.91 Pretend play: mean=1.58 Collaborative play: mean=2.21	Collaborative > pretend, p=.001
Total positive affect	Loose parts: mean=5.94 Pretend play: mean=5.79 Collaborative play: mean=6.30	None

Emotional Expression, Negative

SEL behavior	Average frequency	Significance
Negative affect, solitary	Loose parts: mean=1.11 Pretend play: mean=1.04 Collaborative play: mean=1.06	None
Negative affect, social, directed	Loose parts: mean=1.57 Pretend play: mean=1.23 Collaborative play: mean=1.19	Loose parts > pretend, p=0.020 Loose parts > collaborative, p=0.005 
Total negative affect	Loose parts: mean=2.57 Pretend play: mean=1.50 Collaborative play: mean=2.08	None

Emotional Regulation, Positive

SEL behavior	Average frequency	Significance
Positive frustration, positive/neutral affect	Loose parts: mean=1.50 Pretend play: mean=1.35 Collaborative play: mean=1.69	Collaborative > pretend, p=0.022
Positive frustration, negative affect	Loose parts: mean=1.51 Pretend play: mean=1.30 Collaborative play: mean=1.33	None
Total positive reactions to frustration	Loose parts: mean=2.70 Pretend play: mean=2.62 Collaborative play: mean=3.22	None



Emotional Regulation, Negative

SEL behavior	Average frequency	Significance
Interpersonal aggression	Loose parts: mean=1.21 Pretend play: mean=0.88 Collaborative play: mean=0.86	None
Object aggression	Loose parts: mean=1.44 Pretend play: mean=1.05 Collaborative play: mean=1.09	None
Total aggressive reactions	Loose parts: mean=3.83 Pretend play: mean=1.25 Collaborative play: mean=1.43	None



Behavioral Regulation, Positive

SEL behavior	Average frequency	Significance
Intense involvement, any activity	Loose parts: mean=1.39 Pretend play: mean=1.40 Collaborative play: mean=1.33	None
Intense involvement, independent activity	Loose parts: mean=1.51 Pretend play: mean=1.54 Collaborative play: mean=1.43	None
Total positive involvement	Loose parts: mean=2.71 Pretend play: mean=2.86 Collaborative play: mean=2.78	None

Behavioral Regulation, Negative

SEL behavior	Average frequency	Significance
No involvement	Loose parts: mean=1.04 Pretend play: mean=1.00 Collaborative play: mean=1.08	None
Limited involvement	Loose parts: mean=1.13 Pretend play: mean=1.07 Collaborative play: mean=1.43	None
Total negative involvement	Loose parts: mean=1.33 Pretend play: mean=1.57 Collaborative play: mean=1.50	None

Peer Relationship Skills, Participating

SEL behavior	Average frequency	Significance
Leading	Loose parts: mean=1.24 Pretend play: mean=1.23 Collaborative play: mean=1.28	None
Joining	Loose parts: mean=1.33 Pretend play: mean=1.27 Collaborative play: mean=1.55	Collaborative > pretend, p=0.013 Collaborative > loose parts, p=0.064 
Listening to/following directions	Loose parts: mean=1.76 Pretend play: mean=1.49 Collaborative play: mean=1.68	Loose parts > pretend, p=0.049 
Total participating behaviors	Loose parts: mean=4.79 Pretend play: mean=3.85 Collaborative play: mean=4.69	None

Peer Relationship Skills, ProSocial

SEL behavior	Average frequency	Significance
Taking turns	Loose parts: mean=1.45 Pretend play: mean=1.20 Collaborative play: mean=1.45	None
Cooperating	Loose parts: mean=1.73 Pretend play: mean=1.35 Collaborative play: mean=1.66	Loose parts > pretend, p=0.006 Collaborative > pretend, p=0.020
Sharing	Loose parts: mean=1.57 Pretend play: mean=1.32 Collaborative play: mean=1.52	None
Total prosocial behaviors	Loose parts: mean=6.30 Pretend play: mean=4.52 Collaborative play: mean=5.89	Loose parts > pretend, p=0.030



Peer Relationship Skills, AntiSocial

SEL behavior	Average frequency	Significance
No social interaction	Loose parts: mean=1.09 Pretend play: mean=1.00 Collaborative play: mean=0.91	None
Interpersonal aggression	Loose parts: mean=0.75 Pretend play: mean=1.11 Collaborative play: mean=0.75	None
Total anti-social behaviors	Loose parts: mean=1.00 Pretend play: mean=0.00 Collaborative play: mean=0.00	None

A Joyful Summary

- Children engage in Social Emotional Learning experiences at Children's Museums.
- We see a higher frequencies of these indicators now than we did pre-pandemic.
- We see higher frequencies of these indicators in exhibits featuring loose parts and collaborative opportunities than in pretend play.



CMs are strongly positioned to offer SEL experiences in unique ways. Sometimes these experiences happen by chance, but we can intentionally design for them.

Inviting Joy In

How can we open up possibilities so more children will experience more moments of joy in our museums?

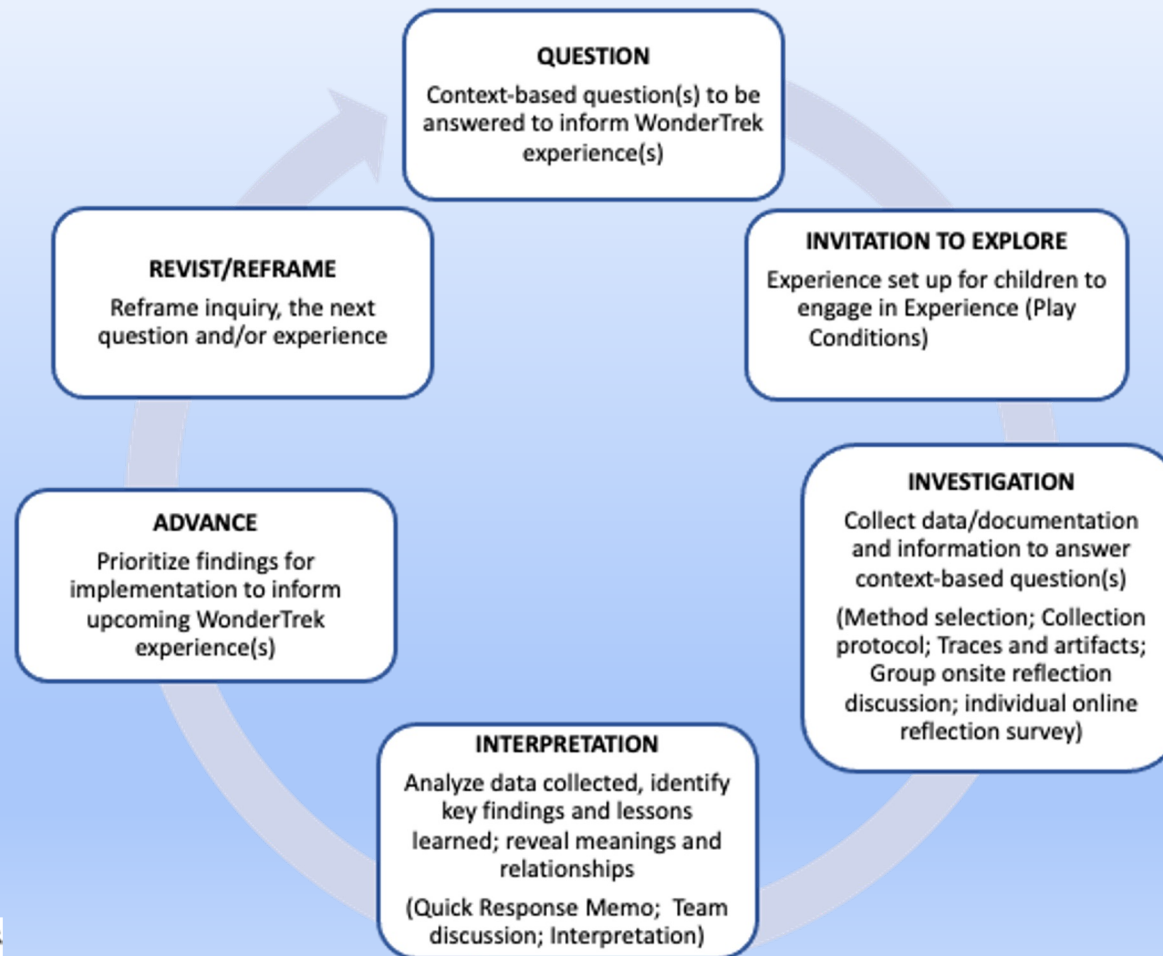


Joy as a Line of Inquiry

- At WonderTrek, an emerging museum in north central Minnesota
- Joy is in its mission and foundational experiences
- Explored through a collaborative, iterative inquiry process
- Using multiple methods
- Engaging children and adults
- Informing museum experiences and practices



WonderTrek Inquiry Process





WTI Question Worksheet

Working Question: *What questions do we want to investigate?*

How can WonderTrek invite and encourage children to feel and express joy?

- What does children's joy look and sound like?
- What can we learn from children and their adults about experiencing joy in settings for children?
- What conditions appear to encourage and elicit joy?

This is important because... *What persistent questions or projects does the Museum have this will address?* Social emotional learning is important in human development. Our museums believe joy is important in children's lives. Joy fights stress and pain; boosts the immune system; is a form of resilience; and feels good. Our museums are places of joy.

Invitation to Explore: *Where and when will this take place? What are relevant Play Conditions? How will it be set up? How is the set-up responsive to the Question?*

Documentation Methods: *What are the ways in which children's activities and experiences will be documented: collect quotes? data will be collected.*

Data Gatherers/Researchers/Documenters: *Who will gather what information?*

Timeline: *What tasks and arrangements must be made for this Studio Explorations to be ready?*

Completed by: *All individuals who contributed to the worksheet.* Date: *Worksheet completed*



SHOW US!

What does *joy*
look like in your child?



WonderTrek Inquiry

What conditions are present that might contribute to the joy?



Photo credit: Bruce Silcox courtesy of Minnesota Children's Museum

WonderTrek's Play Conditions

- Image of the child: The child's strengths and capabilities
- Context or setting: Physical and social space and their qualities
- Invitation to explore: Encouraging children's engagement
- Materials: Varied objects seed the set-up with possibilities
- Interactions and relationships: Connecting people
- Content: What is fascinating and meaningful to children
- Time: An opening for play and learning

Conditions Disposed To Joy

- Image of the Child: A strong sense of agency and sense of self
- Context or setting: The soft qualities of space: abundant light, natural light, moving air; sensory immersion; and space for moving freely.
- An Invitation to Explore: Surprise, novelty, intriguing sensory patterns
- Materials: Explorable, unscripted and responsive to children's actions
- Interactions and relationships: Children feeling recognized; connected to others; adults sensitive to children's spark
- Content: Wind, water, animals, movement, nature
- Time: A opening for joy: unstructured time, a sense of possibilities and freedom

Learning about Children's Joy

- Joy is a feeling and a shared experience
- Joy is expressed early in life
- Everyday joy
- Joy has many qualities and expressions
- Focus on conditions that favor joy
- Museums are places for joy
- Experiencing joy matters in children's lives



Learning from the Inquiry Process

- We can learn with and from children
- Play-and activity-based methods engage children more fully
- The WonderTrek Inquiry Process is adaptable
- Questions matter
- Making meaning takes time

Discussion

Thank You!

Joy, particularly through the activities that result from feeling joy, provides the individual with the opportunity to learn new cognitive and behavioral skills and forge new social relationships and skills which enhance resilience to future obstacles and threats.

Johnson, M. (2020). Joy: A review of the literature and suggestions for future directions. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 15*(1), 5-24.