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Exploratory Study to Determine Possibilities of Parent Education Within a Children's Museum Environment

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EXPLORATORY STUDY TO DETERMINE POSSIBILITIES OF PARENT
EDUCATION WITHIN A CHILDREN'S MUSEUM ENVIRONMENT

by

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A Thesis

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Abstract

This exploratory study examined the possibilities for parent education within a children's museum. The three critical components of parent education were considered: Parent-child learn and explore time; parent observation and parent discussion.

A café style focus group format was used to gather data for this study to allow the participants to freely express thoughts and ideas. Fourteen licensed parent educators attended one of four focus group sessions. Each focus group session included a video, a case summary and power point that generated common themes and insights that guided group discussion. Notes and transcripts from audio recordings were used to identify themes. Participants shared ideas for engaging parents in the critical components and suggestions for activity areas in a children's museum.

Future research about the roles and influences of parent educators in the programming of children's museums remains to be explored.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Children's museums are places where children, parents, families, educators, communities, and cultures gather together to play, explore, discover, and learn about one another and about the world in which they live. Together, through visual, auditory, and hands-on experiences all gain knowledge and understanding of themselves and each other. Together, relationships are strengthened as professional programs support the development of healthy families while enhancing the education of children and parents. Together, all are given the chance to encounter real world experiences in a safe environment that they might not otherwise be able to experience. Children's museums become important institutions to parents and parent educators as resources in supporting families and communities as they strive to become the best they can be.

This is an exploratory study to generate possible roles and strategies of parent education to be used in the design and operation of a children's museum. The critical components of the parent education group process include parent child explore and learn time, guided observations of children and parent discussion time (Campbell & Palm, 2004). These specific intentions would benefit from an informal, educational environment purposefully designed within the confines of a children's museum.

As a parent educator, I am a proponent of building strong families through healthy relationships within the family. Strong families have a high degree of commitment to each other and spend quality time promoting that value. Members of strong families demonstrate love, care and support for each other. These positive relationships

develop in safe, comfortable environments where children trust their needs will be met. A children's museum can become a place for parents to practice new skills, observe their child in a different social context or simply enjoy quality time playing together, all the while cultivating family relationships. By providing children with rich, play experiences and helping parents to understand the importance of playful learning, successful, happy families become the foundation of the community.

Minnesota is the only state with a Board of Teaching Parent Educator License offered as part of undergraduate or graduate programs. A handful of other post-secondary institutions across the country offer a certification program whereby coursework emphasizes family development, working with diversity, home visits and parent learning. Minnesota is one of only two states in the country who require a special licensure to teach in this field. With that, it makes sense to gather this great resource of parent educators and discover if group parent education can transfer into a more informal, interactive learning experience found at the more than 350 children's museums in the United States and other places. As a parent educator, firm supporter and visitor of children's museums, I hope this research can be applied to the present efforts of the Great River Exploratorium in their quest to establish a children's museum in St. Cloud.

Definition of Terms

Teacher of Early Childhood Education. A teacher of early childhood education is authorized to design, implement, and evaluate developmentally appropriate learning experiences for young children from birth through grade 3 in a

variety of early childhood settings and to collaborate with families, colleagues, and related service personnel to enhance the learning of all young children. This includes any professional working in Early Learning and Development Programs, including but not limited to center-based and family child care providers, infant and toddler specialists, early intervention specialists and early childhood special educators, home visitors, related service providers, administrators, Head Start teachers, Early Head Start teachers, preschool and other teachers, teacher assistants, family service staff, and health coordinators (The Office of the Revisor of Statutes, 2012).

Parent educator. A licensed professional educated in core competencies of parenting education. A professional preparation system recognized with a state-based licensure. Bryan, DeBord, and Schrader (2006, p. 808) define license as “official or legal permission to practice granted by an appropriate authority.” Minnesota is the only known state with a Board of Teaching parenting educator license regulated by the State Department of Education. This is a stand-alone license which the state requires for hiring purposes (Cooke, 2012). Parenting educators must be knowledgeable about the many influences on human growth and development. They must understand how these influences affect adults’ and children’s development and be able to deliver effective research-informed practices to promote healthy development of adults and children as individuals and the family as a whole (National Parenting Education Network, n.d.).

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE). A program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth to kindergarten entrance. The

program is offered through Minnesota public school districts. ECFE is based on the idea that the family provides a child's first and most significant learning environment and parents are a child's first and most important teachers. ECFE works to strengthen families. ECFE's goal is to enhance the ability of all parents and other family members to provide the best possible environment for their child's learning and growth (Minnesota Department of Education, 2015).

Children's museum. An institution committed to serving the needs and interests of children by providing exhibits and programs that stimulate curiosity and motivate learning. Children's museums are places where children learn through play and exploration in environments designed just for them. Reflecting their diverse communities, children's museums create playful, interactive learning experiences. In an increasingly complex world, children's museums provide a place where all kids can learn through play with the caring adults in their lives (Association of Children's Museums, 2015).

Play. To engage in an activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose. Play is a spontaneous, voluntary, pleasurable and flexible activity involving a combination of body, object, symbol use and relationships. Children's museums employ play as the accepted methodology for how a child learns (Association of Children's Museums, 2012).

Interactive learning. Learning that occurs which involves the actions or input of a user. Since children's museums provide a hands-on learning experience, the

majority of exhibits are interactive in a meaningful way (Association of Children's Museums, 2012).

Early Childhood Education (ECE). A branch of education theory which relates to the teaching, both formally and informally, of young children. ECE often focuses on learning through play, based on the research and philosophy of Jean Piaget, which posits that play meets the physical, intellectual, emotional and social needs of children. It consists of activities and/or experiences that are intended to affect developmental changes in children prior to their entry into elementary school. Parents can be seen as a child's first teacher and therefore an integral part of the early learning process (Encyclopedia of Children's Health, 2015).

21st Century Skills. The essential skills students must learn for success in today's world to include but not limited to creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, and communication and collaboration. The children's museum environment emphasizes intentional programming and interactive exhibits that promote development of these identified 21st century skills. Children's museums are committed to serving the needs and interests of children as support systems and resource centers that stimulate curiosity and motivate learning in an informal educational setting intended to actualize 21st century skills within the learner. 21st century learning requires more than identifying specific skills, content knowledge, expertise and literacies. An innovative support system, like a children's museum, must be created to help students master the multi-dimensional abilities that will be

required of them (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2011)

Under the guidance and leadership of two retired higher education faculty members in St. Cloud, The Great River Children's Exploratorium, has been introduced to a number of community groups, civic leaders and interested parties in its initial stages of development. As the children's museum begins to take shape, the central questions guiding this research are: 1) How might a parent educator provide educational opportunities for families within the informal learning environment of a children's museum with consideration to the three critical components of parent education: parent-child learn and explore time, parent observation, and parent discussion?; and 2) How might experienced parent educators utilize and design a children's museum environment to enhance their work with parents? The three components of the parent education group process and the use of these components within a children's museum environment are the contexts for addressing these research questions.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Research strategies used for this paper included a review of the library data bases: ERIC and EBSCO, dated between 2000 and 2015, where a number of studies provided insight into children's museums and relevant information which included the origin of children's museums, the impact they have on the communities they serve, as well as the child and family learning that happens within the four walls of a children's museum. A variety of search terms were used that included parent education, children's museums, progressive education, and impacts on communities. *Group Parent Education* (Campbell & Palm, 2004) highlighted the field of parent-education and its current practices. The Association of Children's Museum's (ACM) website reported valuable statistics and general information pertaining to the current landscape of children's museums around the country. Locating current studies with regards to the opportunities for parent educators and parents within a children's museum setting proved to be a difficult task. Many of the studies relating to children's museums document research pertaining to the opportunities and impacts they have on children and early education and child development. For instance, Dr. Rachel White (2012) presents an overview of the scientific research that guides the educational philosophy that play is learning in "The Power of Play: A Research Summary on Play and Learning". In his foreword to The American Alliance of Museums report, "Building the Future of Education: Museums and the Learning Ecosystems", Mr. Michael Robbins (2014) questions how museums and schools can

collaborate to create a new future for education as the current format of the educational system destabilizes. Museums can play a critical role as resources for learners but the literature is lacking as it pertains to a parent educator's role in a children's museum.

The literature review begins with a brief history of children's museums and the pioneers who proposed and seized first opportunities for young learners to grow and develop their minds and bodies in a venue outside the structured classroom. It will examine the impacts of children's museums upon communities and families, theory related to early learners, and end with the opportunities children's museums present for parents and parent educators within these institutions.

Historical Background for Children's Museums

Historically, museums have been places where artwork, valuable artifacts, and collections from the past are displayed for a cultural, scientific, or technological experience for the visitor to enjoy. The objects are typically shelved, arranged on walls or exhibited throughout the floors of the museums and labeled with a text for patrons to learn and understand the intended value. While this type of interaction provides the learner with basic new insights, the very essence of the object would be lost from this disconnected experience. The pedagogical experience becomes one-dimensional and creates boundaries and limitations for learning and comprehension. As educational practices have evolved over the years, a broader agenda that included engagement, interpretation, and reflective processes to learning became

acceptable and resulted in the practices and designs of contemporary children's museums.

A movement of reform known as the Progressive Era (Hein, 2006) flourished in the United States around the turn of the 20th century. The culture and attitudes of the people began to change in response to corporate power and wealth of the few. Middle class Americans demanded more responsibility from the government regarding the health, welfare and education of its citizens. Progressive education emerged from this social agenda to include a dramatic expansion of public education that broadened the curriculum teachers were using in accordance with developmental theories of the time that recognized childhood as a distinct phase of life.

John Dewey, lauded as a champion for progressive education, proposed education be framed considering his **theory of experience** (Neill, 2005). The basis for this theory reasoned that continuity and interaction are critical components for learners of all ages. Dewey's hypothesis is that one's current experience can be understood as a function of one's past (stored) experiences which interacts with the present situation to create an individual's experience (Neill, 2005). Progressive education, like progressivism, generally, had the goal of extending the benefits of modern culture to everyone (Hein, 2006).

Within this same time frame, a reform group led by Jane Addams and Florence Kelly founded the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) to campaign for legislation to regulate child labor with the mission of promoting the rights, dignity,

well-being and education of children and youth as they relate to work and working (Child Labor Public Education Project, 2011). Children were to be recognized as a valuable human resource that needed to be safeguarded and protected for the country's future, not to be exploited in sweat shops for the advancement of a few . Progressives believed that the family was the corner stone of the nation and that government was responsible for maintaining its health and vigor.

The establishment of the Brooklyn Children's Museum in 1899 and the Boston Children's Museum in 1913 presented the first opportunities for young learners with a venue outside of the structured classroom to explore, discover, and gain knowledge. These early prototypes reflected the movement of progressive education with intentions to bring relevant and meaningful experiences to the child. These early models focused attention on specific childhood themes and interests such as dollhouses, American Indian artifacts, stuffed birds and turtles (Association of Children's Museums, 2014) while others committed to a science curriculum of nature study. With the help of curators and through self-directed experiences, children were able to experience and form their own understandings of the world around them. Anna Billings Gallup, a teacher who joined the Brooklyn Children's Museum in 1903, is considered a pioneer in museum education and reflected her progressive objectives and ideals through the management of the Brooklyn Children's Museum. She would describe her early days at the museum as blazing a new trail in service to young children as they sought to discover their own interests and challenge their own minds. Children's museums were not to replace the good work the school systems

provided but rather “to understand the tastes and interest of is {sic} little people and to offer such help and opportunities as the schools and homes cannot give” (Gallup, 1908, p. 376).

In the first half of the 20th century, children’s museums were gaining in popularity. From the first established in Brooklyn in 1899 until 1975, 38 children’s museums dotted city landscapes throughout the country, most of them located in urban settings (Association of Children's Museums, 2005). The intentions and motivations of the earliest of these museums varied from hands-on nature studies, to resource centers for classrooms within a school district, to centers focused on supporting science curriculums. The majority of these museums were supported by community ventures, institutional sponsorships as well as public and private donations (Weihsin Din, 1998).

Three factors helped contribute to the establishment of these museums throughout their early years. First, industrialization of factories allowed more freedom and leisure time for its workers. Families were looking for wholesome yet constructive ways to spend their time and a visit to the children’s museum met this need. Second, the rise of institutional sponsorships such as the Junior League, William T. Hornady Memorial Fund, and The Children’s Museum Section of the American Association of Museums (AAM) granted funds and expertise to communities for related projects. Third, parents, educators and community leaders recognized children’s museums as another means to stimulate and inspire young minds, as well as a way to improve the quality of life in their communities (Weihsin Din, 1998).

In 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first spacecraft, *Sputnik*, into outer space. The response from the education community was to reorganize and place emphasis on math and sciences for the American children in order to compete globally. Around this same time, while television sets became a fixture in living rooms across America and the medium of choice for both news and entertainment, the changing family structure from the stay at home moms to working mothers introduced latchkey kids and juvenile crime to the streets. Children's museums were struggling with their identity to find a place in the mix.

In 1963, Michael Spock, son of pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock, was appointed director of the Boston Children's Museum. His objective to redefine a "hands-on" approach to playful learning involved removing all "Do Not Touch" signs posted throughout the museum. His philosophy and structure of "interactive" and "client-centered" learning experiences was first demonstrated in an exhibit called "What's Inside?" at the Boston Children's Museum in 1964. He explains:

We are imaginative, symbol-manipulating beings with a capacity for extending ourselves outside of our head and into a scene. When you look at a miniature diorama of a house, you are interacting with it by walking through that scene in your imagination. That's as much interaction as the hands-on kind. I think "interactive" is a better word for what we are about than "hand-on" (Weihsin Din, 1998, p. 80)

Spock goes on to say:

...we finally understood that what makes a children's museum different is that it is *for somebody* rather than *about something*. This idea of being client-centered directs an extraordinary number of decisions on a day-to-day basis; all kinds of things, even administrative structures, begin to fall into place in a straightforward way (Weihsin Din, 1998, p. 81)

The next few decades saw a proliferation of children's museums across the country. In 1975, the Association of Children's Museums contended 38 cities declared one in their community. Today, approximately 350 children's museums are scattered throughout the United States and visited by over 30 million children and their families each year (Colbert, 2011). The reasons for this explosion are as diverse as the communities from which they exist. For some cities, the children's museums are part of a revitalization plan for their urban centers promoting an opportunity for cultural enrichment. Children's museums alone can serve as sources of education and life-long learning or can work closely in conjunction with the local school district to enrich curriculum as the Detroit School district (Detroit Children's Museum, 2015) has exemplified. Still others create children's museums to enhance the quality of life and strengthen their community. While the vision of children's museums may have evolved over the years, the broad appeal and value of children's museums can be found worthy in the number of children, parents, caregivers and families that flock to their open doors to visit.

The Impact on the Community

The impacts a children's museum can have on a community, family and children are as wide and varied as the clients they serve. From revitalizing a tired and tattered downtown into a vibrant center where families and children feel safe again, to creating opportunities of philanthropy and active volunteerism, a children's museum provides benefits and value for all to enjoy.

The ACM boasts membership of over 341 (Association of Children's Museums, 2005) institutions worldwide in a diverse range of cities that include Brookings, South Dakota, Las Vegas, Nevada and Brooklyn, New York. Of these 341 plus members, over 35% of them consider themselves as part of a revitalization effort to transform crumbling and aged buildings and infrastructure into a more attractive, vibrant downtown (Colbert, 2011). These children's museums become part of a major focus that cleans up deteriorating areas with goals and objectives that forge downtowns into more visually inviting, safe, and accessible areas while increasing sustainable activity, involvement and investment. Within these revitalizations efforts, it can be noted that six have become shining examples within their communities, as certified by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program of the U.S. Green Building Council, in their efforts to provide a state of the art LEED Children's Museum (Kingston, 2013). The goals and objectives of these projects can be economically realized with an increase in property value and taxes, as well as providing a broader tax base to the communities they serve.

People from all ranges of income and education visit museums. More than 30 million individuals annually visit children's museums around the world (Association of Children's Museums, 2013). In some larger cities, children's museums are touted as high-profile tourist destinations advertised in local Chamber of Commerce brochures and distributed to attract conventions and conferences to the area. In other instances, families include cities with children's museums in vacation plans and drop dollars into the local economy when they visit. According to ACM data, the total

economic activity of its children's museum members is \$448 million (Association of Children's Museums, 2013). Directly and indirectly, a children's museum will have a financial impact on the area's economy as locals and tourists visit the museum.

The Quality of Life Research Unit from the University of Toronto defines quality of life as the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his/her life (Renwick, 2014). Possibilities result from the opportunities and limitations each person has in his/her life and reflect the interactions of personal and environmental factors. Within this definition, children's museums endure and project to its visitor endless hours of freedom to play, explore and learn in a safe, unrestricted environment. Some teachers recognize the possibilities that children's museums provide. The Boston Children's Museum boasts such a rich learning experience for school aged children that the high demand for field trip reservations are filled for the year within 48 hours after the books open (Farmer, 1981). Museums become an educational resource for schools forming partnerships through programming such as the one in the Cape Cod Children's Museum. "Little Sprouts Kids' Garden" is a hands on informal learning program that focuses on gardening and farm experiences and connects children to the agricultural heritage of Cape Cod (Lieberman, 2012). The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Children's Museum of Manhattan launched an innovative program to help families create healthier futures (Children's Museum of Manhattan, 2015). Inclusion programs, supported by the American Disabilities Act, welcome and address visitors with special needs. On specific nights the Children's Museum in Easton opens its doors

exclusively to families with children 10 and under on the Autism Spectrum (The Children's Museum in Easton, 2015) giving them an opportunity to explore the museum's hands on exhibits in a less overwhelming atmosphere. The Play for All Initiative founded by the Chicago Children's Museum received the *Universal Design for Learning* award from the Association of Children's Museums in 2009 stating it "creates a community where play and learning connect for visitors of all abilities" (Golden & Walsh, 2013, p. 337). Generations of grandparents and grandchildren can be found sharing memories and building relationships while learning in the special program the Delaware Children's Museum (2015) calls "Grand Adventures". As an entity that successfully produces child-centered, family focused programs with interactive exhibits, a children's museum provides a positive impact on the quality of life within a community.

Children's museums are uniquely positioned to help reverse stigma and discrimination (Association of Children's Museums, 2013). Children's museums are popular, yet neutral, sources of information that attract a diverse cross-section of people and provide shared experiences through interpretative and interactive exhibits (Association of Children's Museum, 2015). Sixty five percent (Association of Children's Museums, 2005) of children's museums are located in urban areas and over 40% (Colbert, 2011) of children's museums collaborate with Head Start, a national program in the United States that enhances school readiness by providing educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to economically disadvantaged children of families. By exposing adults and children to unfamiliar

concepts in a non-threatening, hands-on approach, and ensuring that the museum experience is accessible to those of differing abilities and backgrounds, children's museums create bridges of understanding (Association of Children's Museums, 2013).

Children's museums throughout the country create endless opportunities for communities, businesses, organizations and private citizens to engage in noble behavior through the act of giving that propels the operations of the museums. The Inspired Giving donation model benefits the Chicago Children's Museum in a number of ways through Inspirato's Inspired Giving (Inspirato, 2012) website, and the Hampton Hotels' Save-A-Landmark (Hampton Hotels, 2011) gift donated money and countless volunteer hours to help preserve the Children's Museum of Bozeman in Bozeman, Montana. United Way's Day of Caring Event (Ramsdell, 2011) gathers dozens of volunteers from across the country to lend a hand in the communities where they live. Student service hours at a children's museum teach valuable lessons to the teens who participate in this win-win situation. Children's museums may be the recipients of many good deeds. True honor and worthiness can be found in those with generous hearts.

Theoretical Perspective on Child Development and Learning

In 1991, an American newspaper named a preschool in Reggio Emilia, Italy as one of the top ten schools in the world (Gibson, 2014). The school gained notoriety based on what is now known as the Reggio Emilia approach to education, named after the small industrial city in northern Italy where it is located. The educational

philosophy, focused on preschool and primary education, was developed after World War II by a psychologist, Loris Malaguzzi, and parents in the villages around Reggio Emilia. The approach values:

- Children's relationships with other children, teachers, parents and their classroom environment
- Documentation of the children's learning as a way to make their thinking and theorizing visible-and convey a strong image of an intelligent child
- Project work, where children are engaged in explorations of their world, making choices about what they will investigate, and then together with their teachers and peers making meaning
- The many ways children express themselves, called the "100 Languages" with a strong emphasis on the visual arts
- Active listening, where children's voices, thoughts and opinions are valued (as much as the teachers') (Gibson, 2014).

Sociocultural theorist, Lev Vygotsky argues children construct knowledge through action. When children solve problems with concrete objects and manipulation, they acquire new concepts (Trawick-Smith, 2006). Philosopher John Dewey recognizes the child as the center of learning and that all relationships in the child's life impacts learning, either directly or indirectly (Neill, 2005). In so much, parents are then seen as vital components and viewed as partners and collaborators in the learning process. This philosophy puts the natural development of children, as well as the close relationships that they share with their environment, at the center of their

learning. Both of these theorists uphold engaged caregivers as foundational influences in a child's learning and education, and that the child is viewed as an active constructor of knowledge. The Reggio Emilia approach aligns these perspectives in its classroom practices.

The hands-on, interactive environment of a children's museum delivers the environment that supports this approach to learning. Exhibits filled with fun and designed to exercise the mind include activities that combine playfulness, mental acuity, and teamwork. Parents as co-learners and collaborators to the children's museum experience help the child organize their environment and foster social and cognitive relationships. Parent education as part of an Early Childhood Family Education program, values the commitment to cooperative home and school relationships together with the family. This parent education instruction targets learning through its three critical components of group process that include parent-child explore and learn time, guided observations of children and parent discussion time. Parent learning using these strategies can be achieved in a children's museum environment.

Opportunities for Parent Educators within a Children's Museum

While the past 40 years has seen an explosion of children's museums throughout the country, the amount of strong research relating to the opportunities for parent educators within children's museums has not been a research focus. Little has been examined regarding the impact or relationship that children's museums and the parent education group process share in their work with families and communities.

Parent education remains a dynamic group process that allows parents to learn and grow to become better parents in order to meet the needs of their developing children and families. Parent-child explore and learn time, guided observations of children, and parent discussion time facilitated by a skilled parent educator are all critical components of the parent education group process that can lead to improved relationships between parents and children(Campbell & Palm, 2004).

Parent- child explore and learn time creates “quality time” for a parent and child to engage in activities together and allows a parent educator to step in as a positive role model and mentor during this time. Parent-child explore and learn time presents opportunities for parents to observe their child within a child-friendly relaxed atmosphere without the distractions of home. Parent educators can observe the interactions taking place and provide appropriate teachable moments for the dyad when necessary.

Within a guided observation, a parent educator calls attention to a child's behavior and interactions in a social setting in order for the parents to recognize and gain insight into their child's development, temperament and skills. It also provides opportunities for the parents to gain a greater understanding of the world from their child's perspective.

Parent educators bring expertise and knowledge of current topics and issues to a parent group challenging their current thoughts and practices. This parent discussion time, facilitated by a skilled parent educator, results in a rich discussion shared between the parent group where parents are enlightened with realistic

expectations of child behaviors and development, along with parenting styles and strategies.

Parent education programs often reach out to targeted populations with complex issues or needs (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). This diverse population brings added stressors and risk factors to their parenting styles that may require collaborative efforts by local agencies together with parent education that can meet specific challenges and provide additional support. Teen parenting, family literacy programs, adult basic education and English as a Second Language all represent groups that could benefit from specific parenting programming. Children's museums may be the conduit for these diverse populations to learn new parenting strategies while they engage with their child in a welcoming, interactive environment.

The lack of credible study and analysis surrounding the use of children's museums by parent educators as an intentional learning opportunity for parents and families provides the premise of this research project. There are two questions that the project will address to add to the current understanding about the role of parent education within the children's museum environment.

1. How might a parent educator provide educational opportunities for families within the informal learning environment of a children's museum with consideration to the three critical components of parent education: parent-child explore and learn time, parent observation, and parent discussion?

2. How might experienced parent educators utilize and design a children's museum environment to enhance their work with parents?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Description of Method

The design for gathering research blended both a focus group interview style (Krueger, 1994) together with a world café conversation (The World Cafe, 2008) method. By blending these two methods, I hoped to create a hospitable space where people felt comfortable to be themselves, in order to produce the most creative thinking, speaking and listening within my groups, and allowed for the exchange of differing points of view. The questions posed to my groups supported a logical progression of discovery throughout several rounds of dialogue. Through the sharing of main ideas and themes, I anticipated an opportunity to link and connect the conversations between groups and to my research questions. A facilitator at each round table prompted the conversations, helped to keep the table focused on the questions, encouraged all to participate, built on conversations from previous groups while actively contributing their own thoughts. This type of research design lent itself well to recruited parent educators who are skilled with the complexities of group dynamics and relationship building.

Recruitment and Selection of Subjects

When conducting research involving human subjects, The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at St. Cloud State University requires the researcher to submit an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), who oversees and approves the process. In addition to this application, it was also necessary to complete and pass the required IRB training modules for graduate students before

any subjects could be recruited. The school district of St. Cloud also required a signed letter of cooperation/permission from its Early Childhood Director before any of its employed parent educators could participate in this study. Parent educators and early childhood educators were recruited through direct phone calls, emails, letters and personal contacts. The participants came from within the three surrounding school districts: Saint Cloud, Sauk Rapids-Rice, and Sartell. I also contacted participants from Reach Up Head Start and from child care centers in the area. I wanted to recruit 10-15 parent educators.

Design Setting

I gathered the participants together at different locations and conducted a café style focus group. Three or four tables were set up in the room to accommodate the group. A leader was appointed to each table in which a series of questions was posed to the group.

Procedure

As the participants entered the location, they were greeted with check-in, name tags and refreshments. Everyone took their place at a table and began the discussion with the questions:

1. What experiences have you had with children's museums?
2. What would you expect to find there?

A short video showcasing the Houston Children's Museum was played and introduced the focus group to this facility (<https://vimeo.com/21408073>). The intent of this viewing was to help prompt discussions and build upon themes, as well as to

understand the similarities and differences between our two communities. The group was also asked to be mindful of the sights and sounds they observed occurring throughout the museum video.

The Children's Museum of Houston has a simply phrased mission statement that reads, "Transforming communities through innovative child centered learning." It became the basis for six identified community needs that the museum focused on when managing and operating its facility.

These six community needs include:

1. Foster the development of Houston's significant child population. There are over 1.5 million children within the five county area and growing at a rate of 15% per year over the last 10 years.
2. Increase and support parental engagement in their children's learning. Key indicators realize the success of children in school and later in life are dependent upon actively engaged parents.
3. Provide learning experiences that reinforce and supplement school classroom instruction. The belief that 20% of a child's day spent in the classroom is insufficient to learn what they need to learn to be successful. The programming is in sync with what the schools are teaching. Evaluated learner outcomes and results determine if an exhibit needs to be tweaked to reach its bench marks.
4. Protect against the negative effects that poverty has on education attainment. Disproportionately, the families of Houston are low income,

largely because people are coming to Houston from all over the world to make a better place for their family. The museum provides five after school programs as well as seven early childhood programs to serve and support this population. In partnership with over 640 social service agencies, such as food banks, homeless shelters, women's shelters, and faith based institutions, the museum deploys free or reduced admission tickets to families if they hold a health care card from the city of Houston or the state of Texas, thereby helping to improve accessibility to all.

5. Serve a multicultural, multilingual population. With 45% of Houston's residents with children under the age of 5, speaking another language other than English in their home, all programming, exhibits, labeling, publications and its website are also written in Spanish. Forty percent of the staff are fluent in Spanish because they want to deliver programming that is culturally sensitive to the way a family learns, their background and interests, as well as the data that is presented.
6. Promote workforce preparedness. Within the context of core knowledge instruction, children must also learn the essential skills for success in today's complex world. Skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration must be built on a base of academic subject knowledge. The museum dedicates itself to building these 21st century skills so students are prepared to thrive in a global work environment.

A one-page case statement entitled “The Great River Children’s Exploratorium”, written by Glen Palm and Greg Reigstad, was presented to the focus group following the video. This non-profit organization in St. Cloud hopes to establish a children’s museum in the community. The intention of this case statement by its authors is to persuade and inform community, civic, and business leaders within the St. Cloud community as to the unique contributions a children’s museum can generate and how it might function in this community. For the purpose of this focus group session, the case summary explored six themes that brought further insights and stimulated conversation within the group. The case summary states:

1. Children’s museums can help young children in our area to develop foundational skills for school success.
2. Children’s museums strengthen community resources that educate and care for children.
3. Children’s museums are environments where families play and connect in meaningful ways.
4. Children’s museums can serve as town squares and build social capital.
5. Children’s museums are in a unique position to address community diversity in a positive manner and reverse discrimination.
6. Children’s museums contribute to the local economy as a destination attraction.

To further stimulate discussion within the group, a photo-laden power point introduced and exposed parent educators to a number of exhibits from children’s

museums across the country. The parent educators enjoyed viewing sights from the Chicago Children's Museum with its lavish atrium, and the children's museum in Brookings, SD with its elaborate outdoor playground including two life size interactive dinosaurs. Dramatic play is a popular exhibit space often depicted with doctor's offices, castles, farm yards, or grocery stores. Omaha had a room completely furnished as a dental office for children of all ages to explore that vocation. Toddler and infant spaces accommodated the crawlers and early walkers with soft, comfortable materials to surround them. Many children's museums offer a water feature for young and old alike to splash and stomp around in, as well as a jungle gym, of sorts, to swing through, slide down, jump around and climb on with an intention to improve gross motor skills. Another common area most children's museum provide is that of a quiet zone which invites the visitors to take time out and regroup away from the hustle and bustle of the crowd.

After the slide show presentation, the following questions were posed:

1. How would a children's museum meet the educational and developmental needs of young children birth to five in your community?
2. How could you use a children's museum to support your goals for parents of young children birth to five?
3. How would a children's museum experience be different from a classroom and add to an early childhood classroom experience?
4. How would a children's museum enhance family learning opportunities in Central Minnesota?

5. How can a children's museum assist parents in their role as a parent to support development and learning in their young children?
6. How can a parent educator use a children's museum to support their work?

The focus group participants also had a hands-on activity that allowed for their creativity to emerge. Parent educators were equipped with art supplies, two templates and a blank piece of paper representing a children's museum. Using the templates, the members were asked to trace spaces onto the blank paper to represent exhibit areas each would like to see in a children's museum. The templates could be manipulated in any way to reach the desired proportions of space for each exhibit. The exhibits were to be designated with a theme within the children's museum.

Data Collection

Each table was equipped with an audio recording device and note paper. The educators in attendance chose a table to join. One volunteer served as the table facilitator. They guided the questioning and kept the conversation on task. Each table focused on one or two of the above stated questions for 20 minutes. After the twenty minutes, one of the table members remained at the table to recount the information previously given and served as facilitator. The rest of the table moved to another table of their choosing. This continued for one hour. I also presented a template for teachers to use to creatively design exhibit space within the children's museum. Data collection included notes taken, audio recordings and transcripts to be reviewed for recurring themes and recommendations.

Demographic Information

The demographics were collected on a form that included (see Appendix C):

- Education level and licensure
- Current position
- Length of time in profession
- Length of time living in the Saint Cloud area
- Number of times visiting a children's museum
- Gender
- Age

The results of the demographic information were: 14 parent educators attended one of a total of four focus group sessions. One parent educator was unable to attend a focus group and chose to send his thoughts and views regarding a children's museum by email. There were 10 female and 4 male participants. Twelve of the participants had been in parent education for more than 10 years. One had been in parent education for 5-10 years although taught elementary education for more than 10 years prior to her parent education licensure. One parent educator had a licensure for less than 5 years. All of them lived in the St. Cloud area. One had lived in the area 0-5 years, and 13 had lived in the area for more than 10 years. The last question on the demographic form asked how many times each had visited a children's museum. Five of the participants had been to a children's museum 1-10 times; 7 had visited 11-25 times; and 2 had visited more than 25 times.

Analysis

A frequency count of the demographic data responses was conducted by the researcher. The qualitative information from the discussion notes and transcripts provided the basis for a case study of the current understanding about the role of parent education within a children's museum environment. The responses also conveyed new insights as to the role of a parent educator within a children's museum setting in order to further their work with families. From this qualitative data, this researcher identified themes that provided and addressed the two research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In the first portion of this chapter, the conversations of the focus groups are summed up and organized to address question #1 of this research paper:

How might a parent educator provide educational opportunities for families within the informal learning environment of a children's museum with consideration to the three critical components of parent education: parent-child explore and learn time, parent observation, and parent discussion?

I determined five intervals within the focus group sessions that granted an opportunity for conversation and discussion. I headlined these five intervals and summarized results from each of them. These headlined intervals are:

1. Experience with Children's Museums: As the participants were settling in they were asked to get acquainted with each other by discussing their personal experience with a children's museum.
2. Themes Related to the Video: A video was viewed by the participants and they were given an opportunity to share their insights when it was over.
3. Points from the Case Summary: Each participant received a case summary entitled "Great River Children's Exploratorium" to reflect upon common themes between it and the video.
4. Responses to Power Point: A power point of photos from children's museums presented a chance for participants to share any opinions or suggestions they might have.
5. Question and Answer Period: I posed a number of questions to the group denoted in Chapter 3—Procedure, and identified developing themes.

The second portion of this chapter addresses question #2 of this research paper:

How might experienced parent educators utilize and design a children's museum environment to enhance their work with parents?

These results will be headlined under "Design Activity Themes and Content Ideas".

Experience with Children's Museums

The café style focus group format allowed for the participants to freely express their own experiences and memories they had of attending children's museums. As the participants settled in and became acquainted with each other, many remembered the hands-on learning experience, learning through motion and the interactive elements rather than sitting and watching something happen. Some of them remembered specific examples of exhibits they had experienced, such as a traveling storybook exhibit in which visitors meandered through an area allowing them to stop at the reading stations before continuing along to the next page, as though they were a character in the book. Another remembered an enormous pizza station where you could make, bake, eat or sell your own pizza. In one museum, an air pressure system would suck balls through the pipes that had been constructed in a maze-like fashion, only to be spit out at the other end. An old fire engine stationed in the midst of a children's museum entertained all ages. As an opportunity for dramatic play, children became fire fighters driving the vehicle, ringing the bell, spraying the hose or used it like a jungle gym climbing up steps, exploring the cubbyholes along the side or sliding down a constructed ramp anchored off the

backend of the truck. More general comments and memories referred to many of the children's museums they had visited highlighted a water feature for children to play in or art rooms filled with supplies. Many referred to the "local flavor" of the community or the familiar landmarks of the area represented within the children's museum.

Themes Related to the Video

The focus groups found many themes emerging from the Houston video and its six community priorities which they felt could apply to a children's museum in St. Cloud. The large outreach program employed by the Houston museum was an unexpected undertaking to the members of the focus groups. "The general view of most people's impression of a children's museum that would not come to their mind is that you'd be involved in that many outreach programs," remarked one member in the group. The focus groups assumed that qualifying grants supplemented the programming and could be beneficial to any children's museum with similar goals of outreach.

Intentional exhibits and programming was mentioned as a theme throughout the video. For both children and adults to be comfortable, confident and feel welcomed, the magic happening inside the space through the exhibits and programming needed to be focused and guided by objectives allowing for positive interactions and learner outcomes. Parent educators indicated that while play and interactions do occur in the space of a children's museum, not all play and interactions between caregiver and child are done in the "right" way. The challenge of the exhibits and programming to educate a parent's involvement in their child's play,

rather than dictate to parents the “right” way to play, then becomes an opportunity to empower parents and increase the fun factor for the family. The commitment to early childhood and after school programs cited within the video concurred with the design of exhibits and programming to young learners.

Another theme from the video was that of engagement on all different levels. The children’s museum itself sought community input and involvement from its inception, ensuring the museum represented all members from all races, ethnicities, and classes throughout the institution. Collaboration between the educational system and children’s museum provided after school programs that supported the lessons introduced in the classroom instruction. Professionals hired by the children’s museum worked with parents and promoted healthy interactions between children and adults in both informal and formal settings. The focus group concluded parent education must have had a presence of some sort in this children’s museum based upon what they saw in the video.

Accessibility to the Houston Children’s Museum for all community members was most evident in its approach to charged entrance fees. The focus group concluded if a children’s museum is for a community, it needs to be affordable for its families. One focus group member stated, “I wonder what the piece is of bringing a diverse community into a place like that. Certainly the first barrier has to be the price because it’s not cheap.” At the Children’s Museum of Houston, if a family or community member holds a state or city healthcare card, admission to the children’s museum is reduced or free just by presenting that card. The over 640 outreach

agencies with a relationship to the museum, also distribute admission tickets to those with a healthcare card. Discounted fees to the museum are available for families when they purchase a Houston City Pass. In the video, school buses dropped off children at the front doors that assured transportation needs were met and safety concerns were eased. The focus groups of parent educators identified CentraCare Health Care system as a resource to approach when considering how to support accessibility to a children's museum in their Central Minnesota community. One member understood the children's museum in St. Paul hosts "one free day a month and it's packed." Seemingly, this offer of free admission would draw a huge crowd and help defer other costs associated with a trip to the museum such as transportation costs or parking fees.

The focus group commented that while the video stresses the importance of the community connections, and many families view the children's museum as a destination, it may not be true for all. Some may not see it as their place to go.

My kids go because grandparents who have some money bought them a membership and I'm sure that's not true for everybody. I wonder with those community connections... my impression is even if something is financially assessable people don't really see it as their place to go and they don't know people who have been there or they don't know what to do there. So it would be interesting to know what was done to take that next step of helping people feel welcome.

Reasons such as these become hurdles a children's museum may confront, but the statistics from the Houston Children's Museum proved it is being utilized by the community. One focus group member observed, "They talked about being 30% over

capacity which really speaks to the fact that it's being used rather than trying to draw people in."

Culture was embraced throughout the children's museum. With 45% of Houston's residents speaking a language other than English at home, the children's museum addressed the multicultural, multilingual population. All exhibits, programming, signage, and its website are available in both English and Spanish in order to remain culturally sensitive. Forty percent of its staff are fluent in Spanish lending to the understandings and interests of the large Spanish speaking population, in addition to bridging gaps within the diverse community. The focus groups recognized the importance that the experiences must match the culture(s) of the community, otherwise it will not be accessed. One member who frequented many children's museums recognized those museums in which the diverse populations helped to develop them. One in particular impressed her.

I loved the one that had an exhibit around how all the various people who live in this community... how did they come to this community or to the United States. It was just a simple way but it made it feel like this was about us. This is about our world not some other thing that isn't about us.

The responsibility the children's museum embraced to help build 21st century skills through its programming to the future workforce of the community was admirable. Preparing a workforce of self-motivated, creative thinkers requires an innovative support system to help students master the multi-dimensional skills that will be demanded of them. One of those support systems was through an initiative available called "Blended Learning" that allowed the visitor to take smart phones or other universally available technology to engage with the exhibits or programming in order

to teach and educate effectively and efficiently. The remarks from the focus groups leaned toward that of careful submission.

You know now days you have to download apps and then you can get this extra thing. At Valleyfair, it'll tell you more things of what's there or you can get coupons, so families always want to get their app. But I tell the kids, 'Who needs the Valleyfair app. Just go on the rides.'

I don't think you want to shut aside technology. It seems like it was very well done at the Houston Museum because we can't hide in the sand.

That's what these kids are going to do but it needs to be very purposeful and intentional.

Most agreed that the interfacing of the exhibits with technology would be appealing to many visitors.

As was evident by the smiles across all the children's faces on the video, one theme that resonated strongly was that of fun and play. While the mission statement quotes "Transforming community through innovative, child centered learning", it was suggested expectations may be different if the family visiting just wants to have fun at the "playground for your mind." With the wide age ranges that families can sometimes have, a children's museum can keep everyone happy with its carefully constructed exhibits that address this issue. It becomes a destination place for families to relax and enjoy time spent together.

The Children's Museum of Houston video made an impression on all who viewed it. A children's museum can transform a community when seen in the context of community priorities and a responsibility of the entity to fulfill those needs. The Houston Children's Museum proved just that. The museum acknowledged and then addressed the large population of young learners who would benefit from a children's

museum's interactive learning environment. One participant stated a children's museum in St. Cloud , "... could be seen as a learning space rather than a school space, using the space in multiple ways rather than just a museum."

The children's museum recognized the importance of an engaged parent role to the success of a child and worked with the parents to get them involved. The parent educators involved in this study know all too well how essential a nurturing caregiver is in the development of a child's life. Recognizing accessibility to all families and diverse populations as priorities within the community helps to build strong communities and bridge gaps that may exist. The themes expressed throughout the video resonated with the parent educators as similar to the themes they work with in their profession each day in the classroom. As one group member observed from the video of the children's museum, "It's more than just education of young children. It's bigger than that."

Points from the Case Summary

As the case summary was reviewed, it became evident to the members of the focus groups that parallels were seen between that of the Houston Children's Museum and the six point case summary for the Great River Children's Exploratorium. One participant alluded to the summary, "Even though we're not a big metro like Houston, in some ways we're a smaller Houston and have many of the same issues that face our community, and a children's museum could be seen as a frill or it could be seen as something that is central in helping a community reach their priorities." In effect, the parent educators became more knowledgeable and

understanding of motives, intentions, and value of a children's museum in a community; that of pedagogy for early learners, supplemental programming through collaboration with K-12 schools, as a place for families to engage in quality time, as a place to for the community to congregate, a place to celebrate diversity and culture, and the impact it has on the local economy.

Responses to the Powerpoint Presentation

This powerpoint proved to generate enthusiasm, beliefs and attitudes which enhanced a healthy question and answer period that followed this powerpoint presentation. It considered distinct elements representative of parent education.

Question and Answer Period

At this point in the café focus group, I directed prepared questions to each of the four groups to gather information and share perspectives pertaining to an ECFE program and parent education. The prepared questions are identified in Chapter 3- Procedure. The conversations were fluid and lively but at times strayed from the direct question asked. This consequence of the focus group café style only enhanced and inspired the parent educators to offer more brainstorming exchanges. Ideas and insights directly relating to the parent education group process during this question and answer period are summarized and headlined below. An asterisk denotes other themes gathered from these conversations that add value to this research.

Parent Education Group Process

Parent education consists of three critical components: Parent-Child Explore and Learn Time, Parent Observation, and Parent Discussion. Each of these three

components offers unique opportunities for family learning within the process. The focus groups of parent educators considered these components as they reflected on their work in a classroom setting and how this work could be transferred to and compatible with a children's museum environment.

Parent-Child Explore and Learn Time

By its very nature and design, a children's museum lays a foundation for a parent-child dyad to explore and learn through the many exhibits and structures designed for play and exploration. The parent educators suggested parent educators in a children's museum could be in a role of a "roaming" parent educator. In effect, observing the parent-child dyad playing and offering gentle guidance by a parent in need of help. For example, a parent and child are together in the dramatic play area "Grocery Store". The parent and child are at odds with one another. The roaming parent educator sets up a teachable moment when s/he facilitates a settlement to the situation, which can then be transferred to the real life experience at the store. It was also recommended the roaming parent educator capture "moments of effectiveness", moments that affirmed a parent's successful interaction with the child. These "moments of effectiveness" could be shared with the parents one-on-one or through the use of technology. This interaction of parent educator and caregiver helps to build a relationship between them and a connectedness to the children's museum.

The parent educators recommended the role of a parent-mentor, in particular for the immigrant refugee population who may not be comfortable sitting side by side with their child and playing. Within this role, the parent educator becomes a mentor

playing with a child. It was suggested within this mentor-role the parent educator not only teaches parents how to play, but also teaches different roles to the parent: how to be an observer that gives the parent permission to allow the child to be free to learn alone; an extender that scaffolds the learning opportunities; as a participant that shares the playing equally; and also when to be a teacher, teaching their children what to learn. During this time, the parent educator could provide bits of information pertaining to the importance of play and child development.

Ideas around Guided Observation

Another component of parent education is that of Guided Observation. During this time, in a formal ECFE program, caregivers are usually separated from their child and situated in a room outfitted with a large one way window looking out into the classroom area and equipped with a sound system tuned into the classroom. It is during this time that the parent educator has prepared a topic focus from which the parents observe their child in the classroom environment and from this perspective. Within a children's museum, the parent educators thought the guided observation could mimic that of an ECFE program if designated classroom space was available. It was suggested that cameras could be utilized as part of a guided observation and part of the programming. If cameras are strategically placed within the play area, parents could watch their child play from another area of the museum. However, it may look different from that of an Early Childhood Center if classroom space is not available in a children's museum. There are ECFE classes which do not separate to have a parent discussion. These classes are offered for families with young children,

normally 2 years of age and younger. In these cases, parents find a corner of the room or sit off to the side while the children are attended to by the Early Childhood Teacher.

A similar space in a children's museum might offer design elements such as a bench or railings placed away from the activities that would allow a parent to observe while feeling comfortable the child is nearby and safe. Another design feature conducive to observation that parent educators suggested was a large deck or mezzanine area with plexiglass side walls for a bird's eye view of their child at play. The parent educators proposed early childhood teachers or volunteers stay with the children while parents and parent educators participate in a guided observation session overhead. These intentionally positioned structures allow for spontaneous or scheduled opportunities for parent educators and parents to connect, develop relationships, and learn more about their child and parenting. Parent educators thought the guided observation would be a chance to introduce and promote 21st century skills and the child development piece to parents. Parent educators also felt the observation could affirm to parents that their own situation and child are quite similar to other children, which can help to alleviate worry.

Parent Discussion within Children's Museums

The parent educators examined elements of the parent discussion component in an ECFE class and wondered how that would transfer to a children's museum environment. The very essence of parent discussion in an ECFE program involves a group of parents all contributing to a conversation in order to learn about a specific

topic from one another facilitated by a parent educator. This is possible if the children's museum has programming to support this ECFE model. Parent educators thought this type of programming would be advantageous to certain segments of the population. For instance, those people who cannot commit to a full year of ECFE classes or for those who may want to learn more about a specific topic, a parent discussion group could satisfy or supplement these family's concerns. The parent educators suggested a "thinking corner" where parents could join in spontaneously in that area of the museum if the specific discussion topic appealed to them.

Another idea would staff a desk with a parent educator located in the midst of the children's museum. Parents could approach with their own questions or immediate concerns. This may be an opportunity for more one-on-one incidental discussions between the visiting parent and parent educator staff.

Connections of ECFE/ECE Programs to Children's Museums

One parent educator recommended opportunities for Early Childhood Family Education classes to be conducted at the children's museum similar to those hosted at centers or schools. This opportunity could be especially beneficial for those not comfortable in a regular school setting or center or for those families who are unable to commit to a full schedule of classes. The children's museum may also be seen as a field trip destination for early childhood classes coming from a school setting.

Use of Technology to Enhance Parent Learning

Some parent educators thought visuals placed near or in exhibit space could be beneficial to parents to help them understand or prompt interactions with their

child. QR codes could also be located in designated areas for parents to scan and then receive snippets of relevant information. Some parent educators cautioned this type of signage needed to be handled delicately, allowing for creative, teachable moments rather than a more rigid, programmed learning experience.

Use of Technology to Enhance Young Learners

Today the K-12 educational system focuses on specific subject knowledge. Parent educators suggested that the children's museum provide an expansion of opportunities to learn through interactive and engaging programs. STEM education (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) is one of those areas that children's museums can collaborate with the schools in support of these subjects the districts are teaching in the classrooms. Blended Learning, the type of learning that blends the use of technology so familiar to families today, with the children's museums hands on environment, explores a new way of thinking and learning. While most parent educators were not excited about the use of technology for young children and their development, they were in agreement that technology based learning is here to stay, and that it needs to remain very purposeful and intentional in its use.

Design Ideas of Children's Museums from Parent Educator Perspective

The demographics of this particular research study represented parent educators with years of experience in the field of Early Childhood Development and Parent Education who had visited various children's museums around the country. It is from their professional expertise that these design perspectives were thoughtfully proposed. Parent educators offered design elements and ideas that they felt would

enhance the environment of a children's museum and improve the parent-child time experience within it. They recommended the space itself needed to be adequate enough to accommodate a parent-child dyad playing together comfortably. They considered families with children in multiple ages and thought areas where caregivers can "perch" on a structure that enables them to watch over the children would allow the parent to respond more quickly in one direction if a child needs help. It was also noted that offering elements to satisfy all stages of play would attract families with multiple ages as well as support Vygotsky's Theory of Development with opportunities to scaffold children's learning. Another suggested an area to feature in the children's museum is that of a rest/relaxation/ "thinking" spot. The parent educator understands the energy demanded of both the parent and child in an active environment like a children's museum. Parent-Child time can be embraced in a soft, comfortable chair, on a more quiet level, where the family has a chance to catch their breath.

The parent educators proposed diversity should be addressed and celebrated throughout the children's museum. Within the space, opportunities to bridge gaps between different cultures in the St. Cloud community could be found in what we share in common and then expressed and honored. Parent educators thought a dramatic play area that offered children a chance to dress in authentic garb or manipulate items used by those with physical limitations, such as wheelchairs or crutches, would elevate conversations between a caregiver and child as well as address the diversity we see in the community. Many desired the space to reflect the

local flavor of the community in order to connect that experience to what they see around them. This idea could take into account nature and the natural environment, vocations, and industry familiar to the area that would become interactive elements of the children's museum. One focus group member expressed,

What really fascinated my children was what was connecting them to what actually was around them. So when you're in the cities and you see the lock and dam, I think this is in the science museum where they show how that works, how the boat rises and then they're actually looking out onto the river and then they connect that.

Parent educators stated that while it is not necessary to constantly rotate exhibits based on the way children learn and expand their thinking, it would be important to keep a dedicated space for fresh ideas. Space for traveling exhibits, displays of current events, specific programs such as literacy exposure, or even opportunities for seasonal fun, would create interest and provide reasons for families to return to the museum.

Design Activity Themes and Content Ideas

This particular hands-on activity answers the second question of this research paper, "how might experienced parent educators utilize and design a children's museum environment to enhance their work with parents?"

The parent educators were each handed an 8" x 14" piece of paper representing a blank floor plan with 10,000 square feet of children's museum space and two templates, each cut to scale, designated as 1,000 square feet and 500 square feet. Using the templates provided, the parent educators were asked to trace spaces from the templates onto the blank paper to represent exhibit areas each

would like to see in a children's museum. Directions for this activity, as well as 27 possible children's museum exhibit spaces from which to choose, were given to each focus group member. The focus group sessions squeezed the time available to work on this activity, which forced the members to take the project with them and to complete it at their convenience. One of the constraints of this sequence required the members to mail the completed project back. Of the 14 members who attended a focus group, only five returned their completed activity. Of the five samples returned, all of them had the largest spaces dedicated to four activities: a water feature, dramatic play area, a gross motor room and a gathering café space. A farm/agriculture area was also a popular space. All five included a toddler and infant area for the youngest learners, although the space dedicated was only half of that dedicated to the more popular activities. A quiet space for reading and regrouping, along with an area for cultural experiences were allocated with space, but again on a smaller basis than that of the larger spaces. Square feet reserved for art and music was popular with all five samples and some chose to devote more space than others to these activities.

Research Questions Summarized

- #1. How might a parent educator provide educational opportunities for families within the informal learning environment of a children's museum with consideration to the three critical components of parent education: parent-child learn and explore time, parent observation, and parent discussion?

Within the framework of the parent education group process, the opportunity exists for parental learning in a children's museum environment. Parent-child explore and learn time is an essential part to most ECFE programs. The interactive environment of a children's museum lends itself well to the parent-child explore and learn component of parent education. The structures and exhibits offered at a children's museum promote parent-child interactions in a playful, non-threatening environment where learning can occur for both parent and child. The parent educator role may look different in a children's museum compared to the more structured, formal environment of a school classroom during parent-child explore and learn time. The roles of parent-mentor, "roaming" parent educator, and the "go-to" parent educator sitting at a desk, are all possibilities that could provide spontaneous, teachable moments during a parent-child interaction.

A children's museum environment can accommodate guided observations through its design of the exhibit space or specifically designated observation areas. The guided observation within the parent education group process allows an individualized opportunity for parents to learn more about their child by simply watching them. A skilled parent educator keeps the focus of the observation on the child and helps the parent to interpret the behavior of the child within the social context of peers.

Parent discussion is the third and final component of the parent education group process to consider. This would be possible within a children's museum environment if the museum had programming to support this ECFE model. The

underlying theme of parent discussion is that of building relationships and trust within a group of parents in order to learn from each other. A parent educator could facilitate group discussion in the children's museum environment if it supports these intentions.

#2. How might experienced parent educators utilize and design a children's museum environment to enhance their work with parents?

The parent educators who completed the design activity dedicated the majority of the 10,000square feet space representing a children's museum to four activities: a water feature, a dramatic play area, a gross motor room and a gathering café space. I would interpret the gathering café space as space that could be used for both guided observation as well as parent discussion space. Most of the parent educators included a farm/agriculture space that can relate back to the local flavor of our rural community. The children's museum caters to children ages birth to 8. With this in mind, all the parent educators designed a space for toddlers to remain safe while exploring. Some thought a quiet corner for reading and regrouping should be considered. As our community becomes more diverse, parent educators felt cultures could be celebrated inside to reflect what is happening outside in our world. The parent educators were encouraged to use their creativity when drafting their children's museum. It was surprising to see how similar they were in design to each other.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Importance of Findings

This research captures perspectives from licensed, experienced parent educators who recognize parents as critical partners in their child's learning and development. Parent educators are committed and focused in this quest of active engagement with a child by a parent. Evidence that parent education could apply itself within a children's museum during a parent-child time, taking on roles of mentor or roaming parent educator, opens the door for families to learn new skills.

Parent educators credit parents as powerful influences in their child's success and understand children learn best when they are in a safe, healthy environment. This understanding aligns itself well to an interactive, playful environment found at a children's museum. Guided observation by a parent educator could be attained in the atmosphere of fun and play that a children's museum provides. It is through this objective lens that a parent comes to understand their child's perspective.

Parent educators work in partnership with parents to help support them in effective decision making for their families. Group parent education is an effective format for parents to find the information and skills needed to better guide their children in their development. This research produces evidence children's museums and parent educators should explore the possibilities of collaboration or expanded programming to parents, families and young learners.

No specific research on this subject was found in the literature review. One reason for this lack of reporting may be the lack of recognized, licensed parent education programs. Minnesota is the only state with a Board of Teaching Parent Educator License offered as part of undergraduate or graduate programs. A handful of other post- secondary institutions across the country offer a certification program whereby coursework emphasizes family development, working with diversity, home visits and parent learning. Minnesota is one of only two states in the country who require a specific parent education licensure to teach in this field. With that, it makes sense to gather this great resource of parent educators and discover if group parent education can transfer into a more informal, interactive learning experience found at the more than 350 children's museums in the United States and other places.

One constraint of this study surfaces within the population of the parent educators themselves who tend to be female. The majority of parent educators living in the community of St. Cloud are Caucasian females. For this particular study, 4 of the 14 participants were male, suggesting an over representation of this population segment in a female dominated field. One participant was represented from an immigrant minority group culture. The representation of minority groups in this vocation limits the voices and perspectives of these populations. Most often, children's museums locate themselves regionally in larger cities with service that extends outside its city limits to those living in more rural communities. It was also realized the focus groups did not include any parent educators from a rural area who may have brought fresh insights with regards to family life and its values for those

living in rural farm communities. Consequently, this was reflected in the attendance of the focus groups and their opinions.

Implications for Practice

In today's world, the emphasis placed on education is on core academic subjects. Teachers emphasize these skills and the children take tests to assess their basic math and literacy skills. A children's museum is different. A children's museum provides a place where all children can learn through play. This type of interactive learning is especially essential for young learners, birth to 8, who learn best through their senses. Parents are considered a child's first teacher and it is believed that when the bonds and relationship between parent and child are strong, a child finds success in learning. By its very nature, a children's museum provides an opportunity for engagement between a parent and child through its hands-on and interactive exhibits alluded to by Dr. Spock's work with the Boston Children's Museum highlighted in the literature review of this study. Most of the parent educators drew parallels between the activities and exhibits offered at children's museums to those in an early childhood classroom environment, albeit on a grander scale. For example, in a classroom there is a sensory table where children enjoy scooping sand or building snowmen. In a children's museum, the outdoor areas become the sensory table. In the classroom, a big cardboard box used as a fire engine along with helmets, coats and black boots signal to the children the dramatic play area is now a fire hall. The Discovery Children's Museum in Las Vegas boasts a gallery that combines a life size

ship, castle and stage to inspire guests to become queens, jesters, princes and kings.

A parent educator becomes a resource to parents because of their knowledge and skills in child development, adult learning, family dynamics, parent-child relationships and group process. The broad appeal families find when visiting a children's museum, provides opportunity to supplement and collaborate with the family learning occurring in early childhood centers and school districts. A children's museum can be seen in some communities as a "frill" but a case can be made for a children's museum as a way to help meet community priorities such as those put forth by the Great River Children's Exploratorium and the Houston Children's Museum. Parent educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills to help bridge cultural gaps, build relationships, and support parents and families within a community. A children's museum can be seen as a community space that opens up these possibilities in new ways.

The current literature base suggests children's museums impact communities on a number of different levels including revitalization efforts, tourist destinations, supplementing K-12 education, accessibility, and outreach services. The literature on children's museums and the impact a parent educator can provide for educational opportunities for families within this environment are for the most part non-existent. This qualitative research supports the role of a parent educator within a children's museum to enhance parent and family learning through the relationships and connections a parent educator cultivates. This research documents the important

contributions parent education can make to enhance a children's museum environment. It sees beyond the lens of early childhood education into the relationship of caregiver and child and how that might be strengthened and supported through the group process that parent education identifies.

Future Research

Further research as to what degree or what kind of influences can be achieved with parent educators present in the programming of children's museum still remains to be discovered. How would a children's museum look with an ECFE model intertwined in its programming? A first step would be for children's museums to reflect on how they want to serve the communities in which they exist. Would part of their mission be to build strong communities through strong families with the added benefit of parent education? Can they hire parent educators from their area who are adept at the processes and methods that truly strengthens families? The diversity of backgrounds of parent educators creates controversy about the level of competencies. Requiring certification or licensure can become one way to ensure that parent educators are well prepared for complex parenting issues they would encounter within a children's museum. Without knowing the administrative and business side of children's museums, it is hard to make a case for inclusion of parent education. A budget or cost analysis of children's museums would be helpful to better understand the operations. Until children's museums are able to financially commit to parent education, the possibilities will not be realized.

As a parent educator looking in from the outside, I recognize the added benefits parent education group process brings in building strong families. In our diverse community, I see the possibilities a children's museum could bring to families who don't feel comfortable in a school setting yet need skills to help raise their children. Families are busy. A children's museum could be the place for those families to join a parent group with less of a commitment than what is found through a school district. It appears from this research that parent education offered as part of a children's museum programming in this community would be well received and have a positive impact on all its guests.

Conclusion

As the dynamics of families and roles of parents continue to evolve and become more complex, the role of an effective parent educator to guide and nurture family relationships can be advantageous when present and available in a children's museum. The café style focus group format used to gather data for this study allowed the parent educator participants to freely express thoughts and ideas. This freedom of expression inspired the parent educators to suggest ideas, methods and give recommendations that not only can enhance a family's visit to a children's museum but also helps to build and strengthen relationships on many different levels. Parent educator to parent, parent to child, child to parent, parent to parent, as well as the children's museum relationship to both parent educator and families, are just a few of the relationships that might be positively influenced within a children's museum. It is these relationships that are paramount to parent education practice and this research

suggests possibilities exist for parent education to occur within a children's museum in many different ways.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Join Focus Group

As a parent educator, you're invited to participate in a Café style focus group discussion on how a children's museum can help parents in their role to support their child's development and learning, and what opportunities exist for a parent educator within a children's museum to support their work with parents.

Under the guidance and leadership of two St. Cloud retired higher education faculty members, Glen Palm and Greg Reigstad, The Great River Children's Exploratorium has been introduced to a number of community groups, civic leaders and interested parties in its initial stages of development. As a parent educator, I have chosen as part of my master's thesis, to study the impact a children's museum can have on our families. This café style focus group will be the main study for my project. The central questions guiding my research pertains to the possibilities for building capacities of parent learning with regards to early learning and development within a children's museum, and how a children's museum can support positive parent/child relationships. Your experience as a parent educator has special insights that would be a great value to this study and potentially to the design and construction of The Great River Children's Exploratorium in St. Cloud.

Who: Parent Educators

When: Thursday, October 15, 2015 6:30pm – 8:30pm

Where: Hillside Early Childhood

30 South 4th Avenue

Sauk Rapids, MN 56379

The evening will include a presentation of visual images from children's museums, focus group discussions in a café style, and an opportunity to creatively design your own exhibit space within a children's museum.

Refreshments will be provided.

Thank you for considering this unique opportunity to have a positive impact on our families and community.

Becky Coborn

Parent Educator

Sauk Rapids-Rice School District

RSVP to: runningfever59@aol.com

Appendix B: Adult Informed Consent

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

Researcher: Rebecca Coborn, Parent Educator
Study Title: Exploring parent educator ideas using a children's museum as a resource to promote parent learning and positive parent/child relationships

1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research.

2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

Parent educators within the St. Cloud community are eligible for this study.

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research study is to gather qualitative data for the expressed interest and application of the results in the construction and design of a children's museum.

4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research will be conducted for 2 hours at Hillside Early Childhood Learning Center, Sauk Rapids, MN. Participants will not be contacted in the future for further study.

5. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to view a presentation of visual images from children's museums, participate in a focus group discussion, and design your own exhibit space within a children's museum with the furnished supplies.

6. WHAT ARE MY BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, I hope that your participation in the study may bring satisfaction to you for helping to bring a children's museum one step closer to a realization.

7. WHAT ARE MY RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

I believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the tasks involved within the focus group.

8. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your study records. The researcher will keep all audio and written records on a computer that is password protected. The researcher will be the only one with access to the password. At the conclusion of this study, the research may publish the findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations. The electronic files will be destroyed 6 months after the thesis is approved.

9. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. I will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project, if you would like to learn of the study results, or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher, Rebecca Coborn at runningfever59@aol.com. If you would prefer to contact someone other than this researcher, you may contact the advisor of this research, Dr. Glen Palm @ gfpalm@stcloudstate.edu

10. CAN I STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

11. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

When signing this form I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this consent form and the results of the study are available for me upon my request.

Participant Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

Signature of Person
Obtaining Consent

Print Name:

Date:

Appendix C: Demographics Form

Demographic Information

1. What is your educational level? (Circle all that apply)
Bachelor of Science Bachelor of Art Masters
2. What areas are you licensed in? (Circle all that apply)
Parent Educator Early Childhood Educator
Early Childhood Special Education
3. What is your current position? _____
4. What is the length of time you have been in your profession?
0-2 years 3-5 years 5-10 years 10+ years
5. How long have you lived in the Saint Cloud area?
0-5 years 6-10 years 10+ years
6. How many times have you visited a children's museum?
0-10 times 11-25 times 25+ times
7. What is your gender? Male Female

Appendix D: Focus Group Questions

What experiences have you had with children's museums?

What would you expect to find there?

How would a children's museum meet the educational and developmental needs of young children birth to five in your community?

How could you use a children's museum to support your goals for parents of young children birth to five?

How would a children's museum experience be different from a classroom and add to an early childhood classroom experience?

How would a children's museum enhance family learning opportunities in Central Minnesota?

How can a children's museum assist parents in their role as a parent to support development and learning in their young children?

How can a parent educator use a children's museum to support their work?

Appendix E: Focus Group Activity

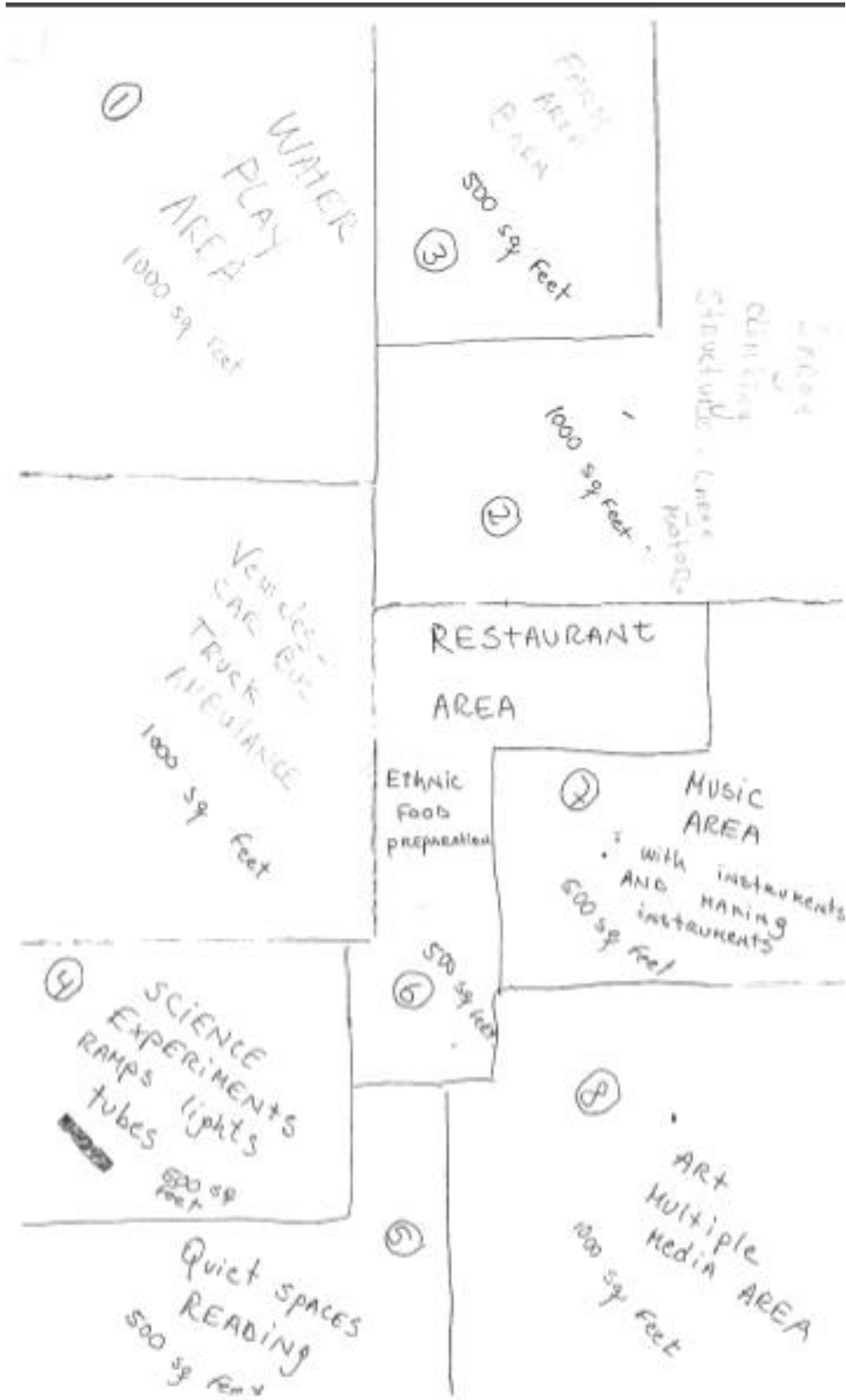
Directions: Your goal for this activity is to design your own children's museum. The 8 X 14 piece of paper represents a blank floor plan with 10,000 sq. feet of children's museum space. The 2 attached templates are true to scale and each designated as 1,000 and 500 sq. feet. Using the templates provided, trace spaces onto the blank paper to represent exhibit areas you'd like to see in a children's museum. Twenty seven possibilities to choose from are listed below but feel free to use your own ideas as well. The templates can be combined or manipulated in any way you choose to reach your desired proportions of space for each exhibit. Please indicate the name of the space and the amount of square feet appointed the area by writing it within the traced template space on the 8 X 14 paper.

Possible Children's Museum Exhibit Areas

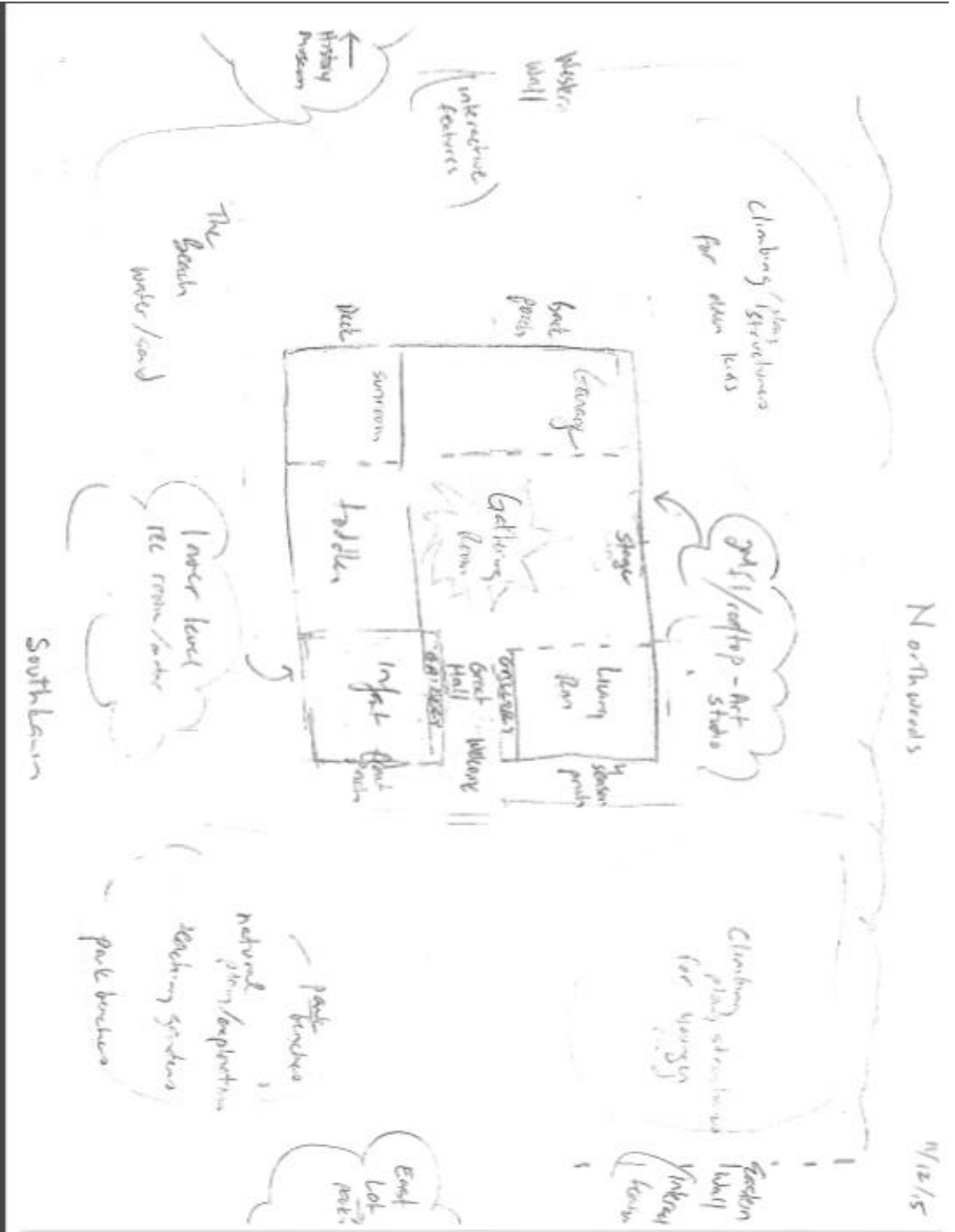
1. Water Play Area
2. Grocery Story Dramatic Play
3. Vehicles- Car, Bus, Truck, Ambulance
4. Farm area-Barn- Tractor-local food production
5. Building-Home construction area
6. Theatre/Stage- with clothes and props
7. Dr. Office- Pediatrician office
8. Dentist office
9. Restaurant Area- Different types of ethnic food preparation
10. Veterinarian Office
11. Resort/Recreation- fishing/camping
12. Art- multiple media area
13. Tinkering Area
14. Large Climbing Structure- large motor
15. Infant play area
16. Toddler nature exploration
17. Music area with instruments and making instruments
18. Big Blue Block Building area
19. Welcome to the US- New immigrant spaces and stories
20. Quiet spaces- Reading
21. Science experiments-ramps, lights, tubes
22. Nature exploration-outside area
23. Special Exhibit space 1500 sq. feet
24. Bank/ ATM office
25. Post Office
26. Fire Station Dramatic play
27. Office Supply store
28. Other ideas

Appendix F: Focus Group Activity Examples









Appendix G: Case Summary



Case Summary: Great River Children's Exploratorium, St. Cloud, MN

In a complex and busy world, children's museums provide a safe haven where children can learn through play and enjoy this unique opportunity for learning with the caring adults in their lives. There are approximately 350 children's museums around the world including the Minnesota Children's Museum in St. Paul and smaller museums in four other MN communities (Duluth, Rochester, Mankato, and Grand Rapids). The **Great River Children's Exploratorium** has been established as a non-profit organization in St. Cloud to establish a children's museum in St. Cloud to serve the greater St. Cloud community and Central MN.

✦ **Children's museums can help young children in our area to develop foundational skills for school success.**

In the past decade, neuroscience has confirmed that the first years of life are essential to future learning. Children's museums are grounded in established pedagogy and combine important learning objectives with play in informal learning environments that are unique, engaging, and developmentally appropriate for infants through school-aged children. This resource would address a community priority in St. Cloud to support early learning in young children.

✦ **Children's museums strengthen community resources that educate and care for children.**

Children's museum art, science, math, literacy and other exhibits and programs for children would be valuable supplements to the early childhood programs and K-12 schools in our community. A Children's Museum also can be a resource in collaboration with local Higher Education institutions for developing workshops on informal learning for college students, parents, teachers and childcare professionals in our area.

✦ **Children's museums are environments where families play and connect in meaningful ways.**

With workplace demands on most parents, adults have less time to spend with children. Children's museums are places away from work and daily household tasks, where parents and other adults can spend quality time with children, learn something new, and experience the joy of playing together as a family.

✦ **Children's museums can serve as town squares and build social capital.**

A landmark study on civic engagement indicates that children are one of the most likely subjects to motivate community involvement. Children's museums engage families and individual citizens to share their talents and perspectives. Area businesses, professionals and university students in the St. Cloud area are a valuable resource that would benefit from helping to fund, design and create learning exhibits at the museum.

✦ **Children's museums are in a unique position to address community diversity in a positive manner and reverse discrimination.**

Children's museums are popular, yet neutral, sources of information, attract a diverse cross-section of people and provide shared experiences through interpretive and interactive exhibits. Most children's museums offer discounted/free admission for low-income individuals/families. In the St. Cloud community, we have an opportunity to create a museum that includes stories of both recent immigrants and long-term residents of our area in the exhibits. By exposing adults and children to unfamiliar concepts in a non-threatening, hands-on approach, and ensuring that the museum experience is accessible to those of differing abilities and backgrounds, children's museums create bridges on understanding across cultures and times.

✦ **Children's museums contribute to the local economy as a destination attraction.**

Many children's museums are part of a downtown revitalization project. Children's museums are sought after as local and travel destinations. More than 30 million individuals annually visit children's museums around the world. Children's Museums in similar sized Midwest communities have attracted 60-100,000 visitors each year.

Appendix H: Power Point Photos




GRCE

Great River Children's Exploratorium

Creating a Vision for a Children's Museum for the Greater St. Cloud Community

Mission

To establish an interactive space for children, family, and community members to share play and learning experiences.



Chicago CM Manifesto



What is in a Children's Museum?

Places for Young Children to Learn Through Dramatic Play Areas around Future Careers



More Dramatic Play Areas

Learning about Space, Problem-Solving and Creative Construction



What Kinds of Activities?

Learning about Nature and Science Through Water Play



What Kinds of Activities?

More Water Play



More Play Areas

Fun with vehicles



Play Areas for Infant/Toddlers

Quiet Spaces for Younger Children to explore and learn.



Discovery

Digging for Dinosaur Bones and Learning about the Past



Discover Science and Technology

Through hands-on learning experiments.



A Children's Museum is

A place for adults to play and learn



A Children's Museum is

A Town Square for diverse community members to learn about and from each other



A Children's Museum is

A place to explore different environments and learn about different lifestyles



A Children's Museum is

A place for grandparents to rediscover the joy of hands-on learning.



A Children's Museum is

A place to learn about healthy food and nutrition through play.





A Children's Museum is

A Lab School for future teachers to create learning environments and observe how children learn in different spaces.



A Children's Museum is

A destination attraction for families, visitors, and school children from Central MN and beyond.

Where should it be located?




Next Steps

- Work with the Stearns County History Museum on developing GRCE as a collaborative venture.
- Pop-up Exhibit- The Amazing Castle – Rental from the MN Children's Museum in St. Paul
- Community Forums about the development of a Children's Museum in our community

Appendix I: IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board Application For Conduct of Research Involving Human Subjects

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project Title: **Children's museum possibilities for building capacities of parent learning with regards to early learning and child development and supportive positive parent/child relationships**

Project Summary (3-5 sentences, include method of data gathering): **St. Cloud is planning for a children's museum. We are planning to gather data through a hybrid focus group- café method. The findings of the study may be applied to help determine the construction, operation, and programming of the museum .**

Data Collection (note: must be a future date and allows sufficient time for IRB review)

Start Date: **May 20, 2015**

Ending Date: **August 15, 2015**

Location of the Research: **Hillside Early Education Center, Sauk Rapids, MN**

RESEARCHERS

Principal Investigator (PI): **Rebecca Coborn**

Type of Research: faculty/staff undergraduate graduate masters graduate doctoral

Mailing Address: **3104 Dunbar Road, St. Cloud, MN 56301**

Telephone: **320-267-1395**

Email: **runningfever59@aol.com**

Advisor or Course Instructor (if PI is a student): **Dr. Glen Palm**

Other Investigators: **Sharalyn Snavelly**

If you collaborate with an individual from another institution, the research must be submitted to that institution's IRB as well, and a copy of the approval letter must be filed with SCSU's IRB.

SPONSORS

Is there potential or confirmed external funding sources for this research project? No

Yes

Funding Agency

Account #

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

The undersigned acknowledge: 1) application represents a complete and accurate description of the proposed research, 2) research will be conducted in compliance with IRB recommendations and requirements, 3) research will not begin until IRB approval received, 4) modifications will not be made prior to obtaining IRB approval, 5) PI responsible for reporting to the IRB any adverse or unexpected events, 6) PI to report to IRB any significant new findings which develop during the course of the study and increase the risk to participants and 7) expedited or full IRB approval in effect for up to one year and PI is responsible to request continuing review or file final report (exempt research is exempt from continuing review process).

Investigator Name/Signature _____ Date _____

Advisor/Instructor Name/Signature _____ Date _____

TYPE OF REVIEW

REVIEW WORKSHEET

Check **ALL** categories—if any—that apply to your research.

Common Categories of Exempt Review

- i. **Research conducted in an educational setting involving normal education practices**, such as research that examines or compares regular and special education:
 - instructional strategies/techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods
- ii. Research involving the use of **educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement)**, **survey procedures**, **interview procedures**, or **observation of public behavior if confidentiality or anonymity is maintained**.
- iii. Research involving activities in category 2 with subjects who are **elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office**—regardless of whether the subjects may be identified or the information is sensitive.
- iv. Research involving the collection or study of **existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens**, if one of the following is true:
 - the sources are publicly available or information is recorded by the investigator in a way that subjects **cannot** be directly or indirectly identified.
- v. Research **subject to the approval of Federal Department or Agency heads** and designed to study or evaluate public benefit or service programs.
- vi. **Taste and food quality** evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, if one of the following is consumed:
 - wholesome foods without additives, or a food that contains a food ingredient, agricultural chemical, or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe by the Food and Drug Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, or U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service

Common Categories of Expedited Review

- i. **Clinical studies of drugs or medical devices** only when research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review.) or research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.
- ii. **Collection of blood samples** by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows:
 - from healthy, nonpregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds (collection may not occur more than 2 times per week and exceed 550 ml in an 8 week period), or from other adults and children, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects and the collection amount, frequency, and procedure (collection may not occur more than 2 times per week and exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8 week period)
- iii. **Collection of biological specimens** by noninvasive means for research purposes. Examples include:
 - hair and nail clippings in a nondisfiguring manner;
 - teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction;
 - excreta and external secretions (including sweat);
 - uncannulated saliva;
 - placenta removed at delivery;
 - amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor;
 - supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus, provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques;
 - mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings;
 - sputum collected after saline mist nebulization.

- iv. **Collection of data through noninvasive procedures** routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving general anesthesia, sedation, x-rays, or microwaves. Any medical devices used must be approved for marketing.
Examples include:
- physical sensors that do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject;
 - weighing or testing of sensory acuity;
 - magnetic resonance imaging;
 - electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography;
 - moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.
- v. **Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings** made for research purposes.
- vi. **Research on individual/group characteristics** or behavior or research employing oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies on areas such as perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, social behavior, etc. **if confidentiality or anonymity is maintained.**

Other

- Other, please explain

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Briefly summarize the proposed research and its significance. Include explanations of the following; 1) research question/hypothesis, 2) research design, including independent/dependent variables, if appropriate, and 3) relevant theory

The qualitative research is aimed at finding out how a children's museum can support parent educators in their role of guiding parents and parent/ child relationships. Questions such as, how can a parent educator use a children's museum to support their work with parents, and how would a children's museum enhance family learning opportunities in Central Minnesota, will be part of a group discussion to gather data and help to develop themes for this research project. The data collected may be applied to the construction, operation and programming of the children's museum to be located in the Saint Cloud area and which is currently in the planning stages .

SUBJECT POPULATION

1. How many subjects will participate in the research? Who will the subjects be?
Approximately 20-30 parent educators from the surrounding communities will be invited to be part of this research.
2. What are the ages of potential subjects? *(Check all that apply.)*
 0-7 8-17 18-64 65+
3. Some populations are considered "vulnerable" to coercion or undue influence. Will any of these populations be invited to participate in the research? *(Check all that apply.)*

<input type="checkbox"/> children (under age 18)	<input type="checkbox"/> elderly individuals (over age 65)
<input type="checkbox"/> prisoners	<input type="checkbox"/> non-English speakers
<input type="checkbox"/> pregnant women	<input type="checkbox"/> mentally disabled individuals
<input type="checkbox"/> economically/educationally disadvantaged individuals	

If any of the above vulnerable categories have been checked, provide rationale for using these vulnerable populations and detail the safeguards that will be included in the research to protect their rights and welfare.

- no vulnerable populations

SUBJECT IDENTIFICATION AND RECRUITMENT

4. How will potential subjects be identified and recruited? *(e.g. college classes, phone books, membership directories, etc.)*
Administrators/supervisors of three local Early Childhood Family Education programs, St. Cloud,

Sauk Rapids-Rice, and Sartell, will be contacted to distribute invitations to their parent educators through their work email. Parent educators and other interested individuals will be sent an invitation to volunteer through an email posted and obtained online. Fliers will also be distributed either by hand or through the U. S. Postal service to area Head Start programs and childcare facilities in the St. Cloud area.

5. Copies of advertisements, bulletin board notices, telephone scripts, letters, and other recruitment materials are attached. Yes N/A
6. Written documentation of cooperation/permission is REQUIRED from any individual or organization that assists you in identifying and recruiting subject:

The following are attached and **MUST** be submitted simultaneously with this application:

- | Yes | N/A | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Letter/email from professor(s) allowing you to distribute materials in their classes. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Letter/email from independent school(s) that will provide access to students. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Letter/email from medical organization(s) that will provide access to clients/patients. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other, please explain A signed letter of permission from the administrators/supervisors of three local Early Childhood Family Education programs is attached |

7. Will subjects be compensated for participating in the research? Yes No

If so, what kind of reward will be given (monetary, extra credit, or other) and when will subjects receive it (e.g. the beginning of the study, the end of the study, or at each visit)?

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

8. Describe the research procedures and list tasks/activities that subjects will be asked to complete. **The participants will be asked to view a presentation of visual images from children's museums, participate in a focus group discussion, and design their own exhibit space within a children's museum with the furnished supplies. They will also be asked to complete a one page demographic form.**

The following are attached and **MUST** be submitted simultaneously with this application:

- | Yes | N/A | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Attached is a copy of surveys or data collection instrument. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Attached is a copy of interview questions. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Attached is a copy of handouts. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other materials attached, please explain The 14"X8 1/2" piece of paper will be used as a "blueprint " where the participants will design and designate spaces to be used within a children's museum. |

9. How will data be collected, recorded, and stored? **Data will be collected through written and audio means. It will be stored in a computer that is password protected by the researcher alone. The files will be destroyed within 6 months after the thesis is approved.**

10. Will the data include names or other identifiers? Yes No

If yes, will the data be coded and identifiable information removed? Yes No

If yes, explain the coding process, what additional measures will be taken to keep your data secure and who will have access to it?

11. The raw data and/or coding key from this research will be destroyed (*Check ONLY one*):

when the study is complete within three years

when my degree is awarded other:**RISKS AND BENEFITS**

12. Will the research present more than minimal risk* to subjects?
-
- Yes
-
- No

*Minimal risk means that the harm or discomfort anticipated in the research is no greater than that encountered in daily life or during routine physical/psychological examinations or tests.

13. Does the research involve:

- | Yes | No | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Physical pain, discomfort, or injury from procedures or drugs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Undesired and/or unexpected psychological changes (e.g. depression, anxiety, emotional discomfort, confusion, hallucination, stress, guilt, embarrassment, loss of self-esteem, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Invasion of privacy/absence of informed consent (e.g. covert observation, review of private medical or educational records, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Sensitive information (e.g. alcohol/drug use, sexual orientation, illegal activities, suicidal thoughts, physical/mental illness, violence, depression, psychological/physical abuse, gang related activities, pro-life/pro-choice, relationship issues, etc.) that could result in social and economic harm (e.g. civil/criminal liability or damage to financial standing, employability, insurability, reputation, etc.) if a breach in confidentiality occurred. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Deceptive techniques (e.g. giving false feedback about performance, staging an event or situation, concealing the purpose of the research, etc.) <u>A debriefing statement is required.</u> |

If yes, how will subjects be misled (i.e. what information will be withheld or what false information will be provided)? Describe when and how this deception will be revealed to subjects and provide a copy of the oral or written debriefing statement. **See the IRB's handout on deception and the debriefing process** for information, examples, and a template.

14. What precautions will be taken to minimize or prevent potential risks, inconveniences, and discomforts (e.g. anonymous data collection, presence of trained personnel who can respond to emergencies, etc.)?
- An anonymous data collection process will be used.**

INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

The informed consent process begins when you first approach potential subjects and continues throughout your research. Typically, it involves:

- presenting information that enables an individual to knowledgeably and voluntarily decide whether or not to participate as a research subject.
- documenting consent with a written form signed by the subject or an implied consent form for surveys
- responding to the subject's questions/concerns during the research and communicating any new findings that may affect the subject's willingness to continue participating.

When your research involves individuals under the age of 18, you must obtain and document the consent of parents or guardians. If your research involves subjects who are between the ages of 8 and 18, child/minor assent must be documented as well. A single project could require an adult consent form, a parental consent form and a child/minor assent form.

15. Minimally consent forms
- MUST**
- include the following information, please verify that your consent process addresses the following:

Yes

- Provides a clear understanding of the project to potential participants.
- Explain the voluntary nature of the research and give the option to withdraw at any time.
- Include researcher and advisor contact information for questions.

- Explain to participants how to request study results.
- Adult consent states the individual is "at least 18 years of age" to consent.
- Confidentiality states data will be presented in aggregate form or with no more than 1-2 descriptors presented together.

16. All projects require consent forms for potential participants: The following are attached and **MUST** be submitted simultaneously with this application:

- | Yes | N/A | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | A cover letter/page accompanying a confidential anonymous survey |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Adult consent form |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | A parental/guardian consent form |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | A child assent form |

17. If applicable, explain the procedures that will be used to obtain child/minor assent and attach a copy of each assent form. not applicable/no minors participating

IRB APPLICATION CHECKLIST

(Submission of a complete IRB application results in a quicker response from the IRB)

- IRB training completed
- All questions answered on IRB application
- Application fully signed
- Question #6 written support attached
- Question #8 data collection instrument(s) attached
- Questions 15 & 16 consent form(s) attached
- Submit completed IRB application to Sponsored Programs in AS 210