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The value of learning through play

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The debate regarding the future home of the Chicago Children's Museum is a local matter best left to those affected by the decision. However, the Association of Children's Museums and the American Association of Museums were alarmed by "Best interest of museum to stay put" (Voice of the People, May 2), by letter writer Joe Smith, which suggested that children's museums are not true museums and are "little more than amusement for toddlers."

The record must be set straight.

Children's museums are recognized by AAM, the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the International Council of Museums as museums. ACM issues standards for professional practices to all of its member institutions and a number of children's museums are fully accredited by AAM.

The mission of museums—those for adults and for children—is education. Specifically for children's museums, the primary focus is on interactive exhibit strategies because young children learn best through hands-on play and exploration.

The grocery store exhibits (a common theme in many children's museums) that Smith mentioned are perfect examples of designing exhibits around familiar concepts that empower children to interact directly, safely and independently with objects in the museum. Grocery exhibits allow children to develop essential foundational skills such as color recognition, sorting, counting, language skills, self-regulation and socialization, as well as serving as a backdrop for talking about balanced nutrition. All of these learning goals are developmentally appropriate for toddlers and young children.

Smith fundamentally disregards play as a recognized and essential medium for learning. The role of play in learning has been documented in numerous studies and is endorsed by many organizations.

Children live in an adult-centered world. When they enter a place that is scaled for their size—where learning has no timetable or follow-up test, that presents the world's cultures, art and historical events in a way that allows them to take part in some tangible way—a light is turned on inside each child. Having a robust children's museum in a community provides a vibrant source of learning and play and represents an investment in that community's future.

—Janet Rice Elman

Executive director

The advertisement features a blue background with a white border. In the top left corner, a red banner reads "Sale Extended!". In the top right corner, the text "Upgrade to BRITISH AIRWAYS" is displayed with the airline's logo. The central text reads "2 nights in London FREE* when you fly from only \$339**". At the bottom, a red button contains the text "Book by 5/22 at ba.com". Small text at the bottom left of the central box reads "*DBL occ. **E/W based on r/t purchase from NYC. Gov't taxes and fees extra."

Association of

Children's Museums

—*Ford W. Bell*

President

American Association

of Museums

Washington

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