What's the Buzz about Learning Frameworks?
Findings from the Children's Museum Research Network

Nicole Rivera, EdD
Assistant Professor of Psychology
North Central College

Susan Foutz, MA
Director of Research & Evaluation
The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis

Alix Tonsgard, MS
Early Learning Specialist
DuPage Children’s Museum

ACM Webinar
September 26, 2017
Poll

Which best describes your museum’s experience with learning frameworks?
What is the Children’s Museum Research Network?
What is the Children’s Museum Research Network?

1) Literature Review
2) Research Agenda Symposium
3) Field-based conversations
4) Field-wide Research Agenda Finalized

The research agenda “identifies and prioritizes the evidence most needed by the field to articulate and demonstrate the distinct learning impacts of children’s museums.” Broad categories include:

- Characteristics of Children’s Museums
- Audience
- Learning Landscape
What is the Children’s Museum Research Network?

- Boston Children's Museum
- Children's Museum of Houston
- Children's Museum of Pittsburgh
- Children's Museum of Tacoma
- DuPage Children's Museum
- Minnesota Children's Museum
- Providence Children's Museum
- Thanksgiving Point Institute
- The Children's Museum of Indianapolis
- The Magic House, St. Louis Children's Museum
What is a learning framework?

A statement of “a museum’s most important ideas about learning and learners.”

• Provides a foundation for all educational activities.
• Guides planning and evaluation of activities.
• Not just for museum educators!

What is a learning framework?

Aligns with a museum’s mission, vision, and goals.

States the value of the museum to the community or learner by articulating what the museum values.

Clarifies how the museum understands learning.

As we’ll see in the story of DuPage, it is a process, an ongoing conversation about purpose, audience, activities, and outcomes.
What did the network learn about learning frameworks?

- The CMRN designed a research study that looked specifically at museums’ institutional learning frameworks.
- Three research questions led the study:
  1. What major vocabularies do these frameworks share? Where do they diverge?
  2. What constructs do children’s museums use and prioritize in their learning frameworks?
  3. What learning theories do these frameworks implicitly and explicitly reflect or endorse?
- Five museums from the CMRN provided learning frameworks and participated in group interviews.
The study of these five learning frameworks revealed:
• Each reflected the institution's values and beliefs about learning.
• Grounded in a specific context.
• Just one perspective, not the only or the best perspective.
The results of the study are available online at:
http://childrensmuseums.org/members/community-conversations/cmrn

This infographic summary of the Network and its first study can be found here:
http://childrensmuseums.org/childrens-museum-research-network

For an easy to read description of learning frameworks by Jeanne Vergeront visit:
https://museumnotes.blogspot.com/2015/05/10-lessons-from-learning-frameworks.html
Developing a Learning Framework at the DuPage Children’s Museum
Building on the work of the Providence Children’s Museum (PCM)

• In 2014, PCM went through a process to develop their current learning framework.
• Transition from “educational philosophy” to “learning framework”
• “Required staff to reconcile their individual beliefs with evidence from research” (p. 10).
• Explored definitions of learning and play
• Interviewed parents and caregivers about their perceptions of children’s play and learning
• Findings informed family focused programming, the development of research, and exhibit design.

Plan for Developing the Learning Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong></td>
<td>Potential Data Collection:</td>
<td><strong>Goals:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>• Staff interviews</td>
<td>• Report to document process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School programs</td>
<td>• Parent/ caregiver focus groups</td>
<td>• Establishment of a learning framework model by the fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community outreach</td>
<td>• Document reviews</td>
<td><strong>Key Questions:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>• Child interviews on the floor (post-it interviews)</td>
<td>• Who are the museum’s learners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>• Administration/ board member interviews</td>
<td>• How do they learn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tasks:</strong></td>
<td>• Why do we think that learning happens this way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>• Compile available data/ documents (Margaret/ Kim; by 6/15)</td>
<td>• What kinds of experiences does the museum provide to support learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators/ chaperones</td>
<td>• Parent Focus Group Study (Nicole to submit to NCC IRB by 6/15; focus groups late June/ July)</td>
<td><strong>Defining concepts:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/ grandparent/ caregiver</td>
<td>• Communicate to DCM staff about LF process (Alix)</td>
<td>• Adult/ child partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>• Discuss Learning Framework with Education Committee on 6/18 (Margaret and/or Kim; collect feedback)</td>
<td>• STEAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>• Staff interviews in July/ August (Alix, Nicole, and Justice)</td>
<td>• Constructivist philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>• Child interviews on the floor (Alix &amp; Nicole, July)</td>
<td>• Possibly interview admin/ board members (Nicole)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## DCM’s Timeline for Developing the Learning Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 2016</td>
<td>Proposed the idea of developing a learning framework to leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>Convened first meeting with planning team to discuss the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer/Fall 2016</td>
<td>Completed data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2016</td>
<td>Meeting with planning team to review data collected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2017</td>
<td>Draft language of learning framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>Two meetings to work on draft language and visual representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2017</td>
<td>Reviewed learning framework and supporting definitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 11, 2017</td>
<td>Meeting scheduled to finalize learning framework and supporting definitions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summer Data Collection: Who Did We Talk To?

- Interviews with DCM administration
- Feedback from DCM’s Education Committee
- Group meeting with DCM staff
- Focus group study: Parents’ Perspectives of Play and Learning
- Ask It Board with children on the museum floor

Questions were based on:


Planning team’s goals for the learning framework:

• Be informed by the philosophies and theories that shape DCM practices
• Embrace the history and background of the institution
• Be “nimble” in order to speak to the front line staff
• Help guide decision making (i.e. holidays, marketing, etc.)
• Be inclusive
• Match the mission of DCM
DCM’s programs and exhibits strive to:

- Foster inclusivity for all children and their adult partners
- Remain innovative by informing our work through current research
- Promote persistent, self-directed learning and encourage risk taking and learning from failure
- Explore the intersection of art, math, and science with accurate, age-appropriate content
- Provide opportunities to use real tools, materials, and equipment
- Create unique opportunities for open-ended, process-oriented experiences with the potential for multiple outcomes
- Engage all children and their adult partners in child-led play experiences that encourage curiosity, exploration, and collaboration
- Be mindful of commercial influence
Putting it into Practice

• As a discussion point when making decisions regarding sponsorship
• To guide the development of exhibits and programs
• To communicate to new hires our guiding principles
• To inform the development of staff training
• To guide the development of a research agenda
Key aspects to our learning framework:

- Family learning focuses on changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes within the family unit.
- Definition of “a family”—at least one adult accompanied by one or more children who appear to have a sustained relationship.
- Development and use of an inventory of observable behaviors as indicators of family learning.
Another Learning Framework Example

Mission-based, institutional focus on Family Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Problem-solving and Collaboration</th>
<th>Enhancement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pointing at an artifact.</td>
<td>• Taking turns to complete and activity.</td>
<td>• Describing a family memory or tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using an interactive.</td>
<td>• Providing clues that allow family member to complete activity.</td>
<td>• Asking open-ended questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Following facilitator instructions together.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Putting it into Practice

We use the Family Learning concept and inventory to:

- Plan and develop gallery programs, exhibit interactives, community outreach programs, and parent-child activities generally
- Evaluate the success of the above activities

We use the concept of Family Learning in all we do, including:

- Exhibition selection—intergenerational appeal
- Marketing—images and campaigns
- Development events
Which element is most important to emphasize in your museum’s current or future learning framework?
Final Thoughts & Questions
Resources on learning frameworks

Museum Notes......... 10 Lessons from Learning Frameworks (blog post)
https://goo.gl/T89kay

Interactivity 2016...... Learning Frameworks: Theory into Practice (session)
https://goo.gl/slPwHK

ACM Website.......... Children’s Museum Research Network
http://www.childrensmuseums.org/members/community-conversations/cmrn
Includes links to previous presentations, Hand to Hand articles, blog postings, and other resources.
As a result of this webinar, what is your next step?

Poll
Thank you for attending!

Nicole Rivera, EdD  
Assistant Professor of Psychology  
North Central College

Susan Foutz, MA  
Director of Research & Evaluation  
The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis

Alix Tonsgard, MS  
Early Learning Specialist  
DuPage Children’s Museum

ACM Webinar  
September 26, 2017