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An invitation to rethinking early childhood learning spaces : museums as young learners' classrooms

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An Invitation to Rethinking Early Childhood Learning Spaces:

Museums as Young Learners' Classrooms

By

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Abstract

Over the last few decades the role of education in the museum field has grown at a momentous rate and most museums now have an education department that provides a range of programs for visitors. There has also been an increasing amount of research about the development that occurs in the first five years of human life. Many museums are now offering more opportunities and incorporating services to encourage families with young children to explore and enjoy museums. One of these opportunities is the creation of preschools located in or as part of museums. The museum preschool is a home to a synthesis of early childhood and museum education theory and practices. This kind of singular experience helps foster a deep love of learning in the children who come through these programs, fostering lifelong learners. These children are also given the very fundamental building blocks to encourage them to be confident learners and aware members of the local and global community in which they belong. Schools in museums also represent the opportunity for greater participation of families and the community as a whole. Although there are many such institutions in the United States and world, I focus on two to provide a picture of how the museum preschool experience has been shaped to fit the institution. The two institutions highlighted were chosen due to their outstanding use of their resources such as space and collections and intense dedication to providing an empowering education to all their students. Lastly, I propose a model of a preschool fusing my own pedagogy with guidance gleaned from the two case studies. This model is meant to represent the further expansion of progressive education in the framework of a museum preschool.

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I. Rationale

Museums are places to explore culture and other ways of existing. Museums have the ability to open doors into other worlds. They are portals to other imaginable possibilities, of knowledge to be captured and discovered. Yes, I can read about paintings, and dinosaurs, and quite a few other topics, but it really is not the same as seeing them in person. There is something about seeing an object, gauging the size, the colors, the texture- our understanding of it becomes more substantial.

Museums connect us to the information found in books, movies, and TV. It's more than just a space for objects though. It's a space for community, for understanding culture, a place of growth. Objects represent culture. Objects tell a story, a history. Museums help us to interpret these stories and better understand other cultures.

For museums to remain relevant in the 21st century, I believe they must demonstrate elasticity as well as resilience. There are several ways museums can achieve this: involving their community, providing spaces to reflect on current events and ongoing issues, and becoming more accessible to a greater audience. One way to reach these goals is through improved education programs offered to the public including more support and services for young children.

While museums are sites of scholarship, preservation, collection, and curation, one of their foremost priorities should also be education (American Alliance of Museums, 2008, p. 16). Many museums and other cultural institutions have education departments and educators on staff. They provide public programs, drop-in classes, workshops, and school group field trips. In a way, educators become the ambassadors to visitors to help shape and navigate their museum experience just as teachers aid in the facilitation of an experience in a progressive education classroom.

Museums should be perceived as sites of progressive education. Progressive education is a force in the education realm advocating for all people to become successful and confident learners. These kinds of learners are aware of how they learn best and have ways to support them in both their strengths and weaknesses. Progressive education fights for children to have plenty of time to explore the arts and the natural world because these two life components are essential to understanding culture, the world, and the self. Progressive education also fights for these children to become lifelong learners as they develop into adults.

Usually when we think of progressive education, we tend to jump to images of schools and classrooms. What if we could blur where the classroom and the world begin and end, including museums, cultural institutions, community spaces, and natural settings? What if our perception of the average person's educational opportunities were to extend beyond the classroom to the settings of community, their neighborhood, and cultural spaces including museums? Instead of everything beyond the classroom being extra, it became essential and interconnected with all the other components: family, classroom, religious organization, and neighborhood.

Having preschools in museums is one-way museums can utilize progressive education to promote all the wonderful benefits of being part of a museum community. They provide a wonderful intersection of opportunities for learning, for dialogue, and for expansion.

Throughout this paper I refer to 'museums and other cultural institutions'. By other cultural institutions I am referring to theaters, historic houses and sites, art galleries, national, state, and local parks, botanic gardens, and any other space that is valued in society because it provides a service that promotes and preserves culture.

II. Literature Review

A: Theoretical Background

“Children are born with a desire for knowledge”

(Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 1995, p. 67)

Progressive education is difficult to fit in any concise boundaries but it does have several important features: community, collaboration, social justice, intrinsic motivation, deep understanding, active learning, and taking students seriously (Kohn, 2008, para. 5-11). By building an environment with these principles at the core, the message delivered to students is a holistic one: we want you to not only be a good student but a good person. School isn't just about academics. (Kohn, 2008, para. 4).

Some prominent names associated with progressive education are John Dewey, Maxine Greene, Paulo Freire, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Ella Flagg Young, Granville Stanley Hall, Colonel Francis W. Parker, and William A. Wirt. Although these men and women have left quite a footprint in the field of progressive education, this field is actually the product of many theorists, educators, psychologists, and others. Although these men and women fall into the field of progressive education, their thoughts and strategies for developing the field varied greatly. They have left behind a rich legacy of many ideas and visions to use and build upon.

John Dewey's theory of constructivism is at the core of progressive education. Like progressive education, there are many facets and nuances to be discussed about the theory of constructivism. At the core of the theory though is the belief that an individual best learns when able to experience whatever they are learning about. For example, reading about whales is not the same thing as going and seeing one in person out in the wild. Science concepts such as the

water cycle, chemical reactions, and genetics are also great examples of how experiencing the concept seems to make the theory click together in a way that makes sense.

However, “the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (Dewey, 1997, p. 25). This is where the role of caregivers, teachers, and museum curators and educators comes in; they help shape the experience to make it most effective.

Museums in addition to schools using progressive pedagogy can address and include many of the components of progressive education such as Dewey’s theory of constructivism, addressing intrinsic motivation, and encouraging community, active learning, and deep understanding. Museums look to provide real, authentic experiences with objects to awaken interest, an interest that hopefully fosters more learning either at the museum or at home.

People go to museums for many different reasons because there is a wide range of experiences offered by a range of institutions. People visit because they think they will have a good time or they want to learn something. They go because they have the day off and need something to do with the kids or there’s a special event going on. They go with a group, with their family, or alone. There are not only many ways to experience a museum but also many reasons to go, both external and internal.

Museums also provide opportunities to engage different learning styles. According to Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences, there are many kinds of intelligences or knowing the world: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial-visual, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and existential. The scope of humanity has strengths in many different configurations of intelligences. Certain forms of intelligences are better served or understood in particular situations. Traditional school classrooms place increased

importance on certain intelligences like mathematical-logical and verbal-linguistic. Alternatively, museums however offer something for everyone. Visitors of all intelligence capacities can find a museum or an aspect of the museums available to them that speaks to their individual and unique intelligence capacities.

There are many intrinsic motivators for visiting museums. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson (1995) museums are prime examples of flow experiences. Flow experiences are “when goals are clear, feedback is unambiguous, challenges and skills are well matched, [and] then all of one’s mind and body become completely involved in the activity” (p.70). This flow experience has several effects: time seems to fly by, “hours pass by in what seems like minutes” and “we discover things about ourselves as well as the environment” (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 1995, p. 70). Overall, this kind of experience allows for us to “fully attend to something, [and] we connect with life and thus fulfill the basic human need for relatedness” (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 1995, p. 71).

Museums help foster these flow experiences by providing multiple components to their spaces. They follow a certain process, starting with a hook that gets the visitor interested, sparking their curiosity, which then leads to the second stage: opportunities for involvement which can be sensory, intellectual, and emotional. In order for the learner to remain intrinsically motivated after they have become involved, they must find something about what they are learning challenging or find opportunities to develop skills. If all these criteria are met in this process, the learner ends at a place of growth in their consciousness. This process or flow leads to the visitor becoming more interested overall in exploration leading to even more skill building, potentially creating an intrinsically rewarding learning cycle. This cycle does not rely

on enforcement of an external source such as an adult or teacher but is sparked and maintained by personal, internal interest.

One of the greatest strengths of museums and other cultural institutions are the opportunities for object-based learning. Museums are important because these are places “where information lost its abstractness and became concrete (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 1995, p. 67) and “offer the opportunity to interact with a real environment, one in which the objects are imbued with the blood, the tears, the sweat of their makers” (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 1995, p. 75).

Museums are also spaces for dialogue, for a sharing of multiple viewpoints and opinions. Museums provide a space where visitors create personal meaning from the objects and each of these individual meaning-making experiences are *valid*. This is not a matter of semantics of right and wrong. Rather, this is a space for possibilities. Each visitor’s experience in a museum is unique and valid. Many schools have become spaces for right and wrong answers, places for students to be passive learners by being fed information with little to no context and high expectations of understanding the information as presented.

Museums and other cultural institutions offer aesthetic experiences, the opportunity to in that moment have something that is more than just an emotional reaction, to feel something at one’s core. Maxine Greene explores aesthetic experiences in her book *Variations On A Blue Guitar* (2001) in which she defines aesthetic education as an

“intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful. When this happens, new connections are

made in experience: new patterns are formed, new vistas are opened. Persons *see* differently, resonate differently (p. 6).

Ackerman addresses this kind of aesthetic experience in *A Natural History of Love* (p. 333):

What is a natural history museum? It's a silent oasis in the noisy confusion of the world, isolating phenomena so that they can be seen undistractedly. What is being collected are not artifacts themselves but the undivided attention of the visitors.

That is a museum. It lies in the mind of the viewers. Its real holdings are the perpetuation of wonder amid a maelstrom of social and personal distractions.

"Collection" is a good word for what happens- not to them, but to you. One becomes collected for a spell, gathering up one's curiosity the way rainwater collects on the ziggurat roofs of Caribbean homes. Every museum is really a museum of one's high regard. That's why we visit them so often, even though we know the holdings by heart. It functions as a sort of pilgrimage and vigil. We go to express our love, our humility, our worship. Museums are where we store some of our favorite attitudes about life.

What truly separates museums and other cultural institutions from other places of learning such as the school and traditional classroom is that museums are spaces for informal learning. Informal learning is learning that happens on the fly, with no tests, no homework, no set regimen for what to learn and when. Informal learning is individual-centered because the individual is in control of their own learning. Those intrinsic motivators described by Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson are at the core of informal learning.

Already, research has been done to investigate the effects of informal learning in museums and other cultural institutions on both children and adults. “Arts-based curricula, because they are interactive rather than passive, help develop critical thinking skills and build the capacity to organize, recast, and use information to solve problems” (Booth, 1995, p. 8). Research has been and is continually emerging from major art players such as the Guggenheim Museum¹, the Isabella Stewart Grant Museum², Crystal Bridges Art Museum of American Art³, and the J. Paul Getty Museum⁴ as to what an arts-based curriculum looks like and the effects of such arts-based programs on students in classrooms. Other institutions such as the Smithsonian⁵ and American Museum of Natural History⁶ have also published findings on research about educational programs.

¹ Research studies: The Art of Problem Solving, Teaching Literacy Through Art, and Facilitating Creativity

² Thinking through Art: Transforming Museum Curriculum by Margaret Burchenal and Michelle Grohe

³ The Educational Value of Field Trips by Jay P. Greene, Brian Kisida, and Daniel H. Bowen

⁴ Language through Art: An ESL Enrichment Curriculum Evaluation

⁵ Early Learning Resources: Looking at Art with Toddlers, Early Learning in Museums, and Teaching with Collections

⁶ Seminars on Science Evolution, Water, and Independent Course Independent Evaluations and Museums, Zoos, and Gardens: How Formal-Informal Partnerships Can Impact Urban Students’ Performance in Science

B: Early Childhood and Museums

1. Play Builds Brains: The Experience of 4 and 5 Year Olds

For parents and students alike, preschool is a time of transition, intense growth, fear, and joy. For many children who do not attend nursery school, preschool or Pre-K is the transitional period where children first move from a space where home and their family is the center of their universe to an alternative world where school becomes another space in which to define themselves. Suddenly, their world is more than just their immediate family. They have friends and other adults who they begin to build relationships with outside of the traditional family roles.

For children who have attended nursery school for years, preschool is a time for serious consideration about their next steps. This is traditionally the last year of nursery school before children begin a more traditional and academic rigorous school experience in Kindergarten. With the beginning of Kindergarten comes a whole new set of expectations and changes: physically, emotionally, and socially.

Four and five year olds are very physical and need time to move around, especially outside. At this age, many can sit still only for brief periods and it takes much practice and perhaps some ‘fidgeting tools’ to help them learn to calm their bodies. By the time a four year old turns five, they are more likely to sit for at least 15 to 20 minutes (Wood, 1994, p. 49). Learning and curriculum for this age needs to provide extensive opportunities for movement and kinesthetic experiences because “learning goes from the hand to the head, not the other way around” (Wood, 1994, p. 33).

Children at this age need time and space to practice using their fine and gross motor skills. They may seem clumsy and spills are a regular occurrence at this age as they are still learning to gain control and awareness of their body (Wood, 1994, p. 34). They are learning how

to hold pencils- a fistful pencil grasp is typical for this age while they are starting to learn the 3-finger grasp. They are beginning to write letters, and although letters may be backward or big they are discernable and readable. Finger painting and easel work are great pre-writing activities to support developing muscles and coordination (Wood, 1994, p. 36). Other activities this age group enjoys are painting with both brushes and fingers, manipulating clay, drawing, cutting and taping, building with blocks and other various materials, sorting small items, pattern blocks, and puzzles.

During this age period, artwork moves from being abstract (what adults call scribbles) to much more representational: some examples are people, animals, and plants (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1982, p. 205). Children will also copy each other and certain archetypal images may become standard fare in a classroom. Some children at this age will narrate their artwork through sounds and stories as they work. An example would be making beeping and crashing noises as they draw a car crash.

At this age, play is their work and is essential for learning. Children are engaged in intense fantasy play. According to Paley (2005), adults can learn a significant amount about what is going on in a child's life and what they are thinking about by observing them in fantasy play. Play becomes a safe space for them to act out and explore certain situations in life that they have experienced and try multiple responses without the fear of failure or punishment. "Our fantasy characters became our confidants. We would talk and listen to them and tell their stories at will. They did not mask reality; they helped us interpret our feelings about reality" (Paley, 2005, p. 29).

Free play and fantasy play are important for developing many different kinds of skills: social-emotional, physical, and cognitive. "The mind that has been freely associating with

playful imagery is primed to tackle new ideas. Fantasy play, rather than being a distraction, helps children achieve the goal of having an open mind, whether in the service of further storytelling or in formal lessons. (Paley, 2005, p. 26). It builds elasticity of thought which is helpful in problem solving and collaborating with other.

A substantial component of fantasy play is the creation of stories. Four and five year old children are “natural-born storytellers” (Paley, 2005, p. 16). A large characteristic of this age period is the propensity to create and consume stories at an expansive speed. They love being read to and during this age they can recite well-loved stories by heart even if they are not yet literate. They are also learning and more aware of visual literacy, the reading and interpretation of images. Pictures and images are the main currency for understanding stories. The princess is always beautiful and the wicked witch always dark and ugly.

In the way so much value is assigned and accorded to stories, “whenever we are reminded that there may be a story involved, our minds seem to loosen up and work better” (Paley, 2005, p. 91). The creation, telling, and listening of stories is hard-wired into our very sense of what it means to be human. Stories allow for us to detach and look at events, a situation, or emotions from a different stance. “Through stories we learn about human culture and psychology, without the potentially staggering costs of having to gain this experience firsthand” (Gottschall, 2012, p. 28).

At this age, peers become extremely important and many children develop best friends. Children at this age still engage in parallel play but are also engaging much more in collaborative play. Play is essential in learning how to build relationships with others. Play is one of the main ways in which children share language and converse with one another (Paley, 2004, p. 70). According to Paley’s summarization of Sara Smilansky’s work on North African immigrant

children to Israel who had difficulty learning a new language, Smilansky found that the first step for these children to learn a new language was through play and that other children in the class took on the role of teacher to instruct and help these immigrant children.

Children at this age also tend to be very talkative. They are experimenting with language and explanations (Wood, 1994, p. 35). There is still some overlap between internal language/dialogue and external language/dialogue. As they work, some four and five year olds enjoy talking and singing to themselves. Often they may shout out and talk out loud without realizing they are voicing internal thoughts and opinions.

Language is also a catalyst for silliness. Bathroom talk as well as nonsense talk is often evident and results in a breakdown into laughter. However, fours and fives are getting better at regulating their actions and emotions. This self-regulation helps them in cultivating relationships with their peers and engage in collaborative play. They still need adults such as family members and teachers to model appropriate behavior (Wood, 1994, p. 37).

Overall, for most children this is a period of great joy and happiness. They are excited about learning, their friends, their family, and generally just being in the world. The successful key to being with this group is riding through some of the emotional turmoil as they learn to navigate social relationships and emotional self-regulation and rejoice in the small ways they learn.

Many lessons learned in the early years of life are integral in predicting the years to come and play is one of the main vehicles through which this learning takes place.

While grown-ups recognize that pretending helps children find their way into the world, many adults think of play as separate from formal learning. The reality is quite different. As they play, children develop vital cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional skills.

They make discoveries, build knowledge, experiment with literacy and math and learn to self-regulate and interact with others in socially appropriate ways. Play is also fun and interesting, which makes school a place where children look forward to spending their time. It is so deeply formative for children that it must be at the core of our early childhood curriculum. (Polakow-Suransky and Nager, 2014, para. 5)

Progressive education provides a great structure for learning at this age and addresses many of the characteristics of age appropriate development. Four and five year olds are still actively working to construct meaning from the world around them which object-based learning can support substantially. Objects tell stories, and stories are something this age group is deeply interested in and engage with. Children at this age are also caught up in the experience of it all and can engage in considerably more dialogue about what they are thinking about and feeling.

2. Why Progressive Preschools Should Be *In* Museums

In *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, the American Alliance of Museums charged museums with placing education at the center of their public service role (p. 5). For many museums this takes the form of public programs, while some museums have additionally created actual schools situated inside their institution.

As aforementioned, museums are imbued with the possibility of place, of progressive education, and personal growth and gratification. If museums already have so many educational programs happening and attend to so many other responsibilities and duties such as collecting, preserving, and curating, why include a preschool in the mix? It is precisely because of all of these tasks a museum makes an ideal place for a preschool.

Museum preschools cultivate these young but large appetites for learning. With changing exhibits that can include skeletons, soundscapes, birds and butterflies, dioramas or platforms for material exploration, museums place an amazing world at children's fingertips. In preschool- sized portions, young children can explore big exhibits where they might meet a nine- foot polar bear, get to know ants, or sit in a dinosaur's footprint. (Vergeront, 2011, p. 2)

Museums provide a unique learning playground for children because of its work in collecting, preserving, and curating.

The museum is an ideal places for informal learning because it plays to the intrinsic motivation at the core of loving an object. We don't always understand why we are drawn to certain things, concepts, or activities like a moth to flame, but it happens. Time and again, individuals hear the siren song during an aesthetic experience and it changes them- maybe not in a big way but there is a deviation from before.

Museums provide the setting for people to explore individual interests, something that is especially important at young ages. "Children's capabilities and strengths are apparent in settings planned with their interests at the center where they can use what they know to build more complex knowledge. Children have definite ideas of what they are interested in" (Vergeront, 2011, p. 2). Museums can help support these tendrils of interest that unfold and feed the growth, fanning the flame of interest through the exploration of unique, mysterious, and captivating objects.

There has also been research published focused on how time spent in museums better helps children develop critical thinking skills such as observing, interpreting, evaluating, associating, problem finding, comparing, and flexible looking as well as "looking to learn"

(Burchenal & Grohe, 2007, p. 118-119). Most of this research was done as facilitated programs with trained educators and with Kindergarten through 12th grade.

A lot of the advantages to informal learning are based in the fact that learning in museums is object-based. Through exploration of the objects, students learn to ask questions and “small questions build to larger and more global ones. It is the process of experiencing, hypothesizing, finding patterns, and gathering information that leads children to the hidden story of objects and to the big ideas those stories reveal” (Wing and DeBree, 2002, p. 10).

The students see themselves as part of the microcosm of the museum. They see the community of the museum and also the community with which the museum engages. They return day in and day out to a place that becomes a safe place, a second home in a manner of speaking. “We find that once children become familiar with the museum setting, their concentration increases, their ability to carry out assigned tasks increases, and their sense of comfort in the museum increases” (Hein, 1985, p. 6). Research has shown that multiple visits to a museum greatly increase the effectiveness of the trips. Imagine having access to the museum on a daily basis and the effect on a child’s experience to feel a part of the museum itself. In fact, Dewey in *The School and Society* (1900) imagined the ideal school having a museum inside it at the very center.

There are several other reasons as to why preschools should exist in museums. A preschool in a museum embodies a very welcoming invitation to the community to become a partner and cultural shareholder in the museum. By opening its doors, the museum builds a bridge to the community. “Art and culture need to be redefined not as frills or luxuries, but as essential and useful agents for invigorating and restoring character to our communities” (Booth, 1995, p. 3).

The public school system was designed to be the great equalizer of humankind. With increased educational access, social classes could more easily be climbed and freedom from social classes was placed within reach for all. Now, in reality, we know that the system is broken and in many cases it reinforces social hierarchies rather than liberates those captured within its strata. For instance, schools in lower income counties cannot compete with schools in more affluent neighborhoods that have greater access to funds for supplies, resources, and technology.

By placing more preschools within museums, I think preschools could take back some of its power to liberate rather than reinforce social confines. Museums are a third party that can broker this transaction of funding. Museums and other cultural institutions exist on multiple avenues of funding; donations, grants, endowments, admission fees, special events, memberships, and government money.

Museums can also provide a holistic experience of education for students because they provide something for everyone in regards to Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Students can also revisit certain objects over longer periods of time, building on previous knowledge and the change that comes with age.

Just as museum educators are the links aiding in bringing the museum alive for regular visitors, teachers are the critical bridges for students in their daily school lives. "With skilled facilitation and their own curiosity, teachers extend children's first-hand exploration of real stuff, intriguing objects or live animals" (Vergeront, 2011, p. 2). Imagine how deeply a student could delve into an object, a gallery, an idea with the continual return to a museum space which is in part facilitated by a teacher who knows that child intimately.

The role of the teacher is critical in nurturing young science learners. With their knowledge of child development and experience in preschool settings, teachers know

how to adapt activities to age groups and how to coach museum experts on what to expect from young children. Moment by moment, teachers find ways to extend children's exploration: a friendly question, a just-in-time tool, an unhurried moment for a cautious child to hold a snake, or recording a reflection on a child's wondering. (Vergeront, 2011, p. 2)

Not only do museums provide an ideal place for learning but they also have the potential to create a vast community of museum advocates. A museum advocate defined by Wilkening and Chung in *Life Stages of the Museum Visitor* is a regular museumgoer, but is characterized by a deep personal commitment to museums which "manifests itself in a different pattern of museum visitation and long-term commitment" (p. 33).

They also found the rate of museum advocates is greater in older generations than in younger generations (Wilkening and Chung, 2009, p.33), but for the majority of these museum advocates their deep personal commitment to museums began with "a seminal memory of museums from childhood" (Wilkening and Chung, 2009, p. 43). In fact, "in most cases, these memories are of "old-fashioned," static, object-based exhibits that created internal narrative and internal activity. They weren't viewed as structured or boring. Instead they allowed the imagination to soar" (Wilkening & Chung, 2009, p. 44).

"These kinds of museum experiences are "sticky" because those powerful early childhood experiences stick in the brains all the way to adulthood. Sticky is good" (Wilkening and Chung, 2009, p. 44). As more research is done, the more evident it becomes that experiences in the early childhood years can have a powerful formative effect on an individual's adulthood and life in general. Cool Culture, an organization based in New York City, has taken this idea to heart and provides passes to families of preschool children in order for them to visit over 90

museums and institutions because they believe in “access to arts and culture as a way to increase literacy and learning in early childhood and to prepare children to succeed in school” (“Cool Culture: About Us”, n.d.).

I am not making the case that all museums should have preschools. There are many other ways to provide good sticky experiences to young learners and old learners alike. Many museums are ill-equipped at this time to take on such a responsibility. The decision to include a preschool in the mission of a museum requires time, energy, and money among other resources. However, for those museums with access to resources this would be a grand step for their future.

III. Case Studies of Museum Preschools

I will highlight two museum preschools: the Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center at the Smithsonian Museums in Washington DC and the Art, Nature, and Me Preschool at the Stamford Museum & Nature Center in Connecticut.

These preschools were chosen according to the following criteria:

- They were housed on or near the premises of the cultural institution thus blurring the lines between classroom and museum.
- The collection and exhibits are regularly visited or used by the classes and teachers.
- The students attended their museum school for the majority of the week just like a traditional model school. There are many institutions that offer classes that only meet once or twice a week. These highlighted institutions run like a traditional preschool rather than as workshops or specialty classes.

Information was gathered through program's websites, interviews with staff members, and literature created and published by the institutions.

Case Study 1: Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center

The Smithsonian Institution is the world's largest museum and research complex consisting of 19 museums, a zoological park, and nine research facilities. The museums have collections ranging from art, natural history, and American history to technology and space. Their mission is to increase and disseminate knowledge by preserving heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing the information they have with the rest of the world.

The Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center (SEEC) comes from a long and rich legacy and they stand as a leader in this field. They have been educating young learners for 26 years and continue to adapt and change to meet the needs of families and students while remaining at the forefront of early childhood learning in museums. Their mission is twofold: to provide rich learning experiences for young learners as well as support educative initiatives globally by sharing what the SEEC does with others.

The SEEC seeks to alter the viewpoint that they are just a “daycare” and dispel the notion that children at a young age shouldn't be held to high expectations of learning. At the core of their mission is the belief that children are naturally curious learners who are capable of observing, thinking critically, problem solving, and being creative. The SEEC accomplishes this by using object-based learning, an emergent curriculum, and collaboration between the classroom and the community.

The SEEC builds its curriculum using the basic tenets of research into the curriculum because they believe children already come equipped to engage with conducting research. Children are naturally curious and ask questions. The teachers and educators help extend the children's understanding by asking questions in order to support them as they probe further into exploring the world around them. The almost daily visits to the museums and DC community the

classes take are also done in service of extending their knowledge about the curricular topic. Anything within a one-mile radius is fair game for walking visits and sometimes the classrooms will take Metro visits to places farther away.

The SEEC has a robust educational mission. They draw from theorists such as Dewey and Vygotsky and use aspects of the Reggio-Emilia approach in the design of their curriculum and structure of the program. The SEEC wants to help children to be confident, self-motivated lifelong learners. The children visit many museums and other cultural spaces because the SEEC believes that learning best happens in context. Object-based learning also plays into building critical thinking skills, visual literacy, and concrete knowledge which helps foster confident learners.

Although the SEEC's educational structure is in part inspired by the Reggio-Emilia⁷ approach, it breaks with the approach in a big way when it comes to thinking about the next steps after students leave the SEEC. Part of building the process of research in the everyday fabric of the classroom is to aid in elementary school preparedness. The SEEC wants its students to not only be confident at the SEEC but in the years of education to come. They feel charged with the responsibility to help students develop skills that they will need in the years to come as they enter schools that may or may not be progressive.

The SEEC is made up of three sites among the Smithsonian museums in Washington DC and all their facilities are located inside the institution. The three sites are located between the National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of American History. There is talk of plans to expand to have facilities in the National Zoological Park and possibly in the National

⁷ The Reggio-Emilia approach is an educational philosophy grounded in shaping the early childhood experience. It is based in the principles of believing that children are born with extraordinary potential and that the school experience should be rooted in the community. For more information visit <http://reggioalliance.org/>.

Air and Space Museum as they look to renovate their space. The SEEC enrolls over 100 students between their three sites.

All students at the SEEC regularly visit the museums and places in the community. Visits into the community include various national monuments and the Library of Congress among others. These field trips look quite different for each group as the structure is tailored to fit the developmental stage of the age of the group. The classes go on many visits in part to create multiple exposures to ideas, concepts, and objects in the world with the understanding that the idea of seeing something several times in different settings promotes flexible thinking. At the heart of a young child's learning is play that is used often during the visits as well as in the classroom.

The SEEC has many different kinds of educators: lead teachers, associate teachers, and assistant teachers. There are also museum educators who support the other services the SEEC offers as well as collaborating with the classroom teachers to assist them with curriculum development using objects in the classroom and field trips. The teachers come from a variety of backgrounds, but the majority have experience with early childhood and are certified before starting to work at SEEC.

Teachers have considerable freedom over the classroom space and are also allowed to choose the colors and any decoration for the classroom space. The school day is a full day, starting at 7:30 am for some and goes until 6 pm. The teachers and students are essentially living in the spaces for a majority of their day and teachers are encouraged to make these spaces homey and comfortable.

Teachers also have considerable freedom over curriculum as well. Because the SEEC uses an emergent curriculum approach, each classroom can chose the topic and length of

exploration for each curriculum topic. Topics are also a combination of teacher and student interests and teachers are encouraged to respond to difficult topics such as death. Teachers respond to the free play they observe in addition to informal and formal conversations in the classroom to help inform their decisions about curriculum topics.

The turnover rate for teachers at SEEC varies per year and is about ten to fifteen percent or four or five teachers at the most. Some reasons teachers leave the SEEC are to teach at other public schools with a higher salary, to go back to school, or they move from the DC area for a variety of reasons. Teachers are on a year-long contract.

Enrollment for students is open to all. The enrollment system is based on a tiered lottery so that Smithsonian employees are given priority. For many of the age groups, the lottery rarely moves to applicants from the public pool. Tuition ranges depending on the age group and the child's schedule. Rates start at \$322/week for preschoolers and extend up to \$391/week for infants. Many families do receive financial assistance in the form of tuition discounts. The SEEC also pulls from an endowment to help subsidize low-income Smithsonian employees who register their children. Teachers at SEEC also receive a discount for enrolling their child or children. Compared to other rates in Washington DC, these weekly rates are slightly below market rate. The SEEC has recently updated the system for awarding financial aid.

An appealing quality for why parents chose the SEEC over other institutions and programs is the location. The majority of students in the school come from parents who work within the Smithsonian Institution so it is a highly convenient location for the family. Many families are also drawn to the rich learning environment and recognize the consequential effect this experience can have on their children.

The SEEC is facing certain challenges at the moment including changes in federal education policies, a proposal to change the institution's financial structure, and an ever-increasing competition in the preschool field. The SEEC is looking to revise the process in which financial aid is awarded and the relationship with the Smithsonian Institution as a whole. The SEEC may also soon have to address changes for licensure requirements to remain a licensed institution. There has also been an increasing number of families who are starting to leave the SEEC when their child turns three or four in order to take advantage of the wider range of free public preschool options available in the DC area, a situation affecting private early education centers across the country as universal preschool becomes more widespread.

The SEEC does receive quite a bit of in kind support from the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian provides the space for the SEEC free of charge and provides other support in the form of security and maintenance. However, the SEEC is its own separate entity and its own 501(c)3 which comes with certain benefits, but also certain challenges. Some benefits include autonomy with many functions such as the hiring process and other decisions. Unfortunately, that means the SEEC does not have access to Smithsonian resources such as Human Resources, Smithsonian health benefits, and fundraising data.

The SEEC is governed by a 14 member board which helps to guide the policies, mission, and major decisions of the school. The board includes at least two parent members and two Smithsonian employees appointed by the Secretary of the Smithsonian. Additionally the Executive Director of the SEEC is a non-voting board member. The director of the SEEC at their meetings represents the teachers' opinions and voices.

The SEEC also provides other programs other than the classroom program. One of these is the Family Workshop, a program open to the community that support family experiences in

the museum. Led by a SEEC museum educator, parents and caregivers attend a class with their children, exploring the museums and collections while practicing critical thinking and visual literacy skills. These workshops are organized by age and are divided into three groups: infant, toddler, and preschool.

Another such program involves opportunities for professional development for educators outside the Smithsonian. The SEEC includes a Center for Innovation in Early Learning that provides professional development in many different forms: seminars and training classes on and off site, teaching kits, written materials, and customized consulting.

One project for which the SEEC is currently seeking funding is to revise the original “Museum Magic” curriculum available and make it available to the public in a digital format. The SEEC used to employ the “Museum Magic” curriculum in their classrooms before moving to a more emergent curriculum model. The “Museum Magic” curriculum includes a thematic museum-based guide to activities: one example of the monthly theme is Buildings.

Case Study 2: Art, Nature, and Me Preschool

The Stamford Museum and Nature Center boasts many benefits of having both a non-living and living collection. The SM&NC consists of 118 acres which includes 80 acres of hiking trails, a working 19th century New England farm, an otter pond, the Bendel Mansion which houses their museum galleries, an observatory, and a planetarium. The museum’s collection of approximately 25,000 objects includes many art pieces, cultural objects, and natural history objects.

The entity of Stamford Museum began in 1936 with wide support from the community to create an institution to provide a “safe and stimulating sanctuary where children and families

could learn about the natural world, the agricultural sciences, astronomy, art, and history” (“History of the SM&NC”, n.d.). Through the years it has grown to its current size and breadth, ever increasing its opportunities for the community and public at large to interact with nature and art.

Nestled within the Stamford Museum and Nature Center is a little two story building which is home to four classrooms of three and four year olds. The Art, Nature, and Me Preschool began in 1993 and started as just one room in the museum’s main building. It has since expanded, more than doubling its size in 2008 when they moved into the newly renovated building where they are currently located. They also applied and received a Childcare License when they expanded into this new space.

The preschool is divided into four classrooms: two classrooms on the ground level for the 3s classrooms, and two classrooms on the upper level for the 4s classrooms. There are two sessions: morning and afternoon. The Art, Nature, and Me preschool is currently serving 138 families; there is often a wait list. The families all come from the surrounding neighborhood. There have been initiatives to encourage families of lower socio-economic background to enroll. However, the main challenge to this initiative is location, as SM&NC is located in the more affluent section of the city in the northern section and is a trek for anyone living in the southern part of Stamford.

All of the curriculum and classrooms have a strong theme of nature and scientific concepts. The curriculum also consistently follows the changing of the seasons so that when the children look out the window and go for outdoor visits, they see and experience what they are learning in the classroom. The Art, Nature, and Me Preschool operates on the idea that anything that can be learned inside can just as easily be learned outside.

The Art, Nature, and Me Preschool wants to support children to become not only confident learners, but also stewards of the earth. Weather permitting, the preschool students go out almost every day. Time outside is a regular part of the schedule and often includes trips to the farm and the gardens. There is a trail right out back of the preschool building which the students regularly visit. Many of the classrooms have class pets and there is also a chicken that lives next to the play space in the back of the preschool building.

The Art, Nature, and Me Preschool also strongly emphasizes the relationship between home and school. Teachers send many projects done in the classroom home with the intent that they will be used at home. For example, in February several of the classes were creating bird feeders out of various materials such as milk and juice cartons as well as pinecones to be hung outside at home. Part of the Art, Nature, and Me Preschool's philosophy recognizes the importance parents have in educating their children and the need for clear and strong communication home and school.

The theorists and educators who have helped shape the educational tradition at the Art, Nature, and Me Preschool includes David Elkind, Richard Louv, Rachel Carson, and Maria Montessori. The preschool also uses the state of Connecticut's Preschool Curriculum Framework and Preschool Assessment Framework to guide them in shaping curriculum.

The director collaborates with the curator of the SM&NC to make any exhibits in the main museum building, the Bendel Mansion, developmentally friendly for the preschool classes. The preschool also receives substantial support in the form of visits from environment and naturalist educators who conduct special programming, such as bringing in live animals, and teaching on scientific concepts, reinforcing the work already being done in the classroom with the regular teachers.

The preschool finds that many families who enroll their children in the preschool also attend many of the special events at SM&NC and come back regularly after their children have grown. Just recently an Art, Nature, and Me Preschool graduate who is now a teenager came back to assist in curating the new exhibit *Dinotopia*, an exploration of the art work by James Gurney for his popular book series accompanied by fossil artifacts from SM&NC's collection.

The Art, Nature, and Me Preschool is now a large source of revenue for the Stamford Museum and Nature Center making up approximately sixteen percent of the overall revenue. With such a strong early childhood program, the SM&NC is now shifting focus on developing their elementary programs. Art, Nature, and Me Preschool does little intentional marketing, relying almost exclusively through word of mouth. The preschool is not looking to expand in the near future. An expansion would require a larger space or acquiring more space and would make it harder to foster the close knit one-on-one feeling of community between the staff and the families who are enrolled in the program.

The Art, Nature, and Me Preschool is part of the education department and is overseen by a Head of Preschool and a Director of Education. The board for the Stamford Museum and Nature Center also oversees the Art, Nature, and Me Preschool as well. Teachers meet with the Head of the Preschool on a regular basis about both small and large issues.

The turnover rate for teachers is extremely low with most teachers having been there for many years. Each classroom has three teachers for classes between ten and fifteen children. Quite a few of the teachers were parents to students at the preschool before joining the staff and all of them come with a background in education with a few having worked at museums or nature centers previously. They were drawn to the Art, Nature, and Me Preschool for many reasons: proximity, love of nature, and desire to teach in such an extensive institution.

Some challenges the Art, Nature, and Me Preschool face are a desire for longer school days and more space. It can be difficult for teachers to incorporate a trip to the Hecksher Farm when they only have a little less than three hours with their class.

Tuition for the whole school year runs between \$3,100 to \$5,900. The enrollment process begins September 1 of the year before the child would be enrolled at the preschool. Children and siblings of children who are already enrolled in the program are given priority for enrollment; new families expressing interest call or email to have their children placed on the list. Someone from the interested family must attend an information meeting in order to be accepted. A child's enrollment is also conditional on the family having a family membership to the Stamford Museum & Nature Center.

Other educational programs the SM&NC offers include school programs, summer camps, public events and programs (both indoor and outdoor), as well as preschool child with adult classes. The Stamford Museum and Nature Center sees approximately 150,000 visitors a year.

IV. Loose Parts Lab & Nursery School: My Proposed School for Tinkerers, Creators, and Thinkers

“What we want is to have the child come to school with a whole mind and a whole body, and leave school with a fuller mind and an even healthier body.” (Dewey, 1990, p. 80)

“When you step into an exemplary pre-K classroom, you see a room organized by a caring, responsive teacher who understands child development. Activity centers are stocked with materials that invite exploration, fire the imagination, require initiative and prompt collaboration. The room hums.” (Polakow-Suransky and Nager, 2014, para. 6)

These two case studies provided me with valuable insight as to important criteria for learning as well as administrative policies and the need for increasing access to all populations for these programs. Based on what I have learned through the case studies, a reading of appropriate theorists, and my own values, I am proposing a museum preschool which pushes even further into encouraging students’ intellectual skills and sense of being in the world.

My own proposal for a museum preschool, the Loose Parts Lab & Nursery School, will operate on the belief that children are natural tinkerers, scientists, and artists. The school will utilize on the greatest possible interdisciplinary approach employing an emergent curriculum approach. Most importantly, the labels of tinkerer, scientist, and artist are viewed not compartmentalized but as flowing from one into one another.

The educational theories to be primarily employed in aiding the structure of the school would be Reggio Emilia, Vygotsky, Gardener, and Dewey. The school also employs many of the structures and strategies demonstrated by both the Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center and the

Stamford Museum and Nature Center such as physical space layout, curriculum development, purpose of field trips, and sustainable business models for enrollment.

The mission of the Loose Parts Lab & Nursery School is to educate the whole child (mind, body, and soul) by creating a space where learning is fostered through the exploration of objects and materials. At the core of the school philosophy is object-based learning. All three lenses (scientists, artists, and tinkerers) employ objects to achieve learning and foster growth.

Following Dewey's own words, the school looks to have students "leave school with a fuller mind and an even healthier body." Therefore the school will design the curriculum, the classroom structure, and the school community to support the whole child- body, mind, and soul. To do so, ample opportunities will be provided and facilitated for children to use their body, use their mind, build relationships, and think introspectively about their experiences.

Borrowing from the Reggio-Emilia approach, the school will employ more natural objects that are objects not heavily processed and closely resembling if not in fact from the natural world. Students will have access to 'loose parts' both inside and outside of the classroom. Loose parts are exactly what they sound like: extra bits and pieces that can be used to create, explore, and experiment. Scientists, artists, and tinkerers all need loose parts, pieces that don't necessarily come with instructions in order to explore, create, and experiment. The majority of the work is student-directed with the teacher acting more as a resource as facilitator.

Teachers will document the children's work using multiple methods such as photographs, videos, displays of students' work, student quotes, and dictation of stories that is a very significant part of the Reggio-Emilia approach. Student work will be displayed around the classroom. The Loose Parts Lab & Nursery School will also borrow the idea of a "work book" in which student work is collected in a binder that the student has access to at all times. At the end

of the year the book goes home with the student with a compilation of years worth of work done at the school.

Documentation of this kind allows for other adults such as parents and caregivers to see the process behind the students' work as well as aiding students to think more deeply about their and others' work. Documentation extends the learning and makes it visible (Seitz, 2008, p. 91). Evidence of documentation in and of itself is a form of object-based learning, where students and teachers both learn by looking and observing the work of others.

Part of the tinkerer, scientist, and artist approach is encouraging children to explore different strategies as they explore and create. The Loose Parts Lab wants to help learners become confident as they understand their own strengths and weaknesses, but also by stretching themselves into more flexible thinkers. Students will be encouraged to try various ways of interacting and thinking about the world around them. Time will be structured for free play and work, but also for more structured activities where different modes of thinking and tinkering will be modeled by teachers and other students.

The Loose Parts Lab & Nursery School will also employ some aspects of Quaker practice in its curriculum and overall school structure as part of the outreach to support the growth of the student's soul or spirit. This is not in fact an attempt to indoctrinate children into a specific religion, but rather using the Quaker concepts of silence, truth, and service to help build a stronger school community.

In Quaker tradition, groups spend silent time with one another. Silence can be shared in a group at the beginning when all parties come together as a way to center everyone. Moments of silence are also engaged when people disagree during a discussion. This is meant as a way for the parties engaged to pause, breathe, and come back to the discussion from a peaceful place. It

is not so much the act of being silent but “a vast pool always available to us where we can refresh and renew ourselves” and to listen to “the voice that speaks to us out of the silence” (Smith, 1998, p. 14, 15).

Part of nurturing the child’s soul includes empowering the student to feel confident in his or her ability to be a learner and to be independent. The school will encourage independence through class jobs and other strategies. One of these strategies will be the idea of using classmates as a resource to help solve a problem rather than always turning to a teacher or adult.

Another central feature will be the role of natural spaces in the overall experience of the students, teachers, and all other staff. As natural scientists, children need ample time to explore and experiment out in the natural world as well as in the classroom. Borrowing from the Art, Nature, and Me Preschool, teachers should build curriculum around the idea that anything taught inside can also be taught outside.

We want to cultivate loving relationships between students and their families and the staff of the Loose Parts Lab & Nursery School. Parents and families are invited to be a major part of the school. Life at home is just as important as life at school and by creating a bridge between the two in which communication flows, a child’s best interests are served.

Inviting families into the school and building strong relationships is not only important for the school community but for the museum community as whole. The museum has become a familiar place, associated with the warm feelings of love, joy, and happy reception the school has embodied and shown to the families through the education of their children.

Another important aspect that will contribute to creating a supported and collaborative space is effective training for teachers. Part of this includes developing strong relationships between the different departments of the museums and especially between the curators and the

teachers/educators. Teachers should feel just as comfortable in the museum as curators do. It is also extremely important that everyone in the museum feels just as responsible in supporting the preschool.

Training for the teachers will thus include some more unconventional methods. Teachers of the school will meet regularly with museum educators and curators. Professional development workshops for the staff will look at education theory, practical strategies for both museum and classroom settings, and include time for staff to be tinkerers, artists, and scientists as well.

Thanks to rapid development of the internet and technology there are a plethora of ways to access information. The Loose Parts Lab & Nursery School will take advantage of that for professional development of staff as well as giving back to the educational community at large. There are many educational courses offered online for free through multiple platforms. Museums also have been moving into the field of technology by developing apps and digitizing their collections making it much easier to access information,

The Loose Parts Lab & Nursery School will also give back to the education and museum community by conducting research which will be shared. Evaluation, research, and reflection need to be part of the key tenets in the institution's structure for an institution to retain healthy relationships within and without its walls. The school and museum gain so much when the individuals who work and enjoy its space reflect on what is working and what is not working and then look for solutions. Growth cannot be sustained if one does not understand the process of the growth.

From the case studies, both the Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center and the Art, Nature, and Me Preschool are licensed and therefore have to hire teachers who are certified. This can be a lengthy and expensive process to be certified. Ideally, teachers for the Loose Parts Lab

& Nursery School would not necessarily need to come from an early childhood background. Many times, in my own experience, I have seen others passed over for jobs because their nontraditional career paths did not align with the desired official experience. There are many amazing museum educators who have experience working with young children, but who also feel confident using the museum as their classroom making them an ideal teacher for this endeavor.

There is a wide breadth of cultural institutions represented in the list of schools I have discovered and compiled into a list (see appendix). I would ideally situate my museum preschool in a natural space such as a nature center and botanic garden or in a history museum or historic site. I believe both of these types of sites (one focused on the natural world and one on interpreting history) would gain by expanding in this direction.

One challenge to anticipate is how to accurately address the needs of the community as well as how to get the community to invest in the school. If the community is more affluent then the school needs to counter with actively seeking to provide greater opportunities for a larger public audience. Not all museum schools chose to pursue such avenues, but since this proposed institution is built on the idea of creating social justice change, this will be essential to its mission.

The funding streams needed to support the Loose Parts Lab & Nursery School would rely heavily on the institution in which it would be established. Ideally it would be able to stand on its own through tuition without significant aid from the institution. However, that is not always possible and depends on many factors such as physical facilities, the location, and standard of living of the area among others. The school would have to develop new strategies to ensure equal access that includes issues related to income, race, and geographical location.

By visiting the museum regularly, the students also come to see the space as one of joyful learning and inclusiveness. The museum becomes a resource for the school, the school has the potential to become a source of funding for the museum, and museums move into the future expressly showing why museums are still relevant in this day and age. The Loose Parts Lab & Nursery School will help its community access the magic of museums.

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VI. Appendix

A.) List of Other Schools in Museums

Other preschools and early childhood learning programs in museums include:

- Museum School at the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History (Fort Worth, Texas, USA)
- The Hundred Acre School at Heritage Museums and Gardens (Sandwich, Massachusetts, USA)
- Not-A-School Creative Enrichment Program at the Bay Area Discovery Museum (Sausalito, California, USA)
- Great Explorations Preschool at the Houghton-Wagman Children's Museum (St. Petersburg, Florida, USA)
- Woodbury School at The Strong, National Museum of Play (Rochester, New York, USA)
- Preschool at the Indianapolis Children's Museum (Indianapolis, Indiana, USA)
- Preschool Powered By Play at the Children's Museum of Tacoma (Tacoma, Washington, USA)
- Imagine Nation Preschool Learning Center at Imagine Nation Museum (Bristol, Connecticut, USA)
- Preschool at the Hands On Children's Museum (Olympia, Washington, USA)
- Early Childhood Institute at Miami Children's Museum (Miami, Florida, USA)
- Preschool at Gilbert House Children's Museum (Salem, Oregon, USA)
- Balch Nature School at Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium (St. Johnsbury, Vermont, USA)
- Opal Beginning School at Portland Children's Museum (Portland, Oregon, USA)

- Rochester Museum and Science Center Preschool at Rochester Museum and Science Center (Rochester, NY, USA)
- John Michael Kohler Art Center Preschool at John Michael Kohler Arts Center (Sheboygan, Wisconsin, USA)
- The Children's Museum Preschool at the New Children's Museum (West Hartford, Connecticut, USA)
- Discovery Kids Preschool at the Discovery Center of the Southern Tier (Birmingham, New York, USA)
- Preschool Alternative at the Family Museum (Bettendorf, Iowa, USA)
- SCI Preschool at the Science Center of Iowa (Des Moines, Iowa, USA)
- Eureka! Nursery at Eureka! The National Children's Museum (Halifax, West Yorkshire, United Kingdom)
- Sugar Hill Early Childhood Center at Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling (New York, New York, USA)
- Young Naturalist Preschool Program at Hudson Highlands Nature Museum (Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York, USA)
- New Canaan Nature Center Preschool at New Canaan Nature Center (New Canaan, Connecticut, USA)
- Friends of Rye Nature Center's Preschool Ecology/Extended Day Program at Rye Nature Center (Rye, New York, USA)
- Nature Preschool at The Schuylkill Center (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA)
- Nature's Way Preschool at Kalamazoo Nature Center (Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA)
- Dodge Nature Preschool (West St. Paul, Minnesota, USA)

Other schools in museums include:

- Henry Ford Academy at the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village (Dearborn, Michigan, USA)
- Opal School at Portland Children's Museum (Portland, Oregon, USA)
- The Cathedral School at St. John the Divine Cathedral (New York, New York, USA)

B.) Permission From Institutions

Hello Ellen,

I hope you are doing well and that everyone is enjoying the spring weather!

I have just heard from my thesis advisor that I need written permission acknowledging the use of the SM&NC name as part of my thesis for Bank Street. I just need a very simple acknowledgement in an email, nothing fancy.

My advisor would like the written acknowledgment about inclusion of the SM&NC's name to be sent to me by Friday. Please let me know if this will be a problem!

Thank you so much,

Charissa

Charissa,

You have permission to use the name of the Stamford Museum & Nature Center in reference to the research you did here as part of your thesis for Bank Street.

Best regards,
Robin

Robin A. Wexler
Director, Marketing & Media Relations



39 Scofieldtown Road
Stamford, CT 06903
Tel: [203-977-6538](tel:203-977-6538)
www.stamfordmuseum.org

Hi Kim,

I hope you are doing well and that things have settled back down now that spring break is done and over!

I have just heard from my thesis advisor that I need written permission acknowledging the use of the SEEC name as part of my thesis for Bank Street. I just need a very simple acknowledgement in an email, nothing fancy.

I've also attached the section from the thesis about the SEEC. Because I mention the challenges facing the SEEC such as licensure changes, shift in leadership, the lottery system, and funding, my thesis advisor would appreciate it if you would look over the attached case study and decide whether it is okay for me to include that information in my thesis. If not, I will remove the information.

My advisor would like the written acknowledgment about inclusion of the SEEC's name and the green light on what information to include to be sent to me by Friday. Please let me know if this will be a problem!

Thank you so much,

Charissa

Smithsonian Museum SEEC Program

Charissa,

I have made some small changes to the SEEC section using track changes and attached it here. Nothing major, just little details! It looks great and you have my permission to use this in your thesis! I would love to read the whole thing when you are done---would love to read about your ideas for a school!

Kim

Kimberlee Kiehl
Executive Director, SEEC