

Abstract Title Page

Title:

A Collaborative Inquiry into Museum and Library Early Learning Services

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Abstract Body

Background / Context:

As states, cities, and communities take a more active role in ensuring that all children have access to high quality experiences and opportunities to learn, many are looking to museums and libraries as part of the early childhood education system. Museums and libraries can play a critical role in these efforts, and there is clear momentum and infrastructure already in place to help make this happen. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and City of Philadelphia have begun a new initiative to engage and coordinate with museums and libraries to provide early learning services. In support of this new effort, an inquiry process was established for collecting, organizing, and communicating evidence on the availability and accessibility of early childhood programming in museums and libraries. This paper presents details of the inquiry along with findings that have already been presented to local leaders in Philadelphia, and are now being used to plan and expand services for young children.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

This study was an empirical investigation designed to generate preliminary objective evidence to inform policymakers and the public about available services for young children, and the factors that influence families' decisions of whether or not to utilize available programs. The study answers the following research questions:

1. To what extent are there programs for young children in Philadelphia's museums and libraries? What is the nature and type of the programming that currently exists?
2. What barriers do museums and libraries face in designing and implementing more programming for young children?
3. What partnerships and other resources exist within the city that might be used to leverage support for more museums and libraries to offer programming for young children?
4. What are the experiences of families in under resourced neighborhoods in accessing programming for young children in museums and libraries?

The goal of this inquiry is to inform ongoing learning about the types of services and programming that are desired, and how to effectively support organizations that want to engage in this work. During the first of two phases of the project, researchers searched for available data on early childhood programming in libraries and museums and developed instrumentation including surveys, interview protocols, and observation protocols. The second phase of the work focused on collecting data in selected communities, and synthesizing results.

Setting:

This inquiry has a particular focus on Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and several neighborhoods within Philadelphia. One objective is to understand not only *what* but also *where* museum and library services for young children are offered. A prevalent theme of research on access to early learning services is that location matters. Families participate in neighborhood programs, and limited availability of nearby services can be a barrier to access. To investigate this, researchers created state, city and neighborhood maps which depict the location of museums

and libraries on maps of child populations, overall and for salient subgroups. Appendix B shows one example of the types of maps created for state and local stakeholders.

Philadelphia is home to an impressive group of cultural institutions and museums, and takes great pride in its libraries and rare and historic organizations. Notwithstanding these premier institutions, there is evidence of persistent disparities in the availability, quality, and equity of services for young children in museums and libraries. Public libraries located in lower-income neighborhoods typically have less funding and offer fewer services, and library closings in high-poverty neighborhoods occur at a higher rate than in more advantaged areas. Philadelphia specifically, represents an excellent setting to further explore opportunities for libraries and museums to provide an expanded array of services and programming for young children and their families.

Population / Participants / Subjects:

Participants in this inquiry included state and city leaders, museum and library directors, museum and library staff, community leaders, and families in three designated Philadelphia neighborhoods. Findings have been presented to multiple local stakeholders groups to discuss intentional strategies for engaging museums and libraries.

Intervention / Program / Practice:

No intervention was implemented by researchers.

Research Design:

This descriptive study employed mixed methods, including secondary data analysis, interviews, surveys, and focus groups. Independent researchers at the University of Pennsylvania were brought in as partners in a collaborative research program to support efforts of local policy makers and practitioners.

Data Collection and Analysis:

The inquiry included a data discovery process focused on identifying relevant existing data. Several data sets were gathered from public and private sources. For libraries, the most accessible and useful data are contained within the Public Library Survey (PLS), a voluntary survey conducted annually by the IMLS. These files include directory information and fiscal information about the staff, operating revenue and expenditures, but not information about the types or programs for young children offered, nor details about young children in attendance. The Free Library System of Philadelphia collects some local information on library preschool services including the number of programs for young children and number in attendance. While this does narrow the scope to young children, it is still limited in utility for planning in that it does not include the content of the programs.

Although not publically available, the Cultural Data Project (CDP) collects and shares similar data for arts and cultural organizations. This data, available for a fee, collects detailed information about the staffing, operational revenue and expenses of organizations, with little detail on programs for young children. Through the process of data discovery, researchers identified several annual data collection efforts at the local, state, and national level, however analysis revealed the information was a) not specific to early childhood programming; b) disparate and not easily combined for analysis; and c) underutilized by decision makers.

Interviews were conducted with museum and library administrators across the city to gain understandings about the general context of museum and library early childhood services and programs. Interviews were guided by a protocol designed to understand the types of programs offered, the personnel employed to design and implement programs for young children, and the partnerships that museums and libraries were engaged in regarding early childhood programming. A total of five interviews were conducted: four with program administrators in three of the city's most well-known museums for children, and one with an administrator in the free library system who oversees programs for children. All interviews were transcribed and coded in Dedoose™, an online qualitative data management and analysis package.

An open-link, online survey designed to collect information from museums and libraries about programming for young children was administered using Qualtrics™, an on-line survey development tool. The survey consisted of both multiple fixed-choice and open-ended questions regarding the types of programming offered for young and school-aged children, the barriers to offering more programming for young children, as well as the partnerships and other resources accessed to inform the development and implementation of programs for young children. The survey was completed by 82 organizations; of which half was individual library branches in the city and the other half were museums. The sample of respondents represents 78% of public libraries in Philadelphia; the response rate for museums cannot be calculated easily because the full population is difficult to define. Results are presented in Appendix B for fixed-choice survey items in percentages separately for museums and libraries. Open-text survey responses were summarized based on inductive derived categories (not included in this abstract).

Finally, a set of focus groups was convened in three different under-resourced neighborhoods across the city to talk with parents of young children around issues of accessibility to museums and libraries. A total of 40 parents or caregivers participated in the focus groups. The focus groups were guided by a protocol designed to talk with families about the extent to which they went attended any programming for young children in museums or libraries, the barriers they encountered or perceived in bringing their young children to these places, and how museums and libraries might better accommodate families with young children. The focus groups were all audio recorded and then listened to by the research team. While listening to the recordings, notes were taken and organized by the questions of the protocols. Additional ideas and themes unrelated to the protocol questions were also recorded in the notes. The notes were then analyzed and summarized into a memo for the purpose of integrating identified themes with interview and survey data

Findings / Results:

The findings related to the four main research questions are summarized below:

Nearly all *libraries* reported that working with young children was part of their organization's mission, while less than half of *museums* said the same. Libraries most often mentioned story-time as their main programming, while museums that did offer early learning services mentioned a range of activities including adapting current exhibits, offering summer programs, and hosting special annual events. Overall, the two most common activities cited were story-time and crafts, followed by play spaces and movement activities.

Museums that did not offer programs for young children and their families cited several barriers, many related to inadequate resources. More specifically, museums mentioned lack of funding for both programming and staffing as a major barrier. Additionally, lack of knowledge and experience with developing and implementing early childhood programming and the perception that the museum's content focus was inappropriate for young children were also listed by museum administrators as barriers to providing more programming for young children.

Interview and survey data indicated a limited number of partnership activities within the city to support providing early learning opportunities. Although few partnerships were reported, the organizations involved found them to be important for providing services through information (i.e. sharing of program content, advice on serving children and families with special needs, and advice on how to access resources) and implementation (i.e. shared use of facilities, professional development opportunities). Most survey respondents asked to receive information about forging new partnerships in this area.

Overall, parents had more experiences in libraries than in museums, but many expressed a desire to be able to attend museums more often with their young children. Focus group participants shared positive experiences of taking their young children to the library to exchange books, but spoke much less frequently about attending specific programming in the library. Some caregivers also felt that their local library branch was out-of-date and generally unwelcoming. Conversely, focus group respondents had positive perceptions of museums, but they faced many obstacles in accessing these places including, money, time, and transportation.

Conclusions:

Several takeaways were identified through the data discovery process related to the availability and quality of information about early childhood programming in museums and libraries. First, there is a general lack of data related to the availability and accessibility of early childhood programming in libraries and museums. Second, museums and libraries lack coherence and consistency in their operating procedures and management capacities. Finally, considering the current lack of data and a lack of infrastructure to collect consistent data across sectors, there will also be challenges for effective data use in local and state decision-making. Implications of each are discussed, with recommendations for improving availability and access of information.

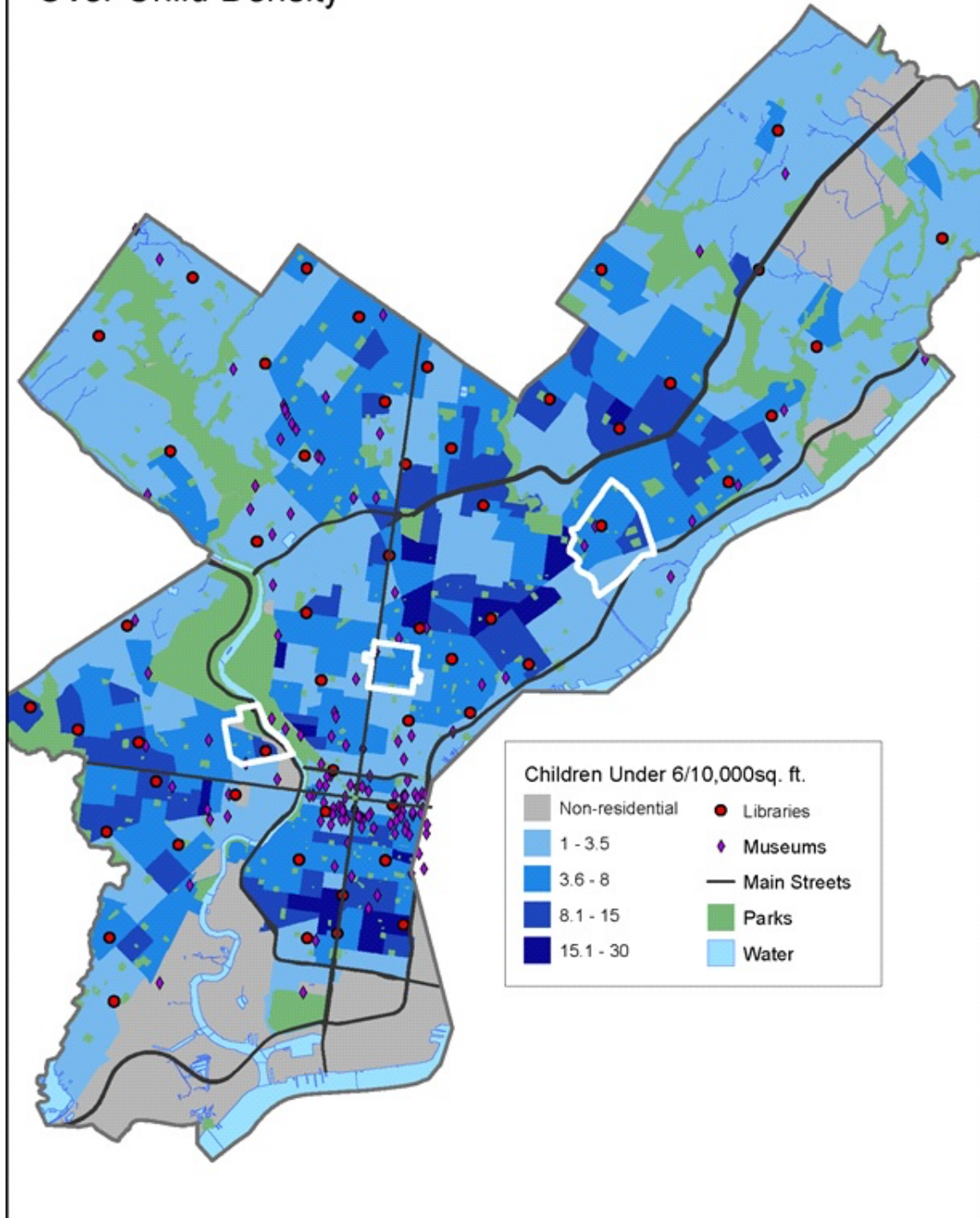
Appendix B.

Fixed-Choice Survey Item Responses

	Libraries	Museum
Respondents	45	39
<i>Response Rate</i>	85%	N/A
<i>Programming for young children (birth to age five) and their families</i>		
Is working with young children part of your organization's mission?	100%	44%
Does your organization consider this a core service?	98%	26%
In the past 12 months, has your organization offered any programming?*	98%	56%
*If yes, how often do you offer programming for young children?		
Less than Once a Month	4%	41%
Once a Month	2%	9%
2-3 Times a Month	17%	5%
Once a Week	33%	14%
2-3 Times a Week	36%	9%
Daily	7%	23%
Do you plan on offering programming for young children in the future?	96%	59%
<i>Programming for early elementary children (Kindergarten to Grade 3)</i>		
Is working with early elementary part of your organization's mission?	100%	62%
In the past 12 months, has your organization offered any programming?***	100%	74%
**If yes, how often do you offer programming for elementary children?		
Less than Once a Month	4%	26%
Once a Month	7%	7%
2-3 Times a Month	11%	7%
Once a Week	18%	11%
2-3 Times a Week	24%	15%
Daily	36%	33%
Please check any/all of the following key learning areas that have been addressed by your organization's programming for young children.		
Approaches to Learning through Play	77%	48%
Language and Literacy Development	82%	31%
Mathematical Thinking and Expression	23%	14%
Scientific Thinking and Technology	73%	28%
Social Studies Thinking	34%	48%
Creative Thinking and Expression	73%	5%
Health, Wellness, and Physical Development	36%	17%
Social and Emotional Development	41%	34%

	Libraries	Museum
Partnerships		
Do you receive information from other organizations about designing and/or providing services for young children (birth to age five)?*	50%	19%
*If so, please rate the usefulness of the information that you have received.		
Not at all useful	9%	0%
Somewhat useful	55%	71%
Very Useful	36%	29%
Are you in partnership with others to actively plan and/or implement services for young children (birth to age five) and their families?*	61%	21%
**If so, please rate the importance for your ability to provide those services.		
Not at all Important	7%	0%
Somewhat important	37%	25%
Very Important	56%	75%
Does your organization work in any way with hospitals, clinics, or health centers regarding services for young children and their families?	22%	3%
Does your organization interact with the Pennsylvania Department of Education in any way that informs your early childhood programming?	41%	21%
Staff		
Is there dedicated staff within your organization with responsibility for planning and/or implementing services for young children?	98%	37%
*If yes, is working with young children her/their primary responsibility?	76%	21%
Data Use		
How often does your organization collect and review data to assess the needs of young children and families in your community?		
Never	26%	62%
Less than Once a Month	28%	32%
Once a Month	28%	3%
Daily or Weekly	18%	3%
How often does your organization collect and review data related to young children (birth to age five) and families that attend your programs?		
Never	14%	59%
Less than Once a Month	2%	24%
Once a Month	55%	12%
Daily or Weekly	29%	6%

Philadelphia Libraries & Museums Over Child Density



Philadelphia Libraries & Museums Over Poverty

