

INTRODUCTION

“How is education made more accessible for visitors with Autism Spectrum Disorders through the museum experience?”

The museum is a place that is welcoming to all people. Working in the museum through various situations has given me much insight on the way that informal education has a way of making learn easier and enjoyable to everyone, but specifically people with disabilities.

I have found that many children that visit the museum that have Autism Spectrum Disorder(ASD) find the things they learn within the museum to be more understandable and retainable.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over a summer, I interned at the Cade Museum in Gainesville Florida to learn about Informal STEM Education. One of my favorite parts about the whole museum environment was watching as guests of all types came with the exact same feeling of excitement. A big part of this internship consisted of working with Summer Camp kids, specifically, a student with ASD that I was a “personal scientist” towards. Watching all the efforts the museum staff put into making the museum an environment for all and creating activities that allowed for variety in participation and social interaction was inspiring. Using two learning theories, I conducted research during my internship:



Behaviorism

Focus on the idea that through interaction with the environment are all behaviors learned.

Social Constructivism

Focus on learning as part of a community, considering how people interact with the culture, society and each other.

For example, a student can thrive or crumble in an academic environment based on the support that they feel from the educators around them and the environment itself as it is presented for them to grow within.

WHAT IS ASD?

MEMORY

Quick at memorizing along with great long-term memory and recall

PERFECTION

Careful to be precise, detail oriented, there is thoroughness and accuracy

PROBLEM SOLVING

Capable of finding alternate solutions and offering a fresh sense of wonder

CONCENTRATION

When motivated can be free of distractions, spending hours on certain tasks

SOCIAL SKILLS

May struggle in social situations, especially when trying to fit in with the crowd

RESILIENCE

Have strong determination specially to challenging opinions

CREATIVITY

Unique imagination and expression of ideas

DEPENDABILITY

Tend to be honest, loyal, and punctual, love to keep consistency



According to the National Institute of Mental Health, ASD is a neurological and developmental disorder that influences the way people interact with others, communicate, learn and behave. It offers a different way to view the world and process it all in, having a neurodivergent mind. Every person is different and on varying levels within the spectrum.

LITERARY ANALYSIS



How willing are you to have your child(ren) participate in Museum activities?
How important is it to have your child(ren) participate in Museum activities?
How difficult is it to have your child(ren) participate in Museum activities?
How much fun is it to have your child(ren) participate in Museum activities?
How do you feel when your child participates in Museum activities? (see Table 2 for emotion list)
The [Museum] provides a sense of belonging or community for my child.

Art is an outlet for my child.
The [Museum] has activities that fit my child's schedule.
I worry what people at the [Museum] think about my child.
My child is interested in learning about art.
I want my child to learn about art.
People at the [Museum] are accepting of my child.
The activities at the [Museum] fit my child's needs.

Anonymous Survey After Visit

Quasi Experimental

Impact on child in the way they learn

The results from this research lead to the understanding that the museum environment has been effective in educating children with autism for the most part the responses of the parents of these children. In addition, through this, the educators and staff within the museum were also able to view what changes could be made to further accessibility for the needs of these visitors as well as what methods that are already set in place are working.

Museum participation questionnaire emotion list:



METHODS

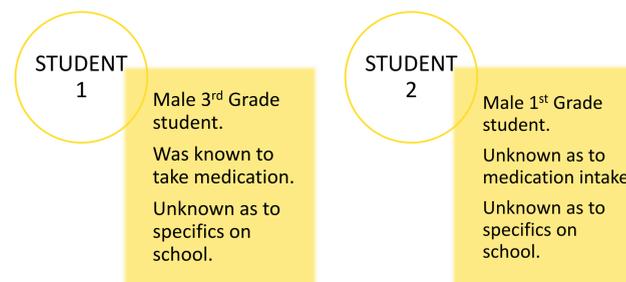
Observational Qualitative

Data was gathered through observation of students diagnosed with ASD and their experiences exploring the museum and throughout the summer camp.

1st -3rd Grade Camp

Only ASD students within the age group between 5-9 were observed, there were others of higher age groups, but participants were only in this demographic.

PARTICIPANTS



RESULTS

Hands to Help

Along with a lead for the camp, there are assistant camp counselors, volunteers and interns to keep an eye out as well as stay with students to help one on one.

Social Interaction

Activities have a variety in levels of Social interactions, with some that are as a class, small groups, individual or between educators. Activities can also be easily accommodating for different students.

Focus and Difficulty of Activities

Activities for camps and around the museum are created for different age groups and difficulty levels, yet all that can still be achieved for anyone with assistance and focus.

Calming Down

There is ample space for students to take a breather or break if they get frustrated with anything, especially without having it be a big deal to the rest of the class or museum guests.

Within the museum itself, these students are seen interacting with many of the sensory activities that are presented. This can go in different ways though with some activities like “Galaxy Slime” being distressing at first due to the initial texture but then also being exciting and fun once it has become slime and even put into a plastic baggie to feel around.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATION & CONCLUSION

Creating an environment that the student feels is welcoming and engaging is key to helping education. Allowing for extra assistance and space as well as creating activates that stimulate minds and social interactions in a voluntary manner provide the best outcome.

Additionally, from the museum setting some things that can be transferred to formal classroom settings include being aware of sensory activities and how some may be extremely helpful while others can be somewhat alarming for others.

The museum environment has proven to be one that fosters education among a variety of learners. Many with ASD and parents of children with ASD agree that the informal setting provides a fun but educational experience.

“For us as parents, it provides a sense of community with other children and parents. For my son, it provides a chance to have him interact outside of his normal boundaries, and it challenges him in a safe environment to overcome his social and sensory obstacles.”

- Parent of ASD Child

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