Development of a Sensory Day at a Children’s Museum
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OVERVIEW OF CAPSTONE SITE
Overview of Capstone Site: The Mississippi Children’s Museum (MCM), located in Jackson, Mississippi, provides children’s education via interactive exhibits, activities, and programs focusing on “literacy; health and nutrition; the cultural arts; science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); and Mississippi heritage. MCM is a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organization.

Mission: To create unparalleled experiences to inspire excellence and a lifelong joy of learning.

Vision: To inspire Mississippi’s children from all backgrounds to discover and achieve their potential.

LITERATURE SUMMARY
Importance of Play: With and Without Special Needs
• Physical, Cognitive, and Social Development
• Problem solving, Creativity, Concentration and Organization
• Catharsis and integration of stressful experiences (Sturgess, 2003)

Children’s Museums:
• Effective means for children without special needs to learn through play
  • Social Participation
  • Play is seen as an occupation

Gap in the Literature:
• Limited information on atypically developing children learning through play in a children’s museum environment
• Sensory and Social issues are barriers to participation (Graham et al., 2019)
• Participation looks different for children with special needs (Graham et al., 2019)

NEEDS ASSESSMENT
Interview with Monique Ealey, Capstone Mentor and Director of Education and Programs
• “My vision is that we will expand our reach and ensure we are inspiring this joy for learning in children from all walks of life and meeting the needs of all children and families.”
• Stated that she has wanted some form of sensory sensitive program at the museum for years

The Capstone Advisor, Peter Giroux, was notified and approved of the project idea.

PROJECT DEPLOYMENT
Sensory Map:
• Divides Museum into 5 Galleries (5 total maps)
• Picture and brief description of each exhibit
• Ranks the sensory intensity experienced at each exhibit as low, medium, or high
• Helps parents/caregivers to decide how to explore the museum
• Available for all guests at front desk as well as on MCM website

Social Story:
• Every other page of the Sensory Map is a Social Story
• Teach an appropriate behavior for a social situation
• Increase the child’s understanding of the situation through first person, goal focused narrative and pictures

Why include Social Stories:
• Sensory difficulties act as a barrier to social participation
• This population may have had less social interaction

PROJECT GOALS / OBJECTIVES

PROJECT SUMMARY AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The sensory system is perhaps the most important factor in how people interact with the world around them, yet it is largely an automatic process and easily overlooked. This means that sensory difficulties can act as major barriers to participation and, therefore, social interaction. The primary goal of Sensory Day is to allow children with these difficulties the opportunity to engage in developmentally appropriate play and social interaction at MCM.

In the future, this program could be adopted by other children’s museums or any organization that wishes to improve accessibility beyond physical barriers.