

**Defining the Chaperone's Role as Escort, Educator or Parent**

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**Abstract**

The concept of family learning in museums emphasizes the interaction between related adults and children through the process of free-choice learning. The complexity of family learning in the context of school visits presents new questions for museum staff on the role of chaperones and the extent to which chaperone-led groups might function as family units. Do chaperones operate as escort, educator or parent on a museum field trip? This article provides a brief overview of existing field trip and chaperone research findings, raises some critical questions on the role of parents as chaperones, and describes the results from a study on chaperone behavior in the museum. Results from observations of 289 chaperones in a children's museum setting suggest that chaperones overall have lower participation in preferred family learning interactions with students in museum exhibitions.

**Keywords:** chaperones, field trips, family learning, museum learning

**Introduction**

The concept of family learning in museums emphasizes the interaction between adults and children through the process of free-choice learning. The role of the family in museum visits is taking on greater attention for museum staffs from the development of exhibitions to programs and outreach. The focus on families as major audiences is critical to the success of museums, and at the same time presents challenging perspectives for other aspects of museum operations. For museum staffs who work with school programs this directional shift can create a dilemma. At one particular children's museum, a mission-driven family learning initiative did not preclude schools from visiting, but forced the school programs staff to begin thinking about the function of family learning within school visits to the museum. These new principles of family learning being adopted across the institution stimulated discussion and curiosity on the role of adult chaperones—who are most often parents and grandparents—in the overall conception of school visits. Some of the main questions raised by school program staff were: How might a school group behave like a family in an exhibition? How do group chaperones function like parents on a non-school visit? What role can the museum play in supporting family learning for school visits? These questions provided the

basis for the present investigation to identify features of family learning in relation to school visits, and chaperones in particular.

The complexity of the chaperone's role within the context of a museum school visit and within a family learning framework opens new questions and avenues for further research and consideration by museum staff. Despite the fact that parents fulfill chaperone duties, museum staff, teachers, and even parents themselves seem to overlook the relational bond and meaningful learning support that parents generally have on when not on a school visit.

After a brief overview of existing field trip and chaperone research findings, this article raises some critical questions on the role chaperones and whether they function similarly to parents on a non-school visit, and describes the results from a study on chaperone behavior in the museum.

#### *Chaperone and Field Trip Research*

The last thirty years of research on field trips reveals a wide range of data on the structure, goals, and formats of successful museum visits (Griffin & Symington, 1997; Price & Hein, 1991; Storksdieck, 2005), and the effects of museum visits on experience and knowledge of students (Falk, 1992). Studies on chaperones, however, are noticeably absent from much of this literature. Traditional research in museum field trips has generally focused on the nature of student cognitive gains, attempting to demonstrate that learning is actually happening through field trip content (Falk & Balling, 1982; Falk & Dierking, 1992, 2002; Falk, Moussouri, & Coulson, 1998). Findings here demonstrate that teachers clearly value the educational opportunities associated with field trips and make links between visits and their curricula, as well as conduct follow-up activities to enhance the overall experience (Storksdieck, Kaul & Werner, 2005; Anderson & Zouchen, 2003). More recently researchers turned to the role of the chaperone (Burtnyk, 2005; Parsons & Breise, 2000; Parsons & Muhs, 1995; Sedzielarz, 2002), though most of this work emphasizes the task of chaperones in generating cognitive gains or other student-focused outcomes.

On the whole, the research base and resulting practical implications have been beneficial to museums and teachers to make the case on the value and benefit of a museum visit. From this research, we know that adults have a powerful impact on a student's museum visit, often controlling many of the logistical and over-arching learning goals. The role of adults whether as teacher or chaperone in the museum setting has an influence on the kind of learning that can happen in a museum. As Griffin points out, "While museums provide the requisites for free-choice, socially mediated, constructivist learning, this does not necessarily mean that such learning is being allowed to take place" (Griffin, 2004, p.565). The recognition of the importance of social interaction as a basis for learning in museums further demonstrates the need for more developed understanding of the role of chaperones in a field trip experience. Some field trip studies have raised the question of the family-like nature of chaperoned school groups and have begun to suggest there is a similarity between the two (Dierking, et. al., 2001; Parsons & Breise, 2000).

External factors such as level of education, sense of trust in the organization, and perceptions about museums influence the role of the chaperone on a museum visit. In formal settings like schools, research demonstrates that most parents are eager to support their child's educational growth, yet struggle against their own lack of education or experience to create places for themselves in the traditional classroom structure (Barton, et. al., 2004). Many parents make assumptions that they must reinforce the traditional teacher-student relationship in their chaperone role, and teachers frequently reiterate the role of chaperones as monitors of behavior and logistics (Burtnyk, 2003, 2004). However, as Reynolds' (1984) research with families indicated, the museum offered a unique setting where parents were no longer the teacher and children no longer the learner; they succeeded in creating a nontraditional learning space. Gilbert and Priest (1997) describe increased learning on field trips when knowledgeable adults are present; where adults provide information, read text aloud, and ask questions.

Despite all the roles chaperones can play, their educational potential is often subverted by teacher and museum expectations on behavior restrictions, time schedules, and head counts (Burtnyk, 2003, 2004; Burtnyk & Combs, 2005; Parsons & Breise, 2002). Burtnyk and Combs (2005) suggest there are important differences between the expectations of chaperones and teachers on field trips. Communication about these roles is a critical issue and further examination of the implication of this is necessary. Sedzielarz's (2003) ethnographic study revealed a range of roles that chaperones might take, and showed that many chaperones fulfill multiple roles during a school visit. These roles represent traditional, logistical roles like the timekeeper, strategizer, and security guard. However, far more of the chaperone types represent an education orientation in roles like guide, group facilitator, learning leader, teacher, role model, or learner.

Concurrent with chaperone research, studies on museums as a context for learning for families as well as groups has taken hold in the field of museum studies. Falk and Dierking's (1992, 2002) contextual model of learning in museums evolved into the variants of family learning and free-choice learning. The latter is now recognized as an important framework in understanding the connection in the school-community-family loop (Dierking & Falk, 2002). The importance of social interaction as a basis for learning in museums further demonstrates the need for more developed understanding of the role of chaperones in a field trip experience.

### *Some Critical Questions on the Role of Chaperones*

Defining the function of adults on a field trip can be problematic because of many different roles that they play in the lives of children. The inclusion of a family learning framework on the museum's educational practices further confounds the definition of adult roles and responsibilities when on a school visit. This section provides some definitions and considerations of the multi-faceted roles of adults on a school visit to a museum used in this article. First, a *parent* is defined as an adult with a biological and/or psychological relationship to a specific child. Parents have particular responsibilities in child rearing--their task is to raise and educate a child. In museum

settings the *chaperones* for school visits are adults who accompany children through the museum. They are most often the parents or grandparents, and sometimes other relatives of students on the field trip. Museums and teachers generally place a certain set of expectations on these adults in the basic supervision of the students on the field trip.

Before starting this study on chaperones, it was important to examine the expectations for the chaperone's role and responsibilities, particularly in the context of a children's museum. What exactly do museum staff, teachers, and parents want out of a chaperone? The fundamental assumptions and functions of these roles can influence our ways of describing successful visits. From this preliminary reflection, three potential roles that an adult can play as a chaperone emerged: *escort*, *educator*, or *parent*. Each function is described below.

The role of chaperone as an *escort* is the most accurate definition, and more likely the functional role that teachers expect. These are the adults who facilitate the technical ease of the trip, making sure that all noses are counted, lunches distributed, and the behavior held in check. Escort chaperones fall to one end of a continuum. On the opposite end of the continuum is the educator. The chaperone as *educator* often appears in the role that museum staff expect. This is the adult that dutifully works through visit guides, and diligently fills in worksheets. However, as Parsons and Muhs (1995) point out, when chaperones were given worksheets to use in a museum setting, the adults treated their own children like students. The chaperone maintaining the *parent* role falls somewhere in between escort and educator where the parent will likely engage in a variety of behaviors, across the continuum. They will be interested in playing and interacting with children, they will monitor behavior, they will count noses. What is important is that they will be someone who lets children explore and experiment as they are learning. Parents have a relational bond with children: They have a social and personal connection with the child in ways that will support emotional connection and growth. The parent's role in supporting learning can be to

provide avenues toward *free-choice* learning. This is a powerful and important consideration that can help museum educators have a better understanding of what to expect from chaperones.

As this research study began to take shape, the museum staff's expectations on the role of chaperones became clear. They hoped for chaperones interacting with children in much the same way as they expect parents not on school visits to interact: talking with children, thinking about things together, having fun together, and wondering together. To the same extent, staff also wished to see chaperones supporting connections between the exhibition content, letting the child lead the experience, and make choices about what to do or where to go next. Staff also expected teachers to take on a role that is intentional and content-driven or linked to the curriculum as well as support children's play, letting children lead the experiences, and make choices about what they see and do.

#### *Research Question*

The above considerations led to the study's two research questions: How do chaperones behave when experiencing museum exhibitions and interacting with students? To what extent does the exhibition context (design, content, experiences) support "family learning" type interactions for school groups?

### **Methods**

This research involved a mixed-methods approach to investigate the role of parents as chaperones in the museum setting. Three types of data were collected: (a) exhibition mapping for the selected exhibits, (b) observation data for chaperones, and (c) comparison observations of families on general museum visits. Data were collected at a Midwestern children's museum during the fall of 2006 and early spring of 2007 primarily during weekday morning hours when school groups were most prevalent. These times were selected on the basis of school attendance and museum-wide programming patterns. Family observations used for comparison data were collected between fall 2006 and fall 2007 across a wide range of time periods including morning, afternoon, evening, and weekends.

Three permanent exhibition spaces were selected for observations and within each exhibition three specific sections were used for analysis. The exhibitions were selected to represent a cross-section of subject or content areas, design and layout of the space, and the extent of interactive or hands-on components. In addition these exhibitions were most immediately related to school programming and local academic standards. Two of the three exhibitions selected are among the museum's most popular.

### *Exhibition Mapping*

First, the research team conducted an exhibition mapping process to identify the potential areas for adult-child interactions and the extent of the specific family learning concepts integrated in the exhibition's design and development. The research team used an assessment tool which included 37 exhibition features in 8 categories based on a family learning framework developed by the Institute for Learning Innovation (2003) for assessing the museum's exhibits. Key categories of this framework include:

- the modes of presentation,
- accommodations for different ability levels,
- appeal to multiple generations,
- consideration of diverse personal and cultural histories,
- comfort and accommodation of the physical environment,
- sightlines, and
- opportunities for sitting and sharing experiences. (Institute for Learning Innovation, 2003)

Within the exhibitions selected for analysis, three target exhibit components were included for the primary observations for a total of nine observation points. Each of these is described briefly.



*World Cultures*<sup>1,2</sup>. At approximately 20 years old, this exhibit features much of the museum's world cultures collections and follows a more traditional approach with display cases full of artifacts and dense text labels. Approximately one-third of the exhibition contains interactive components—flip labels, push buttons, and stations for drawing, listening, and looking. The exhibit components included in the observation were: (a) *Clothing and Communication*: Three display cases containing traditional clothing and Barbie dolls in matching dress and a series of clothing-related interactive elements; (b) *The Imagination Place*: A large three-dimensional tree filled with a variety of mythical creatures, animals, figurines and other folk arts, and directions for visitors to create stories from what they see; (c) *Native American Teepee*: A traditional teepee used only for museum programming and interpretation, includes a general display of artifacts and text.

*Science*. This exhibition is by far the most popular of all the museum's exhibits. It is approximately 10 years old and highly activity oriented, with minimal text, and limited artifact displays. Exhibit components observed in this exhibition include: (a) *Boats and Water*: An interactive experience for exploration of water currents, motion, and simple mechanics; (b) *The Pond*: A live pond habitat with spaces to look above and below the waterline, interpretive programming, and text labels focus on finding animals and telling stories; and (c) *Construction area*: A role play area for moving "rocks" and "dirt" with small machines, exploration of simple machines, weights, and pulleys.

*Dinosaurs*: At the time of the study, this was the museum's newest exhibition, less than two years old. The exhibit planning and design team intentionally used a family learning model to create a fully immersive environment with a high number of interactive experiences. The primary focus is on the use of fossils as clues to help people learn about dinosaurs. Technology is prevalent throughout the exhibition. The three exhibit components used for observation were: (a) *T-Rex*

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<sup>1</sup> Names of exhibitions have been changed.

<sup>2</sup> This exhibition was closed in the fall of 2008 and had not been included in the overall museum assessment during 2007 and is therefore not included in the comparison data with general visitor behaviors.

*exploration*: Interactive components focusing on dinosaurs' sense of smell and sight, dinosaur construction, crawl-in areas, and bone reproductions; (b) *Hypacrosaur Family*: Three-dimensional display of a family of dinosaurs at a watering hole with video/audio text labels, and traditional text labels; (c) *Lab*: Area for demonstration of the science of paleontology, tables for individual fossil demonstrations, and an "ask a paleontologist" program.

### *Chaperone Observations*

Following the exhibition mapping, the research team created an observation checklist that would provide an overview of the frequency of chaperone behaviors at exhibit components in three exhibition spaces. The checklist was initially generated by observing existing chaperone behaviors present in exhibition space, using potential family learning behaviors suggested by the family learning framework, and reviewing the existing research on chaperone behaviors. Three major areas for observation included text interactions, activity interactions, and logistics.

Text interactions included: (a) read or look at written labels, (b) read a label out loud to students, (c) summarize a label text for students.

Activity interactions were described as: (a) guide students through exhibit component, (b) encourage student participation at an exhibit component, (c) participate with students at exhibit component, (d) discuss exhibit component with students during activity, (e) discuss exhibit component with students after activity.

Three logistic behaviors were: (a) address student behavior, (b) deal with time management issues, (c) intense watching, observing, or taking a "guard stance"—frequently seen as arms folded and positioned near an exit.

In addition to these behaviors, a section was included that captured the specific exhibit components visited by the chaperone and detailed written observation notes on the extent of the chaperone's behavior at the exhibit component from start to finish. The checklist was tested with three observers for consistency and reliability. Inter-rater agreement was calculated at 89%.

Based on the initial observations a second set of criteria were developed to note the non-interactive or non-participatory behaviors of chaperones. That is, those behaviors of chaperones that did not stop at the exhibit component were recorded as: (a) pulled a child away from the component, (b) walked by the component without stopping or noticing, (c) was at component but clearly disengaged from any interaction (e.g. talking on cell phone).

Chaperones, identified by group visit stickers (a separate color from the stickers for teachers), were selected for observation on a continuous sampling basis at each component. The first chaperone to enter the area was observed from start to finish at the exhibit component. When that chaperone left the area, the next chaperone to enter the area was observed. Observers noted which elements within the exhibit section were used, and recorded specific behaviors and detailed notes on behaviors, and where possible, any conversations. Observers recorded a "1" for each chaperone behavior demonstrated at the component within the target exhibit area. A total score for each chaperone could be calculated along the positive interactive behaviors, and the logistic interactions. Thus, the total number of positive, or ideal interactive behaviors would be 7, and the total number of logistic interactive behaviors is 4.

### *Family Observations*

During the initial design of the chaperone study, the museum was using the same framework and related tools described above to measure family behaviors in the exhibit; the intent was to use the same tool to compare family and school visits. However, a staff change resulted in the development of a new family learning measurement tool that included a comprehensive set of 48 indicators of family behaviors along three dimensions: (a) interaction to participate, (b) interaction to collaborate and problem-solve, and (c) interaction to enhance experience (Wolf, 2007). The generation of these categories followed a similar pattern to the development of the chaperone behaviors, e.g. naturalistic observation was used to generate the categories, and observations were coded according to those categories. To fully compare the family and chaperone

group behaviors, the observation notes from the chaperone observations were re-coded according to the new indicators.

## Results

The results presented here reflect the three areas of data collection and a synthesis of the data aggregated by exhibition. The results from the exhibition mapping process demonstrate the level and type of anticipated interactions between adults and children. The results for chaperone behaviors demonstrate the types of behaviors in each exhibition, and the results for parent behaviors indicate the basis for later comparison of chaperone behaviors.

### *Exhibition Mapping*

The exhibition mapping process included 37 different features of family learning for each exhibition. Table 1 indicates the number of features observed in each exhibition by family learning subset. In each of these areas the results show the levels of potential interaction and experience that leads toward high levels of family learning. *Dinosaurs*, the exhibition designed and developed using a family learning framework, had 24 of 37 features present, or 64.8% percent, the highest of the three samples, while *Science* had 17 of 37 features (45.%) and *World Cultures* had 16 of 37 features (43.2%). What this suggests is that the design of *Dinosaurs* has the greatest overall potential to support family learning behaviors and thus would be expected support a greater number of ideal chaperone behaviors. The overall potential for family learning behaviors in the *Science* and *World Cultures* exhibitions is lower and the likelihood of ideal chaperone behaviors will be somewhat less than in the *Dinosaurs* exhibition.

[Insert Table 1 here]

### *Chaperone Behaviors*

A total of 289 chaperones moved through the nine exhibit areas in the three main exhibitions; 179 (62%) entered and remained in the designated exhibit space and were included for observation (59 at World Cultures, 59 at Science and 61 at Dinosaurs). From these observations

493 individual interactions were recorded across the nine exhibit stops. As described above, there were 11 chaperone behaviors (7 ideal behaviors and 4 logistic behaviors) possible for each chaperone. Across all exhibitions, chaperones had a mean of 2.75 of 11 possible behaviors, with a fairly high standard deviation in each category. The mean for ideal behaviors was 2 out of 7 possible. Table 2 shows the mean behavior by type of interaction in each exhibition represented by the three main behavior categories.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Chart 1 shows the percent of each chaperone behavior observed across all exhibitions. More than half of all chaperones (58%) adopted the logistical behavior “guard stance” while in the exhibition space. Slightly half of all chaperones displayed the three ideal behaviors, “discuss with students during activity” (47%), “participate with students” (41%), and “encourage student participation” (40%). Of the remaining behaviors, the other logistical behaviors, “encounter time management” and “address student behavior” are among the least observed behaviors. The fact that the guard stance is the most common behavior observed is likely based on the roles and responsibilities of chaperones in the escort role defined above. However, as will be discussed in the next section, this behavior is not necessarily different from typical parent behaviors in these exhibition spaces. While these numbers suggest a direction toward positive behaviors, the total number of behaviors observed in each chaperone was very low. When considering the “ideal” chaperone behaviors alone, the majority of chaperones (64%) were observed with 3 or fewer ideal behaviors. Chart 2 indicates the total number of ideal behaviors observed by chaperone across all exhibitions.

[Insert Chart 1 here]

[Insert Chart 2 here]

The breakdown of individual behaviors by exhibition space in Table 3 helps to demonstrate the range of behaviors observed by chaperone across all exhibition spaces and the types of

interactions happening within those spaces. Of interest in this section are the generally consistent types of behaviors across all exhibition spaces. To better understand the relationship between these behaviors and any potential influence of the exhibition design, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated. Table 4 indicates that none of the exhibition designs necessarily influenced chaperone behavior. Text interactions begin to reach a level of potential influence, but this too falls short of a clear relationship. It should be noted in particular, that in the *Science* exhibition, there is limited text and this is likely a cause for the differences between exhibitions, and thus chaperone behaviors along the text interaction category.

[Insert Table 3 here]

[Insert Table 4 here]

#### *Comparisons with Family Learning Data*

Comparison data for general family visitors were drawn from the building-wide assessment that examined 4 of the museum's exhibitions, including the *Science* and *Dinosaur* exhibitions. These data, based on observation, as well as timing and tracking of 120 families yielded a rich baseline for the museum to describe family interactions in the exhibits and profiles of family-based interactions. It also provided an opportunity to compare the characteristics of chaperone groups with family groups. To best compare the different datasets, the detailed chaperone behavior notes were re-coded along the current family learning framework. Table 5 demonstrates the differences between the behaviors of families and chaperones. In the *Science* and *Dinosaurs* exhibitions families were more likely than chaperones to "engage to participate". However, chaperones were more likely to "engage to collaborate and problem solve" in both *Science* and *Dinosaurs* compared with families. When "engaging to enhance" the experience, families were less likely to do so in *Science* rather than in *Dinosaurs*, and the chaperones mirror this pattern with a slightly higher percentage engaging to enhance in *Dinosaurs*. In all, while the parent and chaperone percentages differ, *Dinosaurs* had an overall higher percentage across all behaviors for both groups.

[Insert Table 5 here]

## Discussion

The results of these observations provide insights into the overall activities of chaperones on a field trip, as well as the design and development of exhibition spaces in relation to chaperone behaviors. The comparison with parent behaviors also helps place adult behaviors in a new light. In particular three major areas will be discussed: First, the relationship between exhibition design and chaperone behaviors, second the overall display of ideal chaperone behaviors, and third, comparing chaperone and family interactions.

### *Exhibition design and behavior*

The overall scores obtained from the exhibition mapping are useful for anticipating the types of experiences that chaperones might have with students in the exhibition spaces and the types of behaviors to expect. For example, we might consider that in exhibitions with a high score on family learning features would encourage and facilitate a higher percentage of family-like interactions between adults and children, such as discussing an activity, or participating in an activity together. Chaperones in the *Science* exhibition were observed to do this about half the time, in *Dinosaurs* this type of activity was less than half and *World Cultures* was the least likely to stimulate participation with both adult and child. Similarly, where there is a high degree and variety of presentation modes, chaperones may not need to provide as much explanation or reading aloud to students, we might anticipate fewer text interactions. In the exhibitions where there is a higher percentage of features that allow for sharing experiences, there should be more conversation and dialogue between adult and child. In both the *Dinosaurs* and *World Cultures* exhibitions, chaperones were more likely to read or look at written labels, but only about a third of the time. With the exception of *Science*, where there is limited label text, the chaperones observed tended to follow similar patterns in each exhibit area.

Activity interactions, an aspect of the ideal behaviors, represent nearly half of all observed behaviors in each exhibition, but we would expect to see a much greater concentration of these behaviors in the *Dinosaurs* exhibition, which has the highest overall score on family learning. We might expect that exhibitions with lower scores in the areas such as “family members can visually stay in touch,” the chaperones might focus more of their attention on logistical behaviors, such as the guard stance, yet this is the highest observed behavior for all chaperones. Only one family learning feature, the ability to see all members, may contribute to the extent of a chaperone's tendency toward the guard stance. Where the exhibition has limited sight lines, as the case with all three spaces examined, the chaperone's behavior adjusts to fit the context.

Overall it appears that chaperones do tend to focus their behaviors on student interactions and participation within exhibition spaces, though it is not clear that the actual design of the space or exhibit component necessarily contributes to those behaviors where chaperones are concerned. The relationship between chaperone behaviors across three very different exhibition settings shows that they do not necessarily alter their behavior based on the exhibition design.

#### *Ideal vs. Logistical Behaviors*

One of the limitations of this study is that the teacher's instructions or procedures for chaperones were not collected. Burtnyk's research (2003, 2004) suggested that many parents make assumptions about their role as monitor. This was certainly part of the overall mix of behaviors observed in individual chaperones. In each exhibition slightly more than half of the chaperones took on logistic roles, primarily in the “guard stance”. Equally, Sedzielarz's (2003) study indicated that chaperones do aim for more educational roles, as indicated by the individual chaperone behaviors toward text and activity interactions. However, despite these positive indicators toward behavior, the overall ideal behaviors are very low. Only about a third of the chaperones observed had more than three ideal behaviors. While they are not necessarily doing more logistical behaviors, the data indicate they are simply not actively participating.



The high numbers of chaperones adopting the guard stance may actually tell a different story. Most chaperones observed in this behavior were also described as watching intensely, acknowledging behavior non-verbally and ultimately following the children to the next activity. In short, the chaperones were allowing students to lead the experience and stepping back to allow children to play. This behavior was seen throughout the family learning observations of parents in the same exhibition in which Wolf (2007) discovered that the parents' "preferred approach is to let the child begin the activity and REFRAIN from engaging unless the child appears to need assistance in some way" (emphasis in the original, p. 15). Thus, parents and chaperones tend toward the same types of behavior in interaction within the museum. This similarity in the behaviors of chaperones and parents must be further investigated to better understand the motivations for certain chaperone behaviors.

#### *Comparing Family and Chaperone Behaviors*

As prior research has shown, the ideal chaperone is one that increases the learning and meaning of the visit, the "educator" role (Gilbert & Priest, 1997; Reynolds, 1984), but one frequently subverted by teacher expectations and procedures, in the "escort" role (Burtnyk, 2003, 2004; Burtnyk & Combs, 2005). Both of these roles appear to be present in the current study, but there are various behaviors that also suggest chaperones are taking on a role similar to other families visiting the museum, the "parent" role. The high percentage of interaction with text and activity is promising, but when compared with other family visit data it reveals a far more important dilemma: Overall, the ideal chaperone interactions along a family learning framework are limited, not reaching more than 50% on any measure, and more realistically, representing only about 30% of their overall behaviors. Chaperones do not necessarily interact with children in the same way that parents would do with their own children. However, when comparing the data along the extensive family learning behaviors, chaperones are clearly capable of behaviors that will stimulate

children's collaboration and problem-solving activities within the exhibition, as appears in the data for the *Science* and *Dinosaur* exhibitions.

### **Conclusion**

As the literature on field trip research shows, the role of chaperones continues to be somewhat elusive for museum educators. Articulating the expected behaviors of chaperones is not always a common practice, though teachers and museum staff have expectations and assumptions about chaperone roles that will influence the materials, support, and directions provided for the field trip. Research reiterates that chaperones often play the role of "escort" when provided with specific guidelines from teachers, and this is clearly seen in the current research project. However, the chaperone may also have a greater understanding of their role as "educator," especially in an informal education setting. This was observed in the chaperones' efforts interact with children through text and exhibition activities. Evidence from a comparison of family behaviors suggests that chaperones could build on the disposition of enhancing collaborative and problem-solving behaviors in the exhibition, but need more support in building relationships with children to encourage more participation and interaction. Perhaps this is, in effect, promoting the chaperones to actually take on the role of *parent* with other people's children. The role of the chaperone is complex and the expectations placed on them by both museum educators as well as classroom teachers is likely to cause some challenges in fulfilling this role. Based on the observations, the chaperones did appear to carry out all three roles of escort, educator, and parent. While the exhibition activities may not fully support the types of family learning behaviors expected, parents as chaperones do have the potential to provide meaningful interaction with students. Additional research should be conducted to further appreciate the underlying motivations for parent participation as chaperones. Examining these perspectives can further museum educator efforts to support overall learning of children and families in the museum setting.

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