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Interview with Rachel Garcia

Anna Becker

Rachel Garcia

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Researcher's name: Anna Becker

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103 College Drive, Gambier, OH 43022

Co-workers present: none

AB: Anna Becker

RG: Rachel Garcia

AB: All right I'm just going to do a short intro and then we can get into it. I'm Anna Becker today is Friday, October 28, 2011 and I'm interviewing Rachel Garcia about the Science Play-space Initiative and public spaces in Knox County.

So first off can you just explain what the Science Play-space Initiative is?

RG: It's an initiative because umm we're starting something, that's why I call it an initiative. Umm, what we want to do is create what I call a science play-space. And, umm, this sort of came out from umm when we have our kids and we want to take them somewhere to go in the winter, when it's cold and rainy. A lot of parents take their kids to COSI [Center of Science and Industry] center in Columbus, or we take them to the one in Newark. I know I always take my child when I go visit my family to the one in Ithaca. And these are great places to bring you kids, they have a lot to do and they play and they maybe learn some science if you're lucky. Umm I mean depending on the age. If they're older they're going to learn something. Umm and these are in – we don't have anything like that here and what happens in the winter here is when we want to get together or to take our kids somewhere we don't know where to go so parents take their kids to McDonalds [laughter]...umm because there's a play area there.

Umm there are no public spaces, aside from the library, that anyone that I know knows of that you can take your kid and just let them play and that's not in your house. Umm a lot of people, including myself, have very small houses. If my kid wants any exercise in the house he jumps on his crib mattress or he turns in circles, because we don't have any place for that [laughter]. Umm so, I see a real need in this area for a place to play, umm...and I – and I first thought we just need some kind of indoor playground and I thought about but what sort of play? I mean they run around for a little while and they get tired and I also thought well there's a great need for a science center here. Because when you have to go forty-five minutes or an hour away by the time you get there, and it opens at ten, your kid is tired, they're there for an hour and they're hungry and they need to eat, they need a nap – whatever it is and you're – you spent fifteen dollars or whatever on this trip. Umm, so, what I really feel like we need is a place here where you can take your kid, they can do something they couldn't do at home – it could be educational with science. I - I would really like to see something with climbing equipment umm because they really need a place when the weather's bad to do stuff.

And I'm a science teacher and I really feel like umm the experiences you – some kids get at home really prepare them well for science class and other kids don't get these experiences. I mean umm some kids get a lot of educational toys, there parents can say "Oh, that's a magnet it

does this or that.” Umm other kids aren’t getting that, you know. Umm so I think that and the other thing about science – science toys is really what young kids – educational toys I mean – they’re fun, kids like them! I mean, they’re - they’re like the best toys out there. That’s how kids explore the world. I mean that – I mean when I say science I take that in a very broad context, just about everything a child is doing is exploring the world and being a scientist, even when they’re dressing up. I mean to me that’s – that’s just as much being a scientist, they’re exploring things. And I think play – and I call it a science play-space is a really important component of science that kids don’t have time to do a lot at school. Umm to just play around with something and to see how it works and not having a particular goal, you know to really umm to just play around with it. You know, what happens if I put this piece here? What happens if I do this? What happens if I do that or the other thing? All the time they’re doing science, they’re experimenting; they’re making a hypothesis. Well what will happen here? Maybe it will do this. Umm and like I said I don’t think they can really get that at school, they get that through play. Umm and that’s why I call it a science play-space. And I call it a science play-space because I think they’re all scientists and I think umm science is something some kids don’t – some kids get at home, some kids don’t. And – and kids love it and it’s really engaging until they get to school and maybe they decide it’s hard. And – and I hope with a space like this that they’re used to doing these things. When they see the thing in school and it’s formal. “Well this is what a magnet is, it has north and south.” Umm that they have an experience to take with them umm I’ve seen that before. “Oh, that’s what it was doing when it did that.” Umm and so – so school should be a little easier. But and they also need that play experience. Just playing around – and there’s no pressure, there’s no test. And if they take away the wrong conclusion, that’s going to happen. But when they learn how it really works it can be very exciting.

AB: So it creates kind of a relaxed environment where they’re free to explore?

RG: Yeah, that’s how I see it. And yeah...and – and not just explore by the book but I - I really do see a place for active play. I think kids really need it and a lot of kids aren’t getting it, or can’t get it very easily in-in poor weather. And that’s– that’s what, I actually did hear of a science center that had an active play area. It’s in Fort Wayne, Indiana, I think. Umm which I had never heard of before. One of the students at Kenyon told me about it. Umm so I thought – I think of it as innovative in a sense but I think a lot of science centers are doing things like that they just haven’t necessarily called it that. Umm and a lot of science centers focus – umm I’m not sure if this is so true today - but there’s sort of a phenomena they want you to see and you push a button or you do something to see that particular thing. And I feel like this should be less focused on seeing a particular thing but the tools to see that thing should be there. But more focused on exploring, umm and really focused one the way we know things through science. We observe them, we sold puzzles, we build models. And that’s kind of the way I see this being put together as a scientific method kind of thing. So I see a place where you can umm build things, with blocks, or magnet tiles, or anatomy models, or DNA models. All those things are modeling and - and also puzzle solving – that’s what scientist do. So I want - I think that’d be an important way to see a science center especially in this area where science is not always seen in a good light. So it wouldn’t have to be focused on things that people are – some people are not very happy about around here, like evolution. I mean it could be there, but that’s not the focus. The focus is learning about the world through science. There’s a lot of different ways to learn about the world and this is one particular one.

AB: You mentioned that, you know, in the winter months there's kind of a lack of places to go. Have you noticed – or – how successful has this been in creating a space? Is it fairly popular?

RG: We don't have a space yet, so in that sense no. In another sense, everyone I talk to says: "Yes we would love this, we would go there, we want this." So I think there's a - maybe a slight disconnect between what people want and what they're... I don't know if they're willing to pay for it - yet. I don't think people are willing to pay a lot, I don't think people have a lot. Umm I think a lot of people are already working on a lot of other really good projects. And there are a lot in Knox County. And this is another one and there - this is not their focus. So I think people want it and I think they will come if it exists, but it's not necessarily their top priority to make it happen.

AB: What kind of space do you use now? Or-

RG: We don't have a space yet.

AB: Right. So what kind of I guess– do you do events then?

RG: We have - we did things this summer. Umm we did umm some activities at Hiawatha Park. I don't know if you know, they have a parks program. Umm so we were there twice a month doing some activities outside there in the pavilion. We did a few activities at some of the First Friday events. And we have gone to the Makers Market, which is right next to Farmers Market every month, but we're done with that now. Umm and... umm I take some toys to umm, they have a big consignment sale for kids – well for parents actually and I just set up some stuff kids can play with. That was more for – that was for little kids. Some of the things - A lot of the educational toys are good for the little kids. And then what I've done at the Makers Market is usually we make something with some kind of scientific aspect to it, like we did this thing called hoop gilders. And that generally is better for little ones, like six to seven. The people that worked at Hiawatha Park, umm they were teachers. And they had some great activities. One of the ones I was there for was umm – they had these syringes with the pipes and they had water. And they were like "Well explore, figure it out, you know. Figure how can you make one syringe pop off and then attach together?" And of course by the end they were all shooting water at each other. Umm so that was focused, that was probably elementary school and a little bit nursery school.

AB: Is the general age range – you said nursery school up and then you said and then through elementary? What –

RG: Well, I think we're going to have to, when we get a space, which I hope we do soon. Umm I think we're going to have to start elementary and younger. However, I really see it as for everybody. And I actually don't just see it as a place for kids – I see it as a - a community space. Umm, I really would like it to be a place where... if it is kid focused, parents bring their kids but they get to interact, you know have a place to eat. You know, because there's - there's not a lot of places – like I'm in a mom's group and sometimes they meet at McDonalds because there's no place for your kids to play [laughter]. And sometimes they meet a church because that's – the

church is sponsoring the group. But umm, but I think it would be – but umm you know if we want to meet outside of that we either invite people to our homes, which tend to be pretty small, and there's nowhere really to do that in a place that you know your kids are going to be safe. And I feel that in this area, I have a four year old, when he was two, and I think that's the most difficult age for parents. Because they're not really big enough to do a lot of activities, and they're still taking a lot of naps and umm...the activities you can find for them are like half an hour, and they cost you some money. Umm and I think that age there's lots of great science toys. I think that that age in particular needs umm somewhere to go, school age and younger.

Umm and then I - I see for older kids...umm...above – above primary school, because primary school kids are usually really still interested in science things [laughter]. Umm...its general harder, from what I've read about other science museums, it's really hard to engage older kids. And I see that particularly being a problem here because umm as far as I can tell kids play sports all the time [laughter]. Umm...but I do see a big role for kids umm I see some can be umm mentoring younger kids, making things for younger kids, playing with younger kids. And high school kids can certainly make stuff for people to do and volunteer and stuff. So I see there are roles for older kids, I think they're different roles. Umm and I see roles for elderly people. Umm a lot of people have mentioned that there aren't a lot of opportunities sometimes for older people to interact with younger people. So umm...so I guess I see it for all ages, I – since we don't really have a space, and I think we need to start somewhere I'm not sure it's going to start out that way. But I would like to see it because I – I feel like there's segments of the community that never really talk. Or – I mean, because there's no – I mean if you're – people see each other in their churches, they see each other at work...and they – and – I'm not sure where...they probably see each other at sports events, so I'd like to umm...I think Ted Rice said this the best he said he'd like to see “and intellectual play-space” outside of the college, the colleges in fact, there's two of them. Umm...one of the students I talked to from the Naz [Mount Vernon Nazarene University], or she's, she's a graduate, an alumni, she's not there now. When I told her about this she said she thought it'd be a really great space for Kenyon and Naz students to interact in a non-forced way. They're just kind of going to be there, working or helping out – or whatever we can get them to do [laughter]. Umm...so I – I see it for the whole community, I see it as a community space. And - and that's...partly umm it relates to my background, I was a Peace Corps volunteer, and umm I see it sort of as community development.

AB: So what – what's your ideal space, I guess. What would that be like?

RG: My ideal space is bigger than this community can support so...it's good to be reasonable [laughter]. I think it's probably five or ten thousand square feet. And what it contains is...a – a uhh sort of an active play area, a climbing space for kids. And it probably is not - it's probably primary school and younger or even just below primary school, I'm not quite sure. I'm - I'm not quite sure ages exactly. Umm and then I see the rest of it being closer to a more traditional science museum with a lot of hands on – well not - not the whole rest of it – a lot of hands on things. Umm one of the things I'd like to see is a water table and you've seen that, COSI has one of those. And I'd like to see things like that, not just have traditional things. But also have umm...things that you can do measurements with, like have a flow meter. Now we've all seen science tables they have good – I've seen ones with pumps. I like to see that stuff like I think that's cool. But I like to – think everything should have a way of measuring it because that's

how scientists do the world. So I think it should have...umm definitely a water table that may not just be for younger kids. Umm I think it should have an archeology dig and that - that really probably is for younger kids. They like to do shovels and sand and...and I think you can put artifacts in there, and you can put bones in there, and you can put shells in there. And then I think for older kids...a similar thing but probably minerals and fossils that they can...and maybe even fossil making. And there's a more appropriate word for that...umm when you make casts...umm and umm...I'd like to see what I call a wet lab, like a chemistry lab. But umm it would have stuff that's kids can really play around with like umm...some cooking things like salt and sugar and umm baking soda and vinegar. You know just the classic volcano experiment. But not- they can just play with it, it doesn't have to be a big...umm. And food coloring and food dye. And really young kids all you need is some food coloring and some water. But for older kids similar things that they can do and that are really safe and you can really get plastic glassware for kids. I mean it doesn't - it doesn't have to be as dangerous as a chemistry lab, but if they get the experience of using some of those that equipment so that when they get to the chemistry lab it's not really foreign to them...that's - that's an area I'd like to see. I'd like to see some kind of growing space...umm that you can grow plants or - what I'd really like to see, this is ideal, I don't know if this will ever happen, some kind of aquaponics set up. Do you know what I mean by that?

AB: Umm...I don't think so can you explain?

RG: Well umm...they have these set ups where there are fish and the fish fertilize the water and they use the water to grow lettuce.

AB: Oh wow.

RG: Yeah that's what they call aquaponics. Umm and I think you can do it on a pretty small scale like have a fish tank with some lettuce on top, it doesn't have to be big. Umm so have some space where you can do some real...germinate seeds and things like that. Umm and you know have - have space with traditional science things like electricity and a place to take apart umm radios or whatever. I know - I say take apart radios as a sort of a - a lot of people say they got their start in engineering taking apart radios [laughter]. I don't know if it will be radios, maybe it will be like computers these days [laughter]. Umm but things like that...umm and I had a whole bunch of other ideas and people have come to me with a lot of other ideas - and there's too many ideas [laughter]. I'd like to see a place where there's something to do with geology. Someone mentioned to me that they'd like to see the kids know their local geology and I think that would be pretty cool. If you had like umm...umm rock umm sediments kind of labeled or something. And I don't know if I mentioned it - there should be a place - there probably will have to be a few different places for different aged kids. Like really little kids, sort of little kids, preschool kids. And they're all kind of different needs in terms of safety and comfort and what kind of toys are there. And I - I think some things that we'll have to umm...you'll have to be changing certain things for certain kids. But I think for the littlest things they're going to grow out of whatever space there is so its - its going to be sort of changing all the time. But for older kids you know I think there's going to have to be a craft kind of place. I - I think there's a lot of - and I think the other thing I want to see in my space is...we have local industry. You know, I'd love to see from areal - this is something someone mentioned to me but it's...I think I

thought of it before that [laughter]. You know they- they make compressors. And someone said, “Oh you should have a cutaway.” You know – you know what that is? Like cut in half. Umm or maybe have a model compressor kids can see how it works kind of – so I’d like - and that’s not the only industry around. There are a lot of industries – I’d like to see stuff from other industries so that kids know what’s going on around here [laughter]. So...and then there’s a connection between those industries and the place. Umm I think that’s most of the things. I have a lot of ideas in the beginning and now I’m kind of more focused on well how do we get some space and whatever space we have...then I’ll work with what’s there. And start small because umm...you can’t really do everything all at once [laughter].

AB: So is there kind of a general atmosphere or feel that you try and create when you have your events or in your future space?

RG: Umm basically what we just from trying to do all the events is – well first of all just give some kids some exposure to science. And I think that ‘s what really happened in Hiawatha Park. We weren’t really trying to market it because the parents weren’t there [laughter]. You can’t really market to kids – I mean you can market to kids but it doesn’t – that won’t get you where you need to go. You really need to market to parents. When we do other public events you know I tell parents this is the kind of thing we can do if we have a space. You know and they’re really excited. They would love to see a space like that. So I mean that’s kind of. I love going there and I see the kids you know you give them something to do and they’ll experiment with like “How dose it do this? What if we did that? What if we did that?” As long as you make it open-ended enough...they’re the greatest little scientists. And it’s just exciting. And you know they ask lots of questions and you can tell them things.

AB: So do you see the kids kind of interacting with each other while they’re doing these different things?

RG: Oh yeah. I mean if – depending on the event. If we go to the Makers Market it’s usually a kid doing one thing with a parent. And then I – the other thing we do, and I didn’t do this very many times that’s why I didn’t mention it, umm there’s – you know about the Hot Meals Program? The churches in Mount Vernon, and I’m very impressed by this by the way, umm they have a hot meal every night I believe umm for people who don’t have dinner. And one church hosts it every night of the week. [Coughing] And I believe they do this all year. And umm occasionally we have come there with some toys. I was there once with umm making the hoop gliders, it was the same thing we did at the Makers Market. We didn’t have that many kids. Umm but yeah they were experimenting, they’ll do something together. When I was at the little consignment market - umm place. I would have like six or seven kids just had a little space – I mean I just had a little piece of carpet out – I had like nothing. And they were playing together. The older ones were helping the younger ones. And some of the toys we had, I wouldn’t really have necessarily consider science toys. One of the things we had was a pizza. It’s a wooden pizza umm its got toppings and it has a little cutter, someone donated it to the – this project. And what I saw was all the kids really collaborating and using it. And I thought, ah that’s science! Because umm that’s one of the things, kids collaborating. Umm and that’s another thing I want to make sure we that we have...things that you can’t do at home if you’re an only child. You know, you can’t have a huge box of Legos; you can’t make whatever it is with three kids. So

yeah, I do see collaboration when - when we provide the opportunity for it I do see it and I'm always impressed [laughter].

AB: So you notice that just in general in Knox County there's kind of a lacking of programs that allow the kids to kind of get out of the house and have a space to come together?

RG: Young kids. Umm there are some programs. Umm...there's dance classes at the Spotlight Studio. And...the YMCA has umm some classes like gymnastics. And...Mad Camp Arts is not really existing right now; they did exist for about a year I believe. So they had some nice art kind of programs. And I think their classes were actually a bit longer. The gymnastics and the dancing were only like half an hour and they weren't always at times that were...good for my particular child's particular nap schedule [laughter]. I don't fault them, I mean that have to do them at some point [laughter]. And that was my problem with the whole two-year-old thing. Oh and the library, the library has programming and its very well attended and that's umm one of the best places...umm to take your kid. It's not necessarily the best place to talk with other parents. You do get to do that a bit...there's story time and then there's a craft time and usually you get to talk with the other moms a little bit there. And they have a little room...its probably about the size of this alcove where they have toys and a lot of times the kids will just play in that room, during that time. And it's great; I mean that's why I want to see more of that [laughter]. And you can do that anytime in the library, that space is always open. Umm so yeah those are the three things that I know about umm. I know for slightly older kids there's umm maybe like soccer and there's probably T-ball, I don't know too much about that. I don't believe that would happen in the winter here but... it'd be a little cold. Those are the things I know about and sometimes - oh and there's Jump and Shout. I didn't mention Jump and Shout.

AB: What's that?

RG: And that- that you'll never find on your own. Someone has to tell you about it, umm unless you see the sign [laughter]. I mean really they just have one sign - they don't advertise it. Umm it takes place in a karate studio...umm...at umm...it's near the square. And there is a little sign but I would never have found it if someone hadn't told me. And they meet Thursday mornings at ten, I think. And umm the person who does it is named Lisa Zoldack and she has a little - she does little singing games and little games with the kids and she'll play red-light, green-light with them or she'll have little shapes on the floor that they'll find, or she'll sing songs with them. She'll do that then she'll give them some free time. And she has a little trampoline and a little slide and maybe some balance beams and hoops. It's a great program umm and it's like ten to eleven on Thursdays if you happen to know about it in the winter. Umm...luckily we did that last year. And that's ages one to three...three and a half kind of.

AB: And was that pretty well attended?

RG: Yeah, oh yeah it was when I did it. I don't think she could have taken too many more people. Umm and that she doesn't do that in the summer, I don't think - I don't think there a lot of demand. And last year, that's the year we did it, I think someone convinced her she needed to do it. But I hear she's already started doing it, so I must be umm...my - my son's getting a little old so I haven't taken him. But no, that was a great thing and that's the kind of thing that I

would love to see in our space. Not just once a week, or – to have the equipment she has just out. She can't have it out all the time because it's a karate studio. But you know a little slide and a little tiny trampoline and some balance beams. I mean the two year olds and the one year olds they're happy [laughter]– they don't need programming, they can just you know. I mean the programming was nice, I thought it was a great program. But if we – if you just had a space like that where you could take your kid whenever you wanted to...instead of having to go to a particular thing that's happening at a particular time I think that would be really helpful.

AB: This goes back to the SPI [Science Play-space Initiative] but how long has it been active?

RG: Well I started umm in the spring trying to get people umm...trying to define what it was and interest people. And I think – I think we, we had our – maybe had our first meeting in March. You should go to our webpage...umm and you'll find all the meeting minutes, if you can find it. It's – it's an...I had to do it myself, I am not a webpage maker, I mean that's all [laughter]. It's not a professionally done webpage; I just did it [laughter]. And you can't find it...you have to like...you can find our Facebook page and then you can click on it. I mean or I can give you the website of course. Google for some reason can't find it...I think because it's not commercial – I don't know it can't find it [laughter]. These things have changed. So yeah we started having meeting then we started having activities I believe in...I think maybe June First Friday. Our first sort of things were kind of to define our goals and our mission...and what we're doing. And people came up with these events they wanted to do stuff at...for publicity and just to get started because we didn't have the space...and we still don't have the space [laughter].

AB: So there was – did you get fairly good general interest from that First Friday?

RG: Well people liked being...doing it. Umm...and you tell someone about this and they're like that is a great idea we should have that. I mean no - no one has ever said this is not a good idea. No one has ever said we don't need that or anything like that. Umm I think...[voices in background, students enter Pub]...I think what you don't really know it's – it's a matter of how high a priority it would be for people...to make happen. And I don't think that it is a high priority for a lot of people – I have had a lot of help in the community. People say we'd like this to happen in the community, you know. People have said they can do X or Y. Umm but I haven't found – I had some people on the planning committee all spring and they do these events but they're busy right now. So I – I don't think it's their highest priority right now [students playing pool and talking in background]. There are some people...and most of them are teachers and they've gone back to teaching. But I can tell you know that they were teaching in the spring and it was a higher priority than it is now. Except, I mean - one teacher who had a child and she has just gone back to school. She actually has changed her whole life around so she doesn't have time. And there's another teacher who her job changed and now she's doing something else. But you know the other people I don't think they're doing anything different now than they were in the spring. But it's they have other priorities and – and that's ok. Like I said, everyone who is working on the is project has a lot of important stuff they're doing and a lot of it is really good stuff in the community. So...people say I have about a hundred and...probably about a hundred and twenty people on the email mailing list right now [voices in background]. They're all people who have expressed interest. And then there's about fifty people on Facebook...and some of those are also on email, but a lot of them aren't. These are all people who want to be updated on

what's going on, but most of them are not people who are going to put their time into it. So when you say is there interest, yes.

And we just won a small grant from the Community Foundation, umm...to – if we've had a space we could use the money for that but we didn't have a space so we asked for money to work on publicity...on making brochures, to help when we do these event – and all summer we've just been putting out time and our money into whatever we do. So I've asked for some of that money will go to say buying a table instead of like [laughter]. [Students playing pool in background, sound of balls colliding] And making brochures so that we don't have to use our money for that...or...umm...I hope to buy a few science toys and not use my son's for everything [laughter]. You know and I want to make some business cards. Because I talk to someone and I'm like "umm..." you know. [Loud voices in background] We would like to become incorporated in Ohio as a nonprofit and that's not that hard. [Yelling from pool players] Umm but we also asked - I also asked for money to be incorporated as a 501 (c)...umm that's to be an official nonprofit. Umm...we can't actually do that until we have a board of directors, which we don't have right now. That's – that's one thing we need to become. Because to get - to ask for money from people it helps to actually be an official nonprofit [background yelling] and we're not that yet.

The grant that we just got - the city is willing to act as our partner so they want this to happen, the Community Foundation's been really supportive. The Areal Foundation...I didn't – there was a deadline I missed [yelling]...which - which I would have – would have sent them something and then I've been in talks with them. But they want to help with the space – when we actually get a space they want to help get money to make that space work. And we don't have a space to talk about yet so [laughter]...so I didn't hand them anything. We spent all - all summer actually working on a grant for our sort of interim space and then it turns out we don't actually have that space anymore. So we actually have a very long grant written which I turned into the Community Foundation with our "we would like a small amount of money to do this publicity" so we've put a lot of work into it.

Umm...the reason we don't have a space...the reason is we don't have [yelling in background]. We have worked with Mark Ramser, he is a landlord around here, and he said that he would have some space we might be able to use for a while for free but that hasn't happened. Umm...we almost were able to be sharing space with Mad Camp Arts [students talking loudly in background]. But at the same time that we had been offered to share that space...umm Mad Camp Arts decided that they couldn't really handle operating and they closed [laughter]...and then we weren't offered the space when they were closed so...so we don't know. We were close. But...that's...we sort of were assuming we would get the space from Mark...kind of haven't really worked on getting other space, that we would probably have to pay for [laughter]...but I - that might be our next step because obviously space isn't happening [laughter].

AB: I think we've covered everything. Is there anything else want to add or anything else you'd like to say?

RG: Umm...your thing is space...umm I guess one of the things I asked when I was starting this was "Has anyone else ever tried this before?" And they said no [laughter]. Everyone said no.

Umm...and I guess the other thing about the space that was not in my initial thinking about it umm...well part of it was that I didn't think it should be – it should be pretty cheap for you go to. Because I don't...Knox County is a very small population to have a science center. It's smaller than almost all science centers, there are a few but very few have...a... places with a population this small have a science center. So I began to think how can this work...because we can't charge a ton of money, because there aren't that many people. And it has to...mostly places survive on about half of their money comes through grants and I'm not entirely sure that can happen here or not. Umm granting agencies, at least local ones, do not want to pay salaries. Salaries are the biggest cost really...and so I've been thinking more about a co-operative venture. I don't know how that will work around here umm...but that may be the only way it can work around here. So there's – there's a lot of financial questions as to whether this kind of thing can work here. And that may be why we don't have anything - we don't have an indoor space for kids to play...we don't have a science center here...and that may be that's its not that financially viable. But maybe no one's ever tired either.

And this whole indoor play thing...I don't think people have felt the need for that in the past and I've tried to kind of figure out why. And I know that everyone says that "I walked ten miles to school, uphill both ways...in the winter." You know kids were just more active outside when we were kids. And that – that may be true...umm kids don't run around the neighborhood and...we don't feel comfortable just letting our kids run free. And I don't think its just because we think they're going to be molested. I...I think if my kid were to run out in the neighborhood I would not worry about him being molested but I'd be worried. So I'm not really sure what has changed. And I think that would be a good question to try to figure out. Why - why do we feel the need for this now? Not a science center because I think that is kind of a new thing, but an indoor play-space. And I'm not sure I really have a handle on it...but I think...I'm not sure exactly...a lot of people will say "Oh it's the TV and the Wii and this and that." But my kid doesn't have a TV and a Wii. And yet I still feel a strong need umm to have an active place. And I don't know...has the weather changed?...[AVI worker passes: "Hi ladies." Rachel responds: "Hello"] Or has the community changed? I'm not sure what's changing and I think that's – to me that's a really interesting question I think that's the kind of thing that you might be interested in.

AB: Yeah...yeah we've actually kind of looked at...you know, we went thought Knox County history looking at past public spaces and then you know are they still existent today? Kind of what has changed?

RG: So what has changed?

AB: Umm...well one example is the train station used to be a popular public space. But with the introduction of new forms of transportation, it changed. Umm... the courthouse, I mean the public square. I think there used to be a lot more events there than there are now.

RG: Would they be all year?

AB: I think probably mostly in the summer months they had more.

RG: But what did they do in the winter? That's what gets me. I mean the summer there are actually a lot of things going on. I mean was it not as cold – I mean it's really cold and we even have better clothing now. I mean really we do. And it just like...even when I send my kid out...I'm like yeah maybe an hour. It's cold out there! Are we just wimps now? So that's sort of the question. I do feel a need to have something like that...but I'm not sure what's changed. Yeah...so...what are you studying exactly about? You said public space and changes.

AB: Yes, we're looking at changes in public spaces and then from there were going to form some kind of project that the center focus is going to be on public spaces. We're not exactly sure what the project is going to be yet. If it's highlighting public spaces, or public events such as festivals and different kinds of fairs. So now we're doing a big survey. Seeing what everyone has to say about public spaces and then from there kind of figuring ok out what we can do from here with the information that we have.

RG: So what are people saying – what are people saying about them?

AB: Well we're all doing our first round interviews right now.

RG: Oh so you don't know [laughter]. And I'm also curious about how – I feel like there's different communities here that don't interact – and I wonder maybe they never interacted. Or maybe there are ways to – maybe they don't want to interact, I don't know. I mean to me...I feel kind of...I feel it's so enriching to meet other people.

AB: Yeah, we've talked a lot about you know, what is a public space? Well it's a place where people, you know, they can show up alone, they don't have to be with a group, and they can just feel a sense of – like a home away from home, in a sense. So we're looking at are there places in the community where people from different backgrounds, different groups, different sections of the community can come together where they do feel like they belong. Even you know...kind of a neutral ground.

RG: Well I think you should – you might want to talk to there's the Moms 2 Moms group that started last year. Umm and I think a lot of us joined it because feeling a lack of such a place to meet other people and it is a ...a very...I don't know if it's representing the whole community, which it probably isn't because its mostly stay at home moms. But its definitely people that I would have no other interaction with. Like...I might see them say at gymnastics or something but I wouldn't have the time to really talk with them. So yeah...anyways it's called Mom, there's a 2, Moms and they have a website...with a contact person who's done a really good job. Umm but I think that people in the group – a lot of people are new they don't have family around and they just felt a real need to meet other people in the community - there wasn't a way to do it outside of your church say. That might be interesting to check out.

AB: Definitely.

RG: It's a public space in that it's open; anyone can join the group and come but its not open 24/7. It's an interesting project you're working on...I'd be – I'll be curious when you conclude anything if you do.

AB: Yeah I'm curious to see what comes out of it. Because I know every year the Rural Life Center they produce something. I don't know if you're aware of the different projects they've done but they did one on local foods and -

RG: Yeah, yeah that's the one I was aware of. And they – another, when I was starting on this project, I live in Gambier. A lot of people in Gambier thought “Oh it should be in Gambier, you should have it here.” And a lot of people outside of Gambier are like “it should definitely not be in Gambier.” And there seems to be...people seem to think that other people were intimidated or didn't like Gambier. And I'm not sure that anyone actually does feel this way...but people thought people felt this way...umm. I mean to me the reason to have it in Mount Vernon is because that is the center of Knox County and we'll be lucky if it survives on the population we have in Knox County, and Gambier is too small. But umm I think there was some real feeling that it should be here because Kenyon is here, because Kenyon does the science. And then again exactly the same reason it should not be here because Kenyon is here and Kenyon does the science [laughter]. So I don't – I don't know if you're going to investigate...who...who feels comfortable in different public places...how – how. I mean - I assume you're studying all Knox County and how the different pieces of Knox County interact in different ways. Is – is Gambier different or would it be the same as Fredericktown, you know [laughter]. So...so that's another aspect that I think would be interesting.

AB: Yeah that definitely is. Well great! You've given me definitely a lot of good ideas.

RG: A lot of things, too many things I'm sure! [laughter]

AB: No, no this is great. A lot of really interesting things.

RG: Well I – I spent - I should tell you how this happened. I – I talked to Ted Rice; I don't know if you've met him, he's a friend of my colleague and the entrepreneur guy. He works with entrepreneurship at Kenyon. Umm...and I talked to him first and I said “Hey this is what I want to do. How to I do it?” And he said “Well I think you should talk to Sam Barone,” he's head of the Community Foundation. So I did. And Sam said, “Well,” and I told him my idea and he said, “you should talk to all these other people.” And he gave me a list of about twenty-five people. And he said, “You should write them a letter.” And I did what he told me to do because I don't know how to do this [laughter]. And umm so I talked to these different people in the community and got their ideas and feed back. And then I looked for people who would be on the planning committee [student voices in background]. And so for a few months I was going to meeting to this...[student voices in background]. I got to know some people in the community who have been really quiet helpful. But I also stopped doing that when we started planning events...I actually still have a lot of people on my list to contact [laughter]. And I haven't gotten out of say Mount Vernon. I mean I've talked to people who are county people but I haven't talked to people in say Fredericktown, unless I know them. And the core group of people is still very focused on people I know at Kenyon. So anyways...it feels to me like there are certain people who run things...but I don't really feel like...I don't really know how to connect to other people as easily. And I feel like the people who run things, they run everything. And they're very busy people because they're doing so many good things. And I don't know what everyone else is doing [laughter]. I don't mean that...I mean I'm sure they're doing good things too [laughter].

Umm so yeah I feel like there is sort of a power structure...and they're all friends and they all know each other. And I think this could be a good thing or a bad thing...I'm not really sure [laughter]. But that's – I don't know if other, bigger communities seem to have more divisions – but I'm mostly talking about Mount Vernon because I feel like Kenyon's sort of a separate community in a lot of ways. I don't know if that helps but...[laughter] I just thought I'd tell you how I went about it.

AB: Yeah that's very interesting.

RG: I mean you're going about it...you've picked people to interview also.

AB: Yeah. Well we just kind of said we want to survey everyone in the community. Then everyone just threw out ideas and then somebody brought up your initiative.

RG: So how did you decide how to survey?

AB: Umm...we have read just about public places. And then who goes to these places? And then we looked at the community and said who can we match in the community? Ok well we want somebody to represent the younger kids, and we looked to your initiative. We looked at, ok we want to look at churches because we know they play a big part, so somebody talked to a minister. Somebody's talking to somebody from the beauty salon, you know. And then...I'm trying to think...there's a few other people but all from various – there's somebody from the hardware store. You know, different places that; you know...if the beauty salon serves as a public place. What goes on here? Who's there? And then looking also at, what are your public places? The focus of this obviously was more on SPI so I didn't ask –

RG: Well I understand. I was just curious. I get to ask questions too [laughter].

AB: Yeah, yeah of course. So, you know, it was basically run we through your day. Where do you go? What places do you identify as kind of your home away from home? So...we're kind of seeing what does the community say about public places? What are their own? Do those come up in other interview? Are they recognized throughout the interview?

RG: Well I think the library is probably one of the best public places. Umm...especially good for parents but I think it's good for everybody. You can even set up meetings there. All ages. The square's good on Framers Market day. In Gambier we meet a lot of people at Middle Ground. I've met people at Sips too. That's a nice place...that's actually a very nice- I'm not always impressed with their food but as a place to meet people it's got a really nice atmosphere. Have you been there?

AB: Yeah.

RG: Yeah...well that's me. Oh, I was going to give you one of these [Rachel handed me last meeting's minutes]... because I have extras. This is something we came up with in May and I don't think most of it has changed. But you can look at it for our website and our goals and

things. That might not be the most current but it's close. And you can go on our website and find the rest of it.

AB: Well great, thank you.

RG: And this is one of the activities we did...homemade bubble prints. We did that at the Makers Market. Oh, here it is these [Rachel handed me last meeting's minutes]... you can have this one because that one's crushed.

AB: Ok, well thank you so much.