

**Family Learning in Interactive Gallery Research  
Impact on Frist Center for the Visual Arts Education and Outreach Department  
Fall 2011**

**Why do the study?**

Through conversations with the educators at the High Museum and The Speed, we realized the need for a larger understanding of how art museum interactive spaces were used by families, and how these spaces functioned within each of our institutions.

**What did Frist educators learn?**

This research project provided our staff an opportunity to learn more about our visitors and their motivations, use and value of the space, and how the experience fits into their family life.

**Who is our audience?**

The majority of our family visitors are mothers with three to four children in tow. The adults are primarily museum goers and art enthusiasts. Of those participating in the Motivation/Use/Value study, 62% had familiarity with Martin ArtQuest Gallery (MAQ) on their first visit and 25% were members of the Frist Center for the Visual Arts (FCVA). Over 46% of the respondents were first time visitors and over 46% were repeat visitors from 2-9 times.

**What is their motivation?**

Families' motivations for visiting the Frist Center ranked as follows: coming for the interactive space (20.7%); practical issues (weather, etc. 17.7%); content (15.2%); social event (13.6%); place-general (13.3%); place exhibition-specific (13.1%); program-based (1.8%); and other (2.1%).

**Why do they visit the space?**

Many parents said they were avid museum visitors before they had children and when their children were born they wanted to expose their children to art. This motivator was the same for parents who did not grow up with the arts. Parents responded that the interactive gallery provided freedom for their children to explore and engage in creative play – together with the adults or independently. Parents valued the chance for them and their children to gain knowledge about art and enhance their art-making skills in the interactive spaces. They saw the MAQ space as a place to unwind and relax a safe place for their children. Staffing in the space is an important aspect for families since they develop relationships with staff over the years and staff members are the ones who help guide the interactive experience.

**How do they use the space?**

The specifics of how the space was used by families were not addressed in this research project, instead the research looked at where the visit to MAQ occurred during the families visit at the Frist Center. The family visits lasted for an average of two hours with the visit to the MAQ typically failing at the end of their time at the Frist Center. Parents used the visit to the space as a “reward” for viewing art in the galleries.

**What did we learn?**

It is very clear that many families would not visit the Frist Center without the Martin ArtQuest Gallery. This interactive art space is a key component in attracting our family audience and sustaining them over the long-term. MAQ serves as an umbrella experience for families. The study has confirmed that the Frist Center's approach to designing this space for intergenerational learning meets a variety of learning styles. Everyone in the family can comfortably explore the space and various activities work to create opportunities for multiple levels of engagement, from toddlers to teenagers to parents.

The interactive gallery serves as a launching point for families and children to explore art, creativity, and imagination, even though the visit is typically at the end of their Frist Center experience. Understanding the order in which families' visit progresses through the Center will impact the continued development of Martin ArtQuest activities.

Other areas that FCVA education staff will consider include:

### **Scaffolding of Programs**

We realize the need to understand and plan for the life cycle of our families and offer opportunities to engage at all ages. Teen and tween programs should be developed to keep children who have "grown up" in Martin ArtQuest coming for something new and for something developmentally appropriate.

### **Marketing**

Staff is considering how to market the programs and space to parents and how to target a variety of age groups by promoting the art, creativity, and play, as well as family time together.

### **Gallery Experiences**

Families do visit the exhibition galleries, but it tends to be a graduated approach based on the child's age. There are opportunities to consider how we engage children in the traditional gallery spaces to encourage spending more time there by families. Programming such as storytelling activities led by staff members or educational components added to exhibitions, such as flip labels or response areas, could increase time in the galleries.

### **Parents**

There were two self-identified types of parents: 1) those that said they were artists or were familiar with the arts and wanted to expose their children to the arts, and 2) those who did not have access to the arts when growing up and wanted an arts experience for their children. As a result, Frist Center educators are exploring programs for parents that help them access the visual arts and feel more comfortable acting as arts facilitators for their children. For example, a parent program in the galleries might be offered during Kids Club, the Saturday children's art program.

### **Home Schools**

Five of the six families in the Frist Center longitudinal case studies home school their children. Recognizing the pivotal role the institution can play in these children's education, educators will consider how tours meet the needs of home school groups and marketing strategies for home school parents.

### **Family Friendly Institution**

Through the research it is evident that the Frist Center is family friendly. However, there is room for improvement and areas for consideration range from membership to marketing, to an examination of how family needs are being met during an average two-hour on-site visit through the amenities of the Café and facilities.