

How Theory Informs Practice, the High Museum of Art

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Who is visiting?

The first thing we examined in the results of this very comprehensive study was who our family audience is. While we expected to see that the majority of our family visitors were Moms and kids, we were surprised to learn that these women considered themselves art enthusiasts. Over 70% percent identified themselves as people who create art for enjoyment. And over 50% of them have taken art classes. They are regular visitors to our museum as well as others in town with over 40% of them having a membership at the High. Understanding more clearly who our current visitors are will help us to more specifically direct our marketing efforts in areas that should help us to build our family audience.

Why are they visiting?

The study confirmed for us that most visitors' motivation for visiting the High Museum is content or special exhibition driven; over 50% of study participants cited this as the motivation for the visit. The Family Learning Gallery is not the primary destination, but plays a supporting role in a family's successful visit to the museum. We were thrilled to learn that over 20% of our Family Learning Gallery visitors listed their motivation for coming to the museum as program-based. In fact 55% of the surveyed families participated in a family program, other than a visit to the family gallery, while there were at the museum. Case study families commented on the success of our family audio tours and discussed reading labels together as a family. This makes us think that more in-gallery family didactic material would improve our family experiences. We are considering a special series of family labels to be added to our permanent collection galleries and moving the self-guiding brochures to an in-gallery location.

Informing the next Family Learning Gallery design

Our current Family Learning Gallery installation has been on view for over five years. With the completion of this research we are beginning to explore the focus and design of the next installation. The results that will most inform our thinking center around what family's value about the current space, their motivations for coming, and how they have used it. We were surprised to learn that almost half of the visitors to the current Greene Family Learning Gallery end their visit there. We had designed the space as jumping off point for families, a place where they could feel comfortable in the museum and

then move into the museum galleries using a range of tools we had developed including, guided tours, self-guiding brochures, and discovery backpacks. Learning that half of our visitor end their visit in the room rather than start there, makes us really rethink where we need position the family tools that will support a gallery visits. In addition if visitor value the Family Learning Gallery as carrot for the children while in the galleries and a place to have some fun and blow off steam before they head home, then we need to design the activities there to build on the gallery and programmatic experiences rather than prepare them for them. This will be a guiding principle for our redesign. We also learned that parents value the social experience for the family as part of the outing to the museum. High received lower marks on this value than the other two museums. This is because our current installation is child focused with and emphasis on creative play, where the parent is a viewer not a participant. In our next installation we will consider more activities that encourage more interaction between the adults and children. However because of our child-focused approach the High received the highest marks in the sections where parents where asked how the experience affected their children's attitudes toward museums and how it built on their social skills, so we will work for a more balanced approach with our next installation.

The qualitative study helped us see where our strengths are in comparison to the other types of museums and leisure activities families participate in. In future installations we will make sure that activities where parents and children can be creative and use their skills of observation are carefully planned and focused upon.

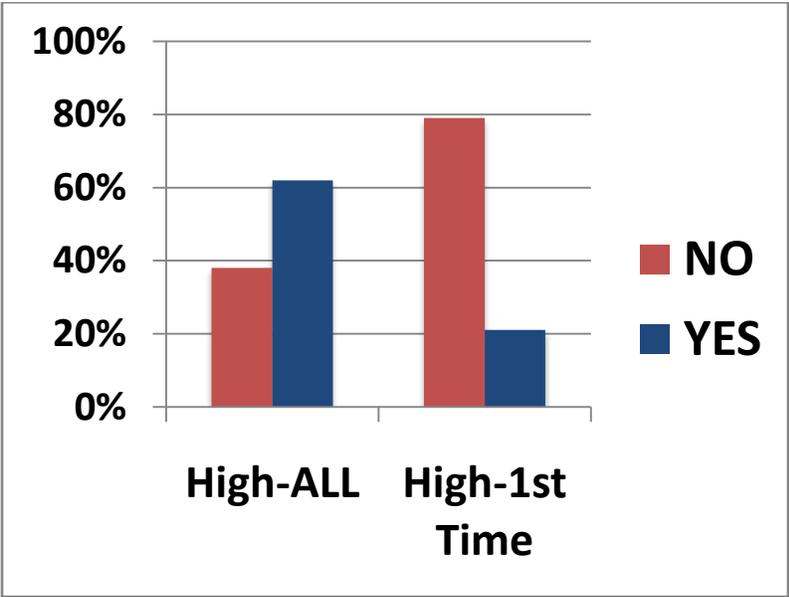
More than the other museums, both studies indicate that families who visited the High engaged in meaningful conversations during their museum visit. The opportunity to spend time in the museum together provided opportunities that they did not usually have. This makes us consider how our public programs and even the new Family Learning Gallery can build on this valued experience.

Informing our Marketing efforts to Families

Finally, we felt the study gave us rich information on which to build our marketing efforts related to families. Two key results in the awareness section of the report caught our attention. Almost 40% of families interviewed stated they were not aware that we had a Family Learning Gallery before they arrived and shockingly, almost 80% of the first time visitors in the study were unaware of the Family

Learning Gallery before their visit. This tells us we have some really opportunities in the way we market to families to build our audiences. In addition it means we need to really work on training with our front of house staff, making sure they are aware of all the programs and special experiences we have for families so that they can appropriately direct families as they enter the museum.

Had you heard of the interactive space before today?



One of the most exciting results of this research is that the museum experience does have a lasting effect on families. That 60% of our study participants are museum members and the High's results were the highest in terms of conversations had by families was also high. The study indicates that High visitors focused on the interactive space as a place of enjoyment, its design, the opportunity to make art in our public programs, and the interactive space as destination children wanted to visit while at the museum helps us to know that we being successful and the we have a strong foundation on which to build as we continue to grow and serve our family audiences.