Visitor Studies: Recent Research in Participant Responses to Education Programs

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In this session we will...

• Share examples of participant experience studies

• Consider the design and results of these studies

• Reflect on how research into your participant’s experiences can help shape your practice
Tangible Memories:
Exploring a Museum Outreach Program for Older Adults in Retirement Communities

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- Introduction
- Methods and Design
- Findings
- Implications for Practice
- General Take-Aways
Program Overview

- **Museum:** Historic Newton
- **Audience:** Older adults
- **Setting:** Outreach (at retirement communities)
- **Topic:** Making and viewing images (focused on photography)
- **Objects:** 13, including stereoscopes and stereographs, a ViewMaster, and cameras from the 1910s - 1970s
- **Type:** Semi-structured reminiscence
- **Length:** One hour
- **Goals:**
  - Engage participants in a multi-sensory experience through the handling of physical objects
  - Help participants access and articulate memories
  - Foster social interaction among residents and with the facilitator and staff
Setting & Sites

- Independent-living residential communities
- Piloted at 2 communities
- Final program implemented at 12 communities
- Variation in size, location, and demographics
  - Community sizes ranged from 40 to 199 living units (mean=96)
  - Urban, suburban, semi-rural
  - Some communities were luxury complexes and others were designed for low-income seniors
Participants

• 114 research participants
• 46% were married, 28% had surviving spouses
• 73% female
• Education ranged from completion of 8\textsuperscript{th} grade to doctoral degrees (average: 3 years post-secondary education)
• Ages ranged from 42-105 (average: 83)
• Group sizes ranged from 4-16 (average: 10)
• Average interest in topic (photography) was 7/10
Selected Research Questions

#1: Do participants feel the program was worthwhile and the goals of memory activation, object handling, and socialization were successful? If so, what, if any, variables are related to these responses?

#2: How do community staff react to the program?
Data Collection Methods

• During the program:
  – Audio recording of discussions
  – Observation

• After the program:
  – Participant paper survey
  – Participant group interview
  – Staff email survey
Data Analysis Methods

• Qualitative data were examined using thematic analysis
• Quantitative data were analyzed using linear regression and logistic regression (to determine if there was a relationship between demographic factors and outcomes)
Research Question #1

Do participants feel the program was worthwhile and the goals of memory activation, object handling, and socialization were successful?

If so, what, if any, variables are related to these responses?
Results: Participant Responses

• Repeat participation & program recommendation
  – 88% of respondents indicated they would participate in a similar program again
  – 89% of respondents indicated they would recommend the program to a friend

• Social interaction: 8/10
• Memory retrieval: 8/10
• Object-handling: 8/10
• Memory sharing enjoyment: 8/10
• Object-handling enjoyment: 8/10
Results: Participant Responses

Participant interest in the topic was significantly related to:

• Whether participants would participate in a similar program again
• Whether participants would recommend the program to friends
• The extent to which participants felt they were able to interact socially
• How much participants enjoyed object handling
• How much participants enjoyed sharing and listening to memories
Research Question #2

How do community staff react to the program?
Results: Staff Reactions

Staff-Observed Benefits

• Socialization
• Reminiscence
• Learning
• Comparison of object-based outreach to:
  – Field trips
  – Traditional didactic outreach
Results: Staff Reactions

Staff-Observed Challenges/Considerations

• Cognitive Challenges
• Physical Challenges
  – Vision
  – Hearing
  – Strength
  – Motor Coordination
• Timing
Specific Implications for Practice

• Important to offer outreach programs for those who cannot or will not participate in field trips
• Provide touchable objects and interactive experiences rather than lectures/slide shows
• Align program topics with the interests of participants, when possible
• Discuss timing with community staff in advance
• Consider the weight and size of objects
• Use communities’ sound systems to amplify voice
General Research Take-Aways

• Be open to unexpected findings, but spend a lot of time honing guiding research questions
• Match methods to questions
• Pilot test/Prototype in advance
• Work as a team to share workload and ensure reliability when interpreting data
• Partner with colleges/universities to leverage expertise while keeping costs reasonable
• Ask different questions at different times to keep things manageable
Acknowledgments & Discussion

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• The participating community residents and staff members

Questions or comments?
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Case Study: Researching over Time

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Designing & Implementing

Considering the Participant Experience

Putting Results into Action

Action Steps & Questions
SCHOOLWIDE IMPACT/YEAR

75 HRS SPP TIME
27 HRS EA X 3D TEACHER
10 VTS LESSONS X 633 STUDENT
6330 HRS SPENT IN/ART SCHOOL

3 YRS - 90 WORKS OF ART/STUDENT
ARTS INTEGRATION
CTS
ATTITUDE, R.E.ART MUSEUMING
STUDENT-CENTERED LEARN
Plan ahead.

Define measurable goals.

Decide how you will use the results.
Considering the participant experience
Results come from what happens (not what you wish happened).

Use participants’ language.

Fit methods to the program.
Putting results into action
Refine programs.

Advocate with data.

Share with the field.
Action Steps
How will you do this in your work?

Write down one thing you will try next week.

@sarabethegan
@NEMANet
Before

I feel personally connected to:

Bringing friends to visit

After

Museum staff

Questions?
How might you use the information we’ve shared in your own practice?

Take a few minutes and discuss with the person next to you.

Then we’ll discuss ideas and questions as a group.