

A single parent with multiple kids at a museum

Team Report

The chosen target population was a single parent with multiple children in a museum. Our museum of choice was the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. We were unable to spend time in the museum on the first try due us finding out that we needed to get clearance from the museum to interview museum-goers. However, the next day we decided to simply observe the specified population in the museum so that we would not have to wait on clearance. Our first observation was that there were about 5 to 10 children, but only in the courtyard area of the museum. In the courtyard, an elder lady was overseeing three children ranging from ages 2 to 4. We assumed she was their grandmother, or at least was somewhat related to them. She never let them out of her sight but would interact with them as they climbed around and played.

We then made our way up to the Art gallery on the second floor. There, we only ran into four children in total. The first group was accompanied by a middle-aged man, or P2. P2 was walking through the art gallery leisurely while his children trailed behind him, not paying attention to the paintings, and actively bothering one another. The second and last group consisted of a middle aged man with one daughter. Unlike the previous group, this child did not have any siblings with her, and sadly, she looked exceptionally bored and not happy to be in the gallery / museum. We noticed that there were not a lot of single parents with multiple children, so we observed all families in the museum.

Next, we decided to wander towards an area with more interactivity. We went to the Benedum Hall of Geology, where we immediately noticed a child with a single parent. The major difference was that this child was not paying attention to his parent whatsoever: he was playing with the mysteries of mobile earth. An interactive video / console that explains the geology of the world. There were some children in the other interactive center but the door was closed and we were unable to observe them, we merely heard them laughing.

We went to the Dinosaur exhibit next. There were definitely a lot more children in this area, and more single parents with multiple children. Ironically the first family we ran into the P2 family again. The father was reading intently, but this time, the children were actually interacting with the exhibit. In the dinosaur exhibit there are touch screens in front of almost every model, and although the children did not look like they were actually

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learning, they were very engaged with the touch screen. Eventually family P2 moved over to two “Teen Mentors” who magically captivated the attention of the children and the father. The entire family began intently listening to the mentors as they talked to the family about, we can only guess, the exhibit. The next family we saw consisted of a middle aged woman with four children: one baby, two young daughters, and a son around 10+ years old. The two daughters would not stop asking their mother random questions about dinosaurs, and the poor mother answered all questions with exhausted and unenthusiastic yes’s or no’s. The final family we observed was an elderly lady with one daughter. During this time, we were playing around with one of the interactive screens in the exhibit. The little girl was watching as we just navigated around the interface. The longer we spent perusing, the closer the girl got to the screen. At some point in time we made a little room for the child and like a dart she shot forward and began interacting with the screen herself. Keep in mind, no words were exchanged between the little girl and her caretaker the entire time she watched us.

We then spoke to an employee in the exhibit and asked him a few questions about the families that go to the museum. We found out that the children absolutely love the Interactive and Dinosaur exhibits because, unlike the other exhibits, the children are allowed to touch. He also explained that the children abhor the Roads of Arabia exhibit. After our impromptu chat we headed up to the second floor where the interactive exhibit is located. There was a large quantity of children, with and without caretakers in some cases. But the most noticeable thing about this floor was that every parent or caretaker was actively engaged with the children, or with what the children were doing. Pictures were being taken left and right, adults would stand behind children and watch as they perform interactive tasks, and in some cases, the adults were actually playing with the children.

During our stay at the museum, we observed a number of problems. One of the main problems observed was a discordance between the energy, or enthusiasm, level of the parent and children. In some cases, the parents seemed tired and unenthusiastic, while the children were overly energetic and asking multiple questions or running around. In this case, the parents were unable to engage with their children and reciprocate their enthusiasm. In other cases, the parents walked leisurely and enjoyed the exhibit, while the children were bored and inattentive.

Another problem observed was that, in some cases, the exhibit was not designed to accommodate for children. For instance, some pictures were placed too high for children to be able to view properly. Some exhibits could not engage children because the content was not interactive or entertaining, and the documentation was mostly text. For instance, the Roads of Arabia exhibit seemed exceptionally boring for children. The exhibit was filled

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with old artifacts from Saudi Arabia. They could not grasp the value of these artifacts, and the documentation (consisting mostly of posters filled with text) was not entertaining, so the children were very inattentive. Another potential concern is that the museum is not child-proof. The low railing along the stairs and sharp objects scattered around the exhibit are all possible threats.

Finally, another problem was that most children wanted to be outdoors, rather than inside the museum. While some exhibits were interactive and engaged the children, in many situations the children became antsy and wanted to go play outdoors. As the children became restless, the parent became overwhelmed.



Dinosaur exhibit in the third floor