Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose Youth Programs

Baseline Assessment Report

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January 27, 2003
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Summary:

In an attempt to better understand the participants of *Discovery Youth* and *Getchy*, Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose's (CDM) Youth Programs staff commissioned an online survey to get a sense of the participants' self-image, relationships with adults, attitudes toward learning, and technical skills. A group of Youth Programs' participants responded to a ten-item survey; the results were aggregated electronically and are summarized below. In general, the responses are best described as mixed. For example, the participants expressed a high degree of confidence in representing CDM to the public, but indicated much less confidence in their ability to present their work to strangers. Overall, the results of this survey paint a picture of a group of adolescents who are very much engaged by the goals of the youth programs and are excited by the opportunities that exist at CDM.

Process:

To compile this report, an independent evaluator worked with CDM staff to develop a process for collecting baseline information from Youth Programs participants. The key steps in this process were:

> Interviewing staff to determine goals for *Discovery Youth* and *Getchy* programs and for the information that the survey aimed to collect
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> Developing and revising questions for pre-program survey to determine baseline life skills and technology fluency, as well as identify areas of interest for participants
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> Authoring a web-based survey for participants with the capability to aggregate and display response summaries for questions on a scale of one to five
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> Creating email addresses for participants to facilitate the survey response process
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> Collecting data electronically and reporting findings to give staff insight into the participants' interests, confidence, hopes, and skills

Findings:

Twenty-three of the most regular Youth Programs participants responded to the electronic survey. The survey consisted of ten questions that asked students to rank their skills as well as reflect on their relationships with teachers and other adults.

> Technology Skills and Projects

By considering a response of "Pretty Darn Good" or "I Rule" as an expression of confidence (rankings of 4 and 5 respectively on a five-point scale), 70% of the respondents expressed confidence in sending e-mail and 77% felt confident about their skills surfing the World Wide Web. In general, the participants were less confident about their skills creating multimedia. The items about creating web pages, scanning pictures and using Macromedia Flash each had only one "I Rule" response. Only two respondents expressed that same high degree of confidence in using Adobe Photoshop. On the other

hand, 77% of the students felt good about their skills using a digital camera, and 90% felt confident using a video camera. One possible reason for these last two answers is that most of the respondents took this survey in January after several months of coming to CDM.

The participants were also asked to indicate their interest in different activities that they would like to work on at CDM on a scale of 1 to 5. 64% of participants responded that making a movie was a "must do"; 55% provided that same answer for creating animations. Only 18% responded that designing science projects was a must do for them, although a combined 54% said that working on science projects "sounds cool" or "would be okay."

Relationships with Adults

One of the goals of *Discovery Youth* and *Getchy* is to give adolescents the chance to build positive relationships with adults. Several questions on the survey were designed to elicit reflections by the participants on how adults see them. In addition to giving the participants a chance to think of others' perspectives, asking these questions provides an venue for reflecting on one's self-image without the pressure of directly asking how one feels about one's self.

81% of the survey's respondents indicated that they "always" or "usually" have an adult in their lives that they "feel secure going to with a problem or a question." This encouraging number could mean that participants have already started to bond with CDM staff; in the year-end survey this question should be broken up into two or three questions to get more precise data.

Next, DY participants were asked to rank how adults see them on a scale of one to five, where one was "shy" and five was "extremely confident"; 27% answered "3"; 36% answered "4" and 22% answered "5". These responses were mirrored by staff who described the Discovery Youth cohort as a "confident bunch." On a scale of one to five where one equaled "Adults think I am careless" and five equaled "Adults think I am Super Responsible", just under 86% of the participants responded with either a "3" or a "4". These items are important because CDM's Youth Programs are designed to help adolescents see themselves as confident responsible young adults as they transition from children to teens, and from middle school to high school.

Schoolwork

After responding about generic adults, participants were asked to reflect on how their teachers think about them. They answered, "My teachers think that I am…." on a scale of "a slow learner (1) to "absolute genius" (5). A combined 86% of the students answered with three or four. On one hand, this could indicate that indeed these youth believe they are held in fairly high regard by their teachers. On the other hand, it could just as well be that asking one to reflect on learning is a very sensitive question that is difficult for adolescents to answer truthfully.

Overall, the respondents have positive feelings about school. On a scale of one to five where one equaled "totally disagree" and five equaled "completely agree" an answer of one or two was considered "disagree" and four or five considered "agree". Only 27% agreed with the statement that "Learning in school is boring." 41% agreed that "school is easy for me", but 82% agreed that "my classes are useful." 87% agreed that "I have a lot of friends at school". Finally, the most equally distributed responses were to the question "School is stressful": 18% marked "1"; 18% marked "2"; 18% marked "3"; 14% marked "4" and 32% marked "5".

Self-Confidence

The final two survey items asked participants to reflect on their confidence in representing their work and Children's Discovery Museum to a variety of audiences. Students were asked to evaluate a series of experiences between "Worse than swallowing a cockroach" (1) and "Better than free pizza" (5). While 91% of the participants rated "working on teams" 3 or higher, only 37% rated "working with people you don't know well" as high. One of the aims of Discovery Youth is to bring youth into contact with a diverse peer group different from the groups that participants tend to meet at their schools. Hopefully, participants will have positive experiences working with new people in this program and will indicate a higher response to this item in the year-end survey.

In this initial survey, participants felt significantly more confident explaining their work to friends – 86% marked "4" or "5" -- than strangers – where only 32% marked "4" or "5." Questions regarding speaking in front of a group and representing CDM to the public received relatively evenly distributed responses.

The final question of the survey was designed to assess participants' feelings about representing CDM in public. Participants were asked to rate on a scale of one to five how they would feel about interacting on the museum floor with people of different ages. In general, the responses all indicated a fairly high degree of confidence in being able to represent CDM to all audiences; 50% responded that they "would be great" at representing CDM to children ages 4-6. This final question indicated that Youth Programs participants have a high degree of self-confidence in the CDM environment where they are experts in the exhibits and design of the museum.

Challenges:

The challenges of this initial report can be grouped into two main categories: logistical challenges and accuracy of self-reporting. Of the logistical challenges two are worth mentioning because they impacted the data collection. First, because the survey was done online, each respondent needed to have an email address. Setting up email addresses for minors required developing a process for getting permission from parents. Only after parental permission was obtained and participants taught how to use email, could the survey be distributed. The second logistical obstacle was overcoming the turnover of the Youth Programs Staff; a new staff member was hired in the summer of

2002 but left by January 2003. By the time this new staff member's learning curve had leveled off, he left CDM. Unfortunately, this delayed the coordination of this survey and instead of a baseline assessment, our report is closer to a mid-year working paper.

The second challenge to this survey is the validity of the answers. Because most of the respondents filled out the survey in the public forum of the CDM Media Studio, it is possible that their answers were affected by the fact that their workspace was not private. Perhaps, respondents felt peer pressure when answering as it is likely that their fellow participants were nearby. On the other hand, the Media Studio is where the kids have access to computers; it is reasonable to assume that the participants would have felt pressure from parents had they taken this survey from their home computer.

Future Plans

Near the end of the Program Year, CDM's Youth Programs staff and evaluator will develop a similar survey instrument to try to get at least a small idea of how the programs have impacted the participants' lives. The results of that final survey will play a part in a more comprehensive summative evaluation that will be produced during Summer 2003.