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INTRODUCTION

Hang@MFAH (Houston.Art.New.Generation at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) is an innovative program for motivated teens who are interested in everything from video-game hacking to talking about art. The program includes a variety of meetups where young people are able to hang out, mess around, and geek out (HOMAGO).

Evaluation Focus

The focus of this evaluation was to determine the degree to which participation in hang@mFAH fostered personal creative growth, social collaborative engagement, and connections to community.

A set of benefit statements, written from a youth perspective, was developed for each of the three larger outcome categories.

Personal Creative Growth

- I actively produce, create, and experiment.
- Activities are driven by my interest/passion.
- I am more sensitive to my own creative process.
- I understand how the creative process is fueled by experimentation and reflection.
- I have some say in what we do and how we do it.
- My opinion is valued.

Social Collaborative Engagement

- I learn a lot from other teens and artists.
- I contribute to the learning of other teens and artists.
- I see how the creative process works with a group of people.

Connections to Community

- I see how this experience and what I do or learn at school and at home relate.
- I feel a sense of ownership for this space.



METHODOLOGY

Because of the organic, experimental nature of hang@mFAH, the MFAH educators and Audience Focus evaluator decided that the methodology should also reflect that spirit. The evaluator made two site visits during 2013 to observe the program and had conversations with teens as they worked on projects. They completed a brief rating of the benefit statements on an iPad interface. The protocol for the conversation and online survey is in Appendix A.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Description of Sample

Thirteen young people were interviewed who were in the 9th through 12th grades. See figure 1 for the counts. Of these thirteen teens, seven were female and six were male. Youth were asked to rate the factors in figure 2 according to the considerations they make when deciding on what programs to attend at the Museum. All four of the statements were rated by most youth but “exploring works of art” was rated by all in the sample.

Grade	#
9th	5
10th	1
11th	4
12th	2
TOTAL:	12

Figure 1: Grade level of sample (Note: only 12 teens responded to this question.)

Factors	#
I want to explore the works of art at the MFAH.	13
I want to learn new digital skills such as Photoshop or iMovie.	9
I want a place to meet other teens who share similar interests as me.	11
I want a place to hang out with my friends and peers.	11

Figure 2: Factors teens consider in deciding what to do at the MFAH (Respondents could check all that applied.)

When young people were asked to select the types of activities they most hoped to experience at the Museum, everyone in the sample indicated that they sought activities that fed into their personal interests. Figure 3 provides counts for all of the statements.

Participate in interest-driven activities	13
Structured activities	5
Unstructured, informal activities	7
Production of digital media projects	10
Learn more about works of art	11

Figure 3: What teens hope to do at the MFAH

All youth in the sample indicated that they felt welcome at the Museum and they intended to return the following semester.

A number of challenges sometimes got in the way of teens being able to attend hang@MFAH. Time management issues and transportation were primary challenges. (See figure 4.)

Challenges	#
Too much homework!	1
I live far away.	3
It's difficult to find transportation to the Museum.	5
Time-management issues: I have too many other extracurricular activities. School is just so busy sometimes.	10

Figure 4: Challenges for teens

Friday nights for the hang@MFAH program were preferred by most teens.

Personal Creative Growth

Youth were asked to rate a set of statements on an eight-point scale with eight being most important for their Museum experience. Creativity that was fueled by their own experimentation was rated highest, followed by the opportunity to actively create. See figure 5.

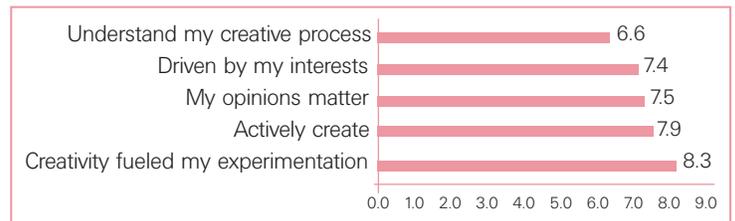


Figure 5: Personal benefit ratings (mean scores on an 8-point scale)

Youth identified many benefits in personal and creative growth as a result of participating in hang@MFAH. The ability to tap into their creative side was most often mentioned, followed by the opportunity to learn interesting things. The following quotes illustrate these benefits.

“All of the technology [is the best part], having a teacher that understands it. It’s not very often that we have stuff like this and a teacher who can explain it to students. Some teachers just mumble it. Mike is very expressive. And allowing us the freedom to use all this technology the way we want and with a person who understands it is great.”

“Definitely creating different things, learning everything new, and the maker bot silk screening was fun, making t-shirts. Learning different parts of the technology was great. It looks complex but so easy and you just learn.”

“Getting to be as creative as I can without having to worry about getting access to things. One person can ask: ‘Can I do this?’ and everyone else can work it.”

“We learn new things and how to work with different supplies that I am not used to. It is interesting and I enjoy it.”

Social Collaborative Engagement

For many teens, the social or collaborative aspect of the program was the greatest benefit. Understanding the role of the group in the creative process and the value of learning from others were the highest rated social/collaborative benefit statements. See figure 6.

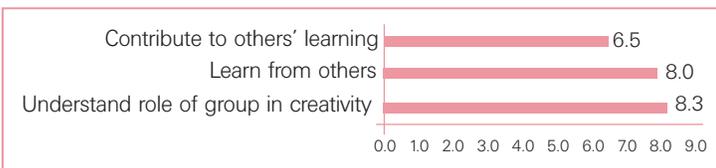


Figure 6: Social/collaborative benefit ratings (mean scores on an 8-point scale)

Youth liked being able to problem-solve together and being with others who share similar interests. The following quotes illustrate the ways teens talked about this benefit.

“I like getting to build and interact with other people.”

“This drawing bot we created ourselves, not really getting help, yeah we get help but we do it ourselves.”

“Mike suggested the idea and we all contributed a lot.”

“I’m with people who understand. They have the same interest as me and they relate to me. I like that I’m learning new things and I get to meet a lot of cool people—kids and adults.”

Connections to the Community

Youth rated two benefit statements related to connections to community. The highest rated statement reflected that teens recognized how what they did at hang@MFAH related to what they did at school and home. See figure 7.

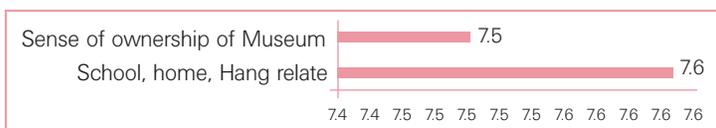


Figure 7: Community connection benefits rating (mean score 8-point scale)

Young people felt very comfortable at the Museum, considering it “their” place. Some of the ways they connected this experience with school was by comparing how much more fun it was to learn at the Museum than at school.

“There are rules but not strict, you can just hang out and be teenagers.”

“There is not really a specific thing you are supposed to be doing, you just do what you want. The instructors, they are not like teachers as in—do this do that.”



Future Directions & Suggestions

A few young people had suggestions for the future direction of hang@MFAH, such as getting more people in the program, although how many would be enough was not clear to them. One teen would like to do filmmaking and animation. But most youth answered this question by referencing how they benefited from the experience.

“I’m looking forward to projects I’ve never done before. Things that I could learn from and probably use later on in life, I’m hoping to grasp some knowledge to figure out what I want to do when I grow up, what I want to major in.”

“It could definitely be bigger, more kids, I hope it will and we will have new tools to work with, created new stuff. Otherwise I don’t have anything specific I want to do, I will go with the flow.”

“[I’ve been with the program] since the beginning and have seen it change a lot. Getting more people to sign up would be great. (How many more?) I don’t know, would be hard to work on a project if too many people but I don’t know.”

“It could go anywhere, and I’m excited to find out what might happen. Maybe it will veer more toward the traditional side of things and maybe it will stay technological.”

“It would be cool if we could all do a big project together. I like how it is now. We have our own but we all help each other so we learn about that. It’s fun.”

Only three teens reflected upon something that could be improved in the program. One youth felt that some participants were not as dedicated as she hoped and that affected how productive they could be. One person noted that the projects were rarely if ever about traditional art forms. This wasn’t exactly a criticism, more of an observation. Another teen wished that occasionally they could continue working on projects at home.



CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The hang@MFAH model has evolved into a successful format that engages young people in innovative ways. Teens are enthusiastic about what the program has to offer them. They value the experience as rich and unique opportunities to learn. The benefit areas of personal, social, and community were all met.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Please rate the degree (scale of 1–10) to which your experience with hang@MFAH resulted in the following:

- I actively produce, create, and experiment.
- Activities are driven by my interest/passion.
- I learn a lot from other teens and artists.
- I contribute to the learning of other teens and artists
- I see how this experience and what I do or learn at school and at home relate.
- I see or understand more about my own creative process.
- I see how the creative process works with a group of people.
- I understand how the creative process is fueled by experimentation and reflection.
- I have some say in what we do and how we do it.
My opinion is valued.

What is the coolest part of hang@MFAH?

What doesn’t excite you about hang@MFAH?

How did you decide to come to hang@MFAH and WHY?
Was it your decision or your parent’s/other adult?

How long have you been coming to hang@MFAH?

Are you planning to come back to hang@MFAH next semester?
 Yes No Don’t know/not sure

Because kids have a say in what is done at hang@MFAH, where could hang@MFAH go next? What would you like to do or learn in the future with hang@MFAH?

Hang@MFAH is sort of an odd mash-up of technology and art. What do you think about that?

Think about your level of interest in art and science. Do you consider yourself more of an art person or a technology/science person?

ART

TECHNOLOGY/SCIENCE

What grade in school are you?

Your grade as of Fall 2013.

7th 10th

8th 11th

9th 12th

Are you...?

Female Male