



Impact Planning, Evaluation & Audience Research

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Formative Evaluation:
***Engaging New Americans* program**

Prepared for the
Harvard Art Museums
Cambridge, MA

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SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This summary contextualizes the findings from a formative evaluation of the *Engaging New Americans* program conducted by Randi Korn & Associates, Inc. (RK&A) for the Harvard Art Museums (HAM) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Museums partner with local community organizations that provide citizenship and English-language courses to offer multi-visit art museum experiences to immigrant populations.

The findings presented here are among the most salient. Please read the body of the report for a more comprehensive presentation of findings.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation findings demonstrate that the *Engaging New Americans* program provides experiences that are of great value to local immigrant populations. Interviewees highly valued opportunities to look at original works of art, learn about the works of art in a meaningful and relevant context, and discuss and share their thoughts and opinions with others. These three program elements—opportunities for authentic close-looking, relevance and meaning-making, and sharing—proved to be highly successful aspects of the program. First, the majority of interviewees had never been to an art museum, and most described feelings of awe and being pleasantly surprised by the beauty, age, and variety of works of art in the Museums' collections. This experience, interviewees said, helped them gain an overall appreciation for art and art museums. Thus, providing opportunities to look closely at authentic works of art is indeed one unique value of an art museum experience. In fact, two-thirds of interviewees described the program experience as more dynamic and authentic than learning in a classroom.

Interviewees also appreciated that the program helped them experience works of art in a more meaningful context. Findings show that this was successfully done in two ways—creating opportunities for sharing and discussion and providing points of relevance. One-third of interviewees said they most valued learning about works of art through stories and narrative, a strategy that is often successful with novice art viewers (Housen, 1983). Another one-third of interviewees said they most valued sharing their experience, thoughts, and opinions about the works of art with others—strategies also used with novice art viewers to help them create meaning from works of art (Yenawine, 1998). Several participants also appreciated the program's points of relevance, such as a chance to practice English and relate works of art and activities to their everyday life and experiences.

Findings also demonstrate that participants encountered challenges during their program experience, specifically understanding and expressing themselves in English, which is to be expected. A few interviewees shed additional light on this challenge by explaining that the combination of expressing their opinions about something new (works of art) in a language they are not fully comfortable with can be quite difficult. The program addresses this challenge by providing bilingual staff to facilitate participants' experiences looking at and discussing works of art. In fact, about two-thirds of interviewees said that staff played a vital role facilitating their learning about works of art and artists. The program also addresses this challenge by introducing more abstract works of art, such as those in the modern and contemporary collections, later in the program experience (i.e., during the final museum visit). Another more subtle challenge is connecting the program to participants' experiences as new

Americans. While some interviewees recalled program experiences that related to their immigrant experience, others connected the program experience to their everyday life in a more general or tangential way (e.g., an interesting experience they can share with others). Further, connecting the program to their experience as new Americans was not necessarily top of mind when participants discussed what was most valuable to them about the program. Thus, staff might consider making these connections more explicit throughout the program if this is a primary goal.

Overall, the *Engaging New Americans* program is a valuable resource for local immigrant communities because it provides opportunities to look at original works of art, learn about the works of art in a meaningful and relevant context, and discuss and share thoughts and opinions with others. Such programs are rare among museum-community partnerships; thus, sharing the program's successful strategies, as well as finding ways to continually perfect the program, can be of great value to the museum community as a whole.

REFERENCES

- Housen, Abigail. *The Eye of the Beholder: Measuring Aesthetic Development*. Ed.D. Diss., Harvard University, 1983a.
- Yenawine, Phillip. (1998). Visual Art and Student-Centered Discussions. *Theory into Practice*. 37 (4), 314-322.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from a formative evaluation of the *Engaging New Americans* program conducted by Randi Korn & Associates, Inc. (RK&A) for the Harvard Art Museums (HAM) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The program offers multi-visit art museum experiences to immigrants who are taking citizenship and English-language classes at local community organizations. This evaluation explores the experiences of English-language learners, specifically those participants’:

- ◆ Attitudes toward museums (e.g., do participants emerge feeling more comfortable and confident in their ability to engage with art and art museums?);
- ◆ Perceptions of the value and/or challenges associated with learning in a museum environment (e.g., using the museum environment to improve their English); and
- ◆ Meaning-making related to their experiences as new Americans (i.e., whether their program experiences resonate with their everyday experiences and concerns).

METHODOLOGY

In-depth interviews were used to explore interviewees’ thoughts and ideas with respect to the evaluation objectives above. In-depth interviews encourage and motivate interviewees to describe their experiences, express their opinions and feelings, and share with the interviewer the meaning they constructed from an experience. In-depth interviews produce data rich in information because interviewees talk about their personal experiences. The interview guide was intentionally open-ended to allow interviewees the freedom to discuss what they felt was meaningful (see the Appendix for the English and Spanish versions of the interview guide).

Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of data from a small number of people. While in-depth interviews may increase practitioners’ understanding of people, they may also reduce their ability to form generalizations. Because data sets are small, findings should be weighed against what the reader knows and believes to be true based on his/her own expertise, as each perspective has equal, but different, value. Additionally, more value should be given to comments made by “most” interviewees versus those made by one or two interviewees; however, the reader should still consider the comments made by “a few” interviewees when thinking about findings, as one person may offer valuable insight.

RK&A, in collaboration with HAM staff, purposely selected two multi-visit *Engaging New Americans* programs at which to collect data.¹ Participants in these programs are beginning (ESOL A) and intermediate level (ESOL B) English-language learners who participate in English-language classes at a local community organization. Participants were eligible to participate in a telephone interview about their experience if they had attended the program at least twice. At the beginning of each program, HAM staff made an announcement about the evaluation, requesting participants’ contact information to conduct telephone interviews. Willing participants filled out a contact sheet with their information, and this information was compiled in a document and sent to RK&A. From each program list, RK&A randomly selected participants to interview. If these individuals were not able to participate in an interview (either due to their selecting not to do so or inability to reach them), another participant was

¹ One additional program designed for intermediate level (ESOL B) English-language learners was included in the sample to help reach the interview quota.

randomly selected. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, conducted in Spanish, and transcribed to English to facilitate analysis. Interviews were conducted March to May 2011.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING METHOD

Interviewees' responses to interview questions were analyzed qualitatively, meaning that the evaluator studied the data for meaningful patterns and, as patterns and trends emerged, grouped similar responses. Trends and themes within the data are presented in thematic sections, and, within each section, findings are reported in descending order starting with the most-frequently occurring.

This report uses verbatim quotations from interviews (edited for clarity) to give the reader the flavor of participants' thoughts and opinions, and to illustrate their ideas as fully as possible. Interviewees' gender, age, and English-language level appear in brackets following quotations. Within quotations, the interviewer's comments appear in parentheses.

Findings are organized around the following six areas:

SECTIONS OF THE REPORT:

1. Introduction
2. Perception of Staff Role
3. Overall Impressions of Art Museums
4. Changes in Perceptions of Art and Art Museums
5. Learning in a Museum Environment
6. Relevance to Everyday Life and Experiences

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

RK&A conducted in-depth telephone interviews with 23 program participants who had participated at least twice in the *Engaging New Americans* program. All interviewees were from English-language classes offered by local community organizations. Eight interviewees are considered beginning level (ESOL A) English-language speakers, and the remaining 15 interviewees are considered intermediate level (ESOL B) English-language learners.²

Slightly more than one-half of interviewees are female ($n = 12$), and the other one-half are male ($n = 11$). Interviewees' ranged in age from 19 to 67 years, with a median of 36. Most interviewees had never visited an art museum before the program ($n = 21$), and interviewees had participated in the *Engaging New Americans* program two to four times, with a median of three.

PERCEPTION OF STAFF ROLE

When asked about the role Museum staff played in their experience, about two-thirds of interviewees said staff played an important role facilitating their learning about works of art and artists they saw during their visit (see the first quotation below). Some of these interviewees also said they appreciated that staff solicited their opinions and tied discussions and activities into things that were relevant to them (see the second quotation). The remaining one-third of interviewees made general comments that staff were friendly, knowledgeable, and accommodating, but they did not elaborate further about staff's facilitation role (see the third quotation).

(What role did the museum staff play in your experience?) They narrated the stories that we heard and told us about the characters in the art. I had never met people like them; they gave us a lot of attention and were very good to us. [female, 31, ESOL B]

[Staff played] a very important [role] because [they] took time to understand what was important for us, and they shared the story of the artwork. (What had the most impact on you?) [The opportunity] to share our dreams and how the art expressed this for us. [female, 20, ESOL A]

The staff were very kind, very knowledgeable and charismatic, and in the short time we were there, [they] made us feel very good. [male, 51, ESOL B]

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF ART MUSEUMS

The majority of interviewees had never visited an art museum before; when asked to describe their overall impressions, interviewees' comments were extremely positive. Most described feeling awed by the beauty, age, and variety of works of art they saw, as well as an appreciation for being given the opportunity to see such things (see the first two quotations below). Several interviewees also appreciated the opportunity to learn about the works of art in a way that made the works of art more

² The original sampling plan included a more even split of beginning and intermediate level English-language learners; however, due to low attendance at one program and the timeline for evaluation, participants were randomly selected from another intermediate level program to reach the interview quota.

meaningful (see the third quotation). The few interviewees who had been to an art museum before said this experience was better because the program context helped them learn more about the works of art (as opposed to an unguided visit) (see the fourth quotation).

(And what were your general impressions?) The beauty that is found in these art pieces I have never seen before; it was very interesting that there were many different types of things that they call art and that there [are] very old pieces, and I marveled at how they could still have these things. [female, 39, ESOL B]

Oh! It was emotional; I could never have imagined that one day I would be standing in front of a beautiful painting like that of a Picasso. And there were other paintings too, from Italian painters, and I don't remember the date that they were painted but it could be around 1800. [male, 45, ESOL B]

I thought so many things because I had never seen paintings like that. When we each got to choose one painting and then had to describe it; that was very emotional for me. [female, 53, ESOL A]

(And how would you compare [your other art museum visits] to this experience?) Well, it was completely different; in our country, we didn't get as much information, and it really doesn't compare the same way. This time was much better because it was more current. (More current in what way?) In that we received more current information about the paintings and sculptures. [female, 20, ESOL B]

CHANGES IN PERCEPTIONS OF ART AND ART MUSEUMS

When asked specifically whether the experience changed how they view art and/or art museums, the majority said it did. These interviewees described being surprised by the beauty of the works of art and gaining an overall appreciation for art and art museums (see the first quotation below). Further, some said that the program made the works of art more exciting and understandable by placing them in a meaningful context (see the second quotation). A few also expressed an explicit desire to return and view more works of art. The few remaining interviewees who said the experience did not change how they view art/art museums explained that they had never stopped to consider their views of art/art museums or already appreciated art/art museums (see the third quotation).

(Has this experience changed how you view art or art museums?) I didn't know that it was like that in art museums; it was much more beautiful and I couldn't imagine that fine art was like that. [male, 19, ESOL B]

The truth is that I didn't like [art] much before; now, I like it much more; you learn about what the painting means, how it was made; I like it now because I understand it better. [female, 20, ESOL B]

I don't think that there is much difference, because I always believed that [art museums] had antique things, that they maintained them, and that's what I saw as part of this experience. [male, 34, ESOL A]

LEARNING IN A MUSEUM ENVIRONMENT

RK&A asked interviewees about the value and challenges of learning in a museum, as well as to compare the program experience to learning in a classroom.

MOST VALUABLE ASPECTS

When asked what was most valuable about their experience, about one-third of interviewees said they enjoyed learning about the works of art through stories and narrative (see the first quotation below). Another almost one-third said they enjoyed sharing the experience with others, as well as being given the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions about the works of art (see the second quotation). Several described the value of the experience as being exposed to something new and different (see the third quotation), and several others said they valued being able to practice and use English while looking at works of art (see the fourth quotation). A couple responses were idiosyncratic (i.e., valued feeling welcomed by staff, valued learning about conserving works of art).

(What was the most worthwhile part of your program experience?) The narrative about the small Buddha statue. Why is that? Because the story that they told us was pretty common, simple, but it leaves us with a message, most of all. . . . The message there is the idiosyncrasy of the Buddha, what it transmits to humanity as a whole. [male, 56, ESOL B]

The part when we talked about the paintings, and we got to discuss what we thought of them, and they asked us to describe the painting and why we liked them. (And why did you like that?) I liked that part because we got to ask questions that helped us understand and describe [the work of art] better; for example, there was one with a boy and a girl, and the girl was in the air, so we didn't know if she was dead and if it was her spirit or [if] she was pinned to a tree, and it was very impressive to me. [female, 53, ESOL A]

To learn and know that there are other things we can do. (So that was worth your while, knowing that there are other things you can do?) Yes; that we don't have to just work, but that it is worthwhile to do other things and to learn about culture and other people. [male, 38, ESOL B]

All of it was worthwhile, but I really liked the last part where we took an artwork and read about the characters in it. (And why did you like this?) Because we could read in English, and I was able to do it and learn how to read better in English. [male, 19, ESOL B]

MOST CHALLENGING ASPECTS

When asked what was most challenging about the experience, about one-half of interviewees said that understanding and expressing themselves in English was the most challenging aspect of the experience (see the first quotation below). A few elaborated, saying that the combination of expressing their opinions about something new (works of art) in a language they were not fully comfortable with was challenging (see the second quotation). About one-third said that nothing was difficult or challenging, and several said that understanding the works of art and/or the artist's intentions was the most challenging aspect (see the third quotation).

The hardest part was when we had to speak in English because we are learning, and it was difficult to express myself. [female, 67, ESOL A]

For me, the most challenging part of this experience was Leonardo Drew's work of art because it was difficult to be able to explain how this artist, with so many little pieces of wood, has been

able to build a work of art, so that was the most difficult part for me in the program, to be able to understand, I can't explain it, or I was not able to understand that subject very much. [male, 29, ESOL B]

(And what was the most challenging part or the most difficult?) When we were put into a group and we had to describe a piece of art, a painting. (Why was that difficult?) Because I had a painting that was difficult, a bit mysterious, and hard to describe because it had only trees in it. And, I couldn't figure out what else to say about it other than it had trees in it so that was not fun for me. [female, 22, ESOL B]

COMPARISONS TO CLASSROOM LEARNING

When asked how the program experience compared to learning in a classroom, slightly more than two-thirds of interviewees described the program experience as more dynamic and authentic than learning in a classroom (because they participated in activities, engaged in conversations, worked with others, looked at original works of art, etc.) (see the first quotation below). A few described the program experience as different than a classroom because the subject matter is different (see the second quotation). A few said the program experience is very similar to learning in a classroom because in both instances a knowledgeable person is teaching you something new (see the third quotation).

(How does this experience compare with learning in a classroom?) Well, this [experience] is more interesting, more fascinating, there are activities to do, not just sitting around and talking about theories but you are directly in front of the artwork, and not looking at photographs. You feel like a participant in the art. [female, 30, ESOL B]

It is very different, because it feels like you are learning new things in a different environment. (How else does it compare?) Well it is very different because you are learning just like in a classroom but you are also learning about art and culture. [male, 19, ESOL B]

Well, really, I think that they are very similar, because it's all about learning, you learn new things that you didn't know so really there isn't much difference. (So for you it's more or less the same?) Yes, the only thing is that maybe you're not learning the same things in a classroom that [you] learn in a museum, but it's all about learning. [male, 34, ESOL A]

RELEVANCE TO EVERYDAY LIFE AND EXPERIENCES

RK&A asked whether the program experience related to participants' everyday life and experiences, and probed specifically about whether the experience related to participants' experiences coming to and living in the United States. About one-half of interviewees named an activity and/or work of art that they felt related to their everyday life and/or specifically their experience as an immigrant to the United States (e.g., they created a list of obstacles they face at work) (see the first quotation below). Another one-half related the program experience to their everyday life in a general or tangential way; that is, they viewed it as another way to practice English, learn about something new, and/or an interesting experience they could share with others (see the second quotation). A few interviewees also said that the program experience (i.e., viewing works of art, going to a museum) was a nice respite from the hectic nature of everyday life (see the third quotation).

The most important part was when each of us remembered what we saw that reminded us of our country, what art objects brought us back to recollections about our country, and how that could be related to what we see every day; for example, I wear a bracelet that is from my

country, and we talked about how art is in all objects that can remind us of our culture and our country, that have significance for us. [female, 20, ESOL B]

(How (if at all) did the program relate to your everyday life or experiences?) Only to be able to have more abilities in the different places that you could visit, then you have an idea through what the program teaches you. (What do you mean more abilities?) The practice and the exercises give you more abilities expressing yourself in English. [male, 56, ESOL B]

(How (if at all) does the program relate to your daily life or daily experiences?) There is a lot to take advantage of at a museum, and with all our stress and busyness that is involved with work and our life, it's good to have the museum to go to. [male, 51, ESOL B]

INTERVIEW GUIDES

ENGLISH VERSION

I'm calling to talk with you about your experiences in the *Engaging New Americans* program at the Harvard Art Museums. You indicated that you would be willing to participate in a brief interview. Can we conduct the interview now? It will only take about 15-20 minutes.

[If the participant agrees] Great. I would like to verify that you have participated in the program at the Museums at least two separate times?

[If yes, continue with interview]

[If no] I'm sorry; I am only speaking to those who have participated at least two times. We are conducting one more round of interviews with your class. If you participate a second time and are still interested in being interviewed, please put your name on the list when the Museums ask for more volunteers.

Today we are talking about your experiences in the program. This is not a test; there are no right or wrong answers. To ensure accuracy, I would like to audio-record this conversation; however, your comments are confidential and your name will not be used. Is it okay if I audio-record?

[Probe for concrete examples throughout]

1. First, describe some things you remember doing as part of the program. What else did you do?

What role did the museum staff play in your experience? Please tell me more about that.

[Probe for concrete examples]

2. Was this your first time in an art museum?

[If yes] What did you think (or what are your overall impressions?) What makes you say that?

[If no] What other art museum experiences have you had? Tell me about that. How did this experience compare? What makes you say that?

3. Did this experience change how you view art or art museums? If yes, how so? If not, why do you think that is? **[Probe for specific examples from the program]**

4. What was the most worthwhile part of your program experience? Why is that?

What was most challenging about your experience? Why is that?

How does this experience compare to learning in a classroom? What makes you say that?

[Probe about the value/challenge of learning in a museum]

5. How comfortable are you speaking English? Please give me some examples of how you used English during the program.

What was most valuable about using English during the program? Why is that?
What was most challenging about using English during the program? Why is that?

6. How (if at all) did the program relate to your everyday life or experiences?
[Probe for specific examples from the program]

Did you do or talk about anything during the program that relates to your experiences of coming to and living in the United States? How does that relate to your experiences?

7. Is there anything else you would like to say about the program?

Thank you for your time. [Ask and record information on the interview log]

SPANISH VERSION

Saludos, Estoy llamando para hablar con usted sobre sus experiencias en el programa Engaging New Americans en los museos de arte de Harvard (Harvard Art Museums). Usted indicó que estaría dispuesto a participar en una breve entrevista. Podríamos hacerla ahora? Solo tomará como 15 a 20 minutos.

[*Si SI*] Fantastico. Me gustaría verificar que usted ha participado en el programa en el Museo al menos dos veces separadas?

[If yes, continue with interview]

[*Si NO*] Lo siento, solo estoy hablando con aquellos que han participado al menos dos veces. Vamos a llevar a cabo una sesión mas de entrevistas con su clase. Si usted participa una segunda vez y aun está interesado en que lo entrevisten, por favor ponga su nombre en la lista cuando el Museo pida más voluntarios.

Hoy estaremos hablando sobre sus experiencias en el programa. Esto no es una prueba, no hay contestaciones correctas ni equivocadas. Para asegurar fidelidad o exactitud, me gustaría grabar esta conversación; sin embargo, sus comentarios son confidenciales y su nombre no se utilizara. ¿Esta bien que grabe la entrevista? (la información del voluntario se destruye una vez se llama al participante – solo se usa para contactarlo para la entrevista) (grabamos para no cometer errores tomando notas escritas...)

[Probe for concrete examples throughout]

1. Primero, describa algunas cosas que recuerda haber hecho como parte del programa. Qué más hizo?

Qué rol o papel jugó el personal de Museo en su experiencia? Por favor dígame mas sobre eso.

[Probe for concrete examples]

2. Fue esta su primera vez en un museo de arte sin incluir las veces que fue al programa?

[*SISI*] Qué pensó? (Cuales fueron sus impresiones generales?) ¿Por qué dice eso?

[*SINO*] Qué otras experiencias en museos de arte ha tenido? Cuénteme sobre eso. Como compararía esta experiencia? Por que dice eso?

3. Esta experiencia, cambi'o como usted ve el arte o los museos de arte? Si lo hizo, cómo? Si no, por que cree usted que no lo hizo?

[Probe for specific examples from the program]

4. Que fue la parte que mas valio la pena de su experiencia en el programa? Por que?

Que fue la parte mas retante de su experiencia? Por que?

Como se compara esta experiencia con aprender en un salon de clases? Por que dice eso?

[Probe about the value/challenge of learning in a museum]

5. Cuan comodo se siente usted hablando ingles?

Por favor deme algunos ejemplos de cómo usaron Ingles durante el programa.

Qué fue lo mas valioso de usar ingles durante el programa? Por que?

Que fue lo mas retante de usar ingles durante el programa? Por que?

6. Como, si de alguna manera, se relaciona el programa con su vida diaria o experiencias diarias.

[Probe for specific examples from the program]

Hicieron o hablaron sobre cualquier cosa durante el programa que se relacione con sus experiencias de venir a Estados Unidos y vivir aca? Como se relaciona eso con sus experiencias?

7. Hay algo mas que le gustaria decir sobre el programa?

Muchas gracias por su tiempo. Esto ayudara a mejorar el programa.

[Ask and record information on the interview log]