

Virtual Visitors and Real Readers

VSG Summer School

At-Bristol Science Centre

21st & 22 September 2006

Evaluation of Event

The Visitor Studies Group Summer School was a huge success which examined and explored different approaches to research and evaluation of interactive learning experiences.

We asked delegates at the end of the second day to give feedback on the event. Twenty of the thirty plus delegates and speakers gave feedback.

Overview

On a scale where 1 was 'pretty poor' and 10 was 'just wonderful' delegates rated:

- Content as 8.3 (lowest 7) - Andrew McIntyre's presentation was most liked, and the first presentation on the second day was least liked.
- Venue food 8.1 (lowest 6) - quality was considered good but people wanted more
- Venue facilities 8.6 (lowest 5) - although some thought it a bit dark, they liked the variety of spaces we had access to and they really liked the roof terrace

Was the content useful?

In order to gain an insight into whether the event was a learning experience we asked delegates to let us know if the Delegates said they learned the following things:

- building in evaluation from onset - prototypes etc.
- evaluation still not as firmly embedded as it could be
- evaluators aren't so bad as they used to be
- exhibits fit for purpose, specific outcomes to link with organisational goals, involve all staff in establishment
- I took a lot from Andrew's talk about evaluation - finding out what works and what doesn't and that it doesn't have to be a complicated process. Sometimes its enough just to observe visitors with a pad and pen
- involve all your floor staff in evaluation
- I've had several ideas for future projects
- I've learnt that there are many people in this field thinking the same way about integrating evaluation into the design process

- learned more about Andrew McIntyre's world thought about how to apply
- not everyone does very specific GLO's, and if they do, they shouldn't
- play = learning
- references to read
- That we're mostly thinking on the same lines so I need to work with these people to save time!
- The importance of play and appealing to the inner child - this will definitely help inform our current exhibition development
- value of personal experiences in the learning process and that learning takes time. Also the importance of reflection
- we're all past the 'is playing learning?', 'evaluation too hard/expensive to do', 'more to learning than fact retention agenda'

Fifteen delegates shared the following revelations they had:

- its possible to evaluate very personal experiences to an extent at least!
- evaluators are no longer reactionary
- didn't know there was a new children's museum in Liverpool
- I think I've realised (or had it reinforced) how important evaluation really is... we're just at the beginning of the evaluation process
- Apart from above, nothing major. All about meeting useful people
- hadn't realised that I've never advocated play as a word to my director
- reinforced ideas rather than 'revelations' but lots of very interesting and helpful content
- connections between different visitor centres, museums, science centres etc. It was interesting to hear from such a wide Variety of experiences
- actively to evaluate very disparate events / experiences against very similar objectives
- really enjoyed the discussions
- good for inspiring effort
- immersion
- some presentations not so useful e.g. Ian Russell's 'Underwater Street' too long
- so much happening in the country

What could we have done better?

Although just over half the delegates either didn't comment or said there was nothing we could have done better - they included:

'nothing! Thought it was great!'

'Some discussions on evaluation very helpful',

Comments were grouped into three areas:

Venue facilities:

- drinks / water available during sessions!
- Different types of session nearly there, but some were discussion types (realise that theatre not ideal for some)
- rooms with windows would have been nice

Summer school Structure:

- Possibly incorporate workshop or group session smaller for earlier debate)
- could have had more of a workshop session to discuss some of the techniques discussed (other than the debate)
- debate end of day 2, summary of key points, how we more ??turnone!??
- more networking is always good

Content:

- less good for enabling - not enough on how - website?
- why plastic wallets/pens? could have been card paper
- would have been better if the speakers weren't so heavily skewed toward big science centres

Summary

In summary they liked the summer school, found it useful, relevant, informative and even inspiring. Venue facilities in general were good but could have been better if a break out room was included too.

Lessons learnt:

Advertise early and wider: to facilitate this don't get bogged down with the detail. i.e. don't worry about timetable, or asking for content of presentations to be firmed up - most speakers prepare a week or less in advance - delegates don't care as much as we do. Venues away from London are less well attended - we should consider this in the future. Looking after delegates basic needs is paramount to learning. Its risky booking speakers you don't know very well - although the content of Geory's presentation was very informative, his low key delivery style didn't go down well at all. It would have been a missed opportunity not to have involved him.

Suggestions:

more examples of critical thinking (what Andrew McIntyre does) more how it was done, more discussions, more dynamic spaces.

Finally, huge thanks to Emily and Mary for their massive practical help and support - really appreciated.