

"California Academy of Sciences Discovery Room"

J. Diamond, A. Smith, & A. Bond
(1988). *Curator*, 31(3), 157-166.

Summarized by
Kay Allen
Jacksonville State University

In this study a total of 14,691 visitors were counted over a three month period as they visited the California Academy of Sciences (CAS) Discovery Room. The CAS Discovery Room allows the visitor to touch and explore a collection of games, objects, and exhibits on natural history. Of the visitors counted, behavior observations were made on a total of 62 groups and trackings of movement were recorded for 68 individual visitors while they were in the room. Also, during 75 half-hour periods, 2,417 visitors in the room were classified into age, sex, ethnic and social groups. Interviews with children and adults of 100 groups, 24 written surveys and informal conversation were also used to obtain information.

Highlights of Results

- (1) The most popular objects were the discovery boxes (77% preference), followed by costumes (26%), puzzles (16%), the human skeleton (11%), phases-of-the-moon exhibit (11%), and mounted badger (8%).
- (2) Favorite activities included touching (58%) and everything about the room (32%).
- (3) Average time in the room was 18 minutes for parent-children groups; children interacted with an average of 19 objects.
- (4) A child exploring the room alone was more likely to look but not touch. The presence of another individual greatly influenced the child's exploration. In fact, the child remained with the objects three times longer when accompanied by others.
- (5) The most common behaviors in the room involved children handling and attempting to make the objects do something. Children sometimes invented new ways to use objects.
- (6) Most of the visitors were there for their first time or accidentally came across the room.
- (7) Adults tended to read labels aloud to children and suggested how objects could be explored.

- (8) The adults were found to influence a child's exploration in two ways:
 - (a) if the child felt timid, the presence of an adult helped the child feel more confident;
 - (b) the adult presence caused the child to slow down long enough to develop interest in an object he/she would otherwise rush by.
- (9) Children tended to be the initiators of activities and social contact with parents.

Conclusions

The authors argue that exhibits should be designed "to create a social environment as well as a physical structure." In addition, the following guidelines are suggested:

- (1) Exhibits should encourage exploratory (open-ended) behavior.
- (2) Exhibit objects should be real artifacts.
- (3) Exhibit areas should be arranged so that they encourage social interaction.
- (4) Staff should encourage exploratory learning.

Membership in a Museum Organization and Educational Level

Stephen Bitgood and Lin Stewart
Jacksonville State University

A recent comparison of two community phone surveys conducted for the Anniston Museum of Natural History produced some interesting results with respect to educational level. It is not surprising that members were more educated than nonmembers, but, as the table below shows, the large differences in educational level were surprising.

<u>Educational Level</u>	<u>Members</u>	<u>Nonmembers</u>
High School or less	6.2%	44.2%
One year of college	5.1	11.4
Two-Three yrs college	13.3	24.4
Four yrs college	28.2	9.1
More than 4 yrs	47.2	11.0

Educational level was an important factor even within museum membership. Members with less than a college degree were more likely to cite free admission as a reason for becoming a member. More educated members (college graduates) were more likely than less educated members to take advantage of membership receptions and temporary exhibitions.