

AAM 2007

Visitor Studies 201: Focus Groups

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Word Craft

Presentation

- Overview
 - definitions & protocol
- Case Studies
 - Front-end Evaluation:
Teachers' Needs
 - Summative Evaluation:
Family Program Participants

Focus Groups: Definition

- Group discussion (interview)
- 6 to 12 individuals
- With facilitator
- Pre-determined set of open-ended questions
- Location & settings vary (comfort & control)
- Recorded (audio, video)
- Average duration of 1.5 to 2.5 hours



Focus Groups: Museum Use

- Program & exhibit evaluation, marketing, PR, communications
- Visitor and non-visitor studies, front-end & formative (mostly)
- Great for exploratory research
- Good at providing richness and depth to quantitative research

Design Steps

- Identify issue/research question
- Identify sampling frame & recruiting strategies
- Choose moderator
- Select location and incentive
- Develop interview/discussion guide
- Recruit (and retain) sample
- Conduct focus group
- Thank & pay group
- Analyze & interpret data
- Write report

Pros

- Rich, deep data
- Visitors' ideas & own words
- Group synergy
- Works with varied audiences
- Good facilitator helps
- Results accessible

Cons

- Data difficult to quantify
- Not generalizable
- Group dominance
- Can get skewed group & data
- Poor facilitator harms
- Analysis challenging

Case Study 1

- Teachers' Needs
 - NOAA/NERRS Study
 - Front-end evaluation
 - Goal: teacher use of real-time data (RTD) & needs for related ed products
 - 1 pilot & 6 focus groups at 5 sites nationally
 - Included ed product (website) review

Audience

- Teachers (K-12)
- English speaking (although work with diverse students)
- Use RTD in classroom and computer literate
- Busy, lots of requests
- Curious
- Classroom is familiar setting



Method Choice

- Synergy of sharing
- Conversation, own stories
- Could ask follow-up questions
- Could demo ed products & get reactions
- Started a learning community



Eval Design

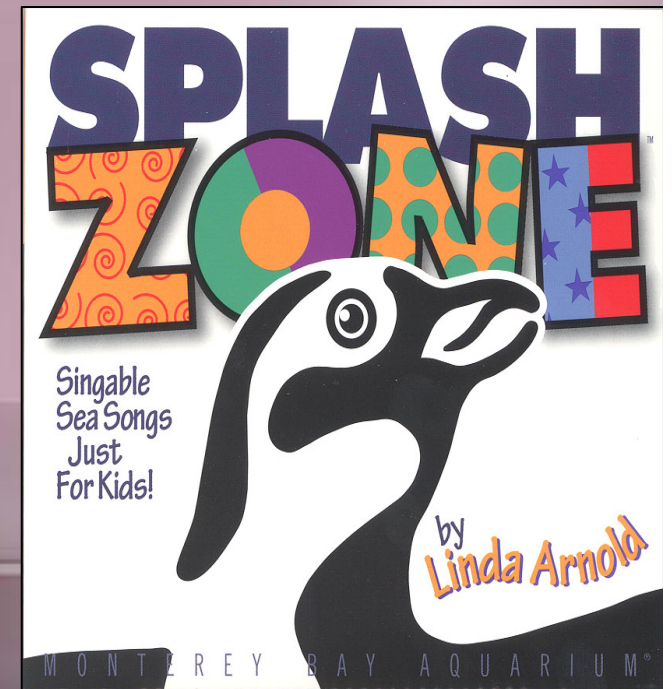
- Conducted at nature centers or schools nearby
- Scheduled for Saturday morning
- Pre-meeting online survey
- 1-hr. discussion of current RTD use
- 45 min. of website review & feedback
- 1-hr. discussion of RTD needs
- Invited to join online “learning community”
- Focus group n = 72
- Part of a larger study

Personnel & Incentives

- Facilitator (also A/V tech)
- Grant PI & Administrative Assistant
- Host representative
- Funder (at one session)
- Incentives
 - pay for time
 - refreshments
 - thank you gifts (teaching materials)

Case Study 2

- Head Start Program
 - Monterey Bay Aquarium
 - Summative evaluation
 - Goal: impact of the program on family (caregivers & children)
 - 7 focus groups in 2 counties; 90 adults
 - Combined focus group with survey



Head Start Discovery Program

- Program Goals
 - Introduce young children and families to ocean conservation
 - Provide programs for Hispanic families and those with limited incomes
 - Create a comfortable learning environment
 - Improve MBA understanding of conservation education

Program Format

- A pre-visit to the Head Start Center
- A parent meeting
- A teacher workshop
- 2 or 3 visits to MBA by each Center



Audience

- Parents (primarily mothers), but also other family caregivers
- Predominantly Spanish speaking
- Trust in the Head Start Center staff and Aquarium staff
- Possible distrust of formal evaluation methods (survey forms, phone interviews)
- Limited transportation
- Lots of family obligations



Method Choice

- Conversational style, stories
- Comfortable, trusted setting
- Can feel informal, but be structured
- Can customize, make personal
 - bilingual & culturally sensitive

Eval Design

- Conducted at Head Start Centers
- Scheduled with regular Parent Meetings after school
- 1 pilot test + 6 focus groups
 - 3 in Santa Cruz County (2 visit program)
 - 3 in Monterey County (3 visit program)
- Approx. 1 hour each
- Survey all at the end of discussion
(n = 80)

Personnel & Incentives

- Bilingual MBA staff (2)
- Bilingual facilitator
- Monolingual evaluator
(technical advisor & A/V tech)
- Head Start teacher & aides
- Incentives provided
 - child care (funds & help)
 - refreshments
 - thank yous

Audience Sensitivity

- Lively
 - Lots of noise, lots of distractions
- Up to 27 adult participants, plus children
 - Sometimes as many children as adults
- Comfort is relative
 - Sites great, but sat in pre-schoolers' chairs
- Most groups entirely in Spanish

Final Thoughts

- Need to know audience to design an evaluation & choose method
 - cultures, languages, comfort & trust
- Be open & flexible
 - find a balance between ideal & real
- Be prepared to learn & enjoy
- Get great collaborators/
partners/advisors

Thank you

