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LIS 258
Interactive Technology Assignment

**Sample Exhibit**

The Long Island Children's Museum (LICM) is a prime example of the effect interactive exhibits can have on museum attendance. The entire museum is filled with hands-on activities, which make use of both software and physical items, and for this reason it is a memorable experience that receives positive feedback from children and parents alike. Many people flock to the museum due to the extensive word-of-mouth publicity garnered by all those who visited the space and enjoyed being able to participate in the exhibit rather than simply view it from a safe distance.

Ciolfi and Bannon (2002) studied the Hunt Museum in Limerick, Ireland in order to determine how best to design an interactive exhibit. One of their findings was that allowing visitors to open up drawers and cabinets to discover items on their own, rather than having these items already displayed in the open, lead to more discussions and observations (p. 3). LICM is similar to the Hunt in that it allows visitors to do much of the exploration on their own rather than presenting objects forthright.

**Interactive Features**

Although there are a vast number of interactive technologies at play within LICM, I selected this museum for its use of ProtoZone Interactives. The creators of this technology were at a recent panel organized by the Long Island Museums Association (LIMA), and the examples they displayed fell right in line with what I had been envisioning for the Phebe Whitman coverlet.

Several of these examples can be seen on the ProtoZone website, under the "Software" category. The first is called Uccello and allows children to create virtual pottery using a screen set up at the museum. Visitors may then decorate this pottery by using a pre-created pattern or by designing their own unique decoration. A similar idea is employed in the second software, known as DollHouse. This application allows children to design the rooms in a virtual dollhouse, giving them free reign over even the smallest details such as the pattern on a tablecloth in the kitchen. A third software is called Pattern Studio and allows children to explore symmetry and math by designing unique patterns.

These interactive features were chosen with engagement from younger audiences in mind. At the LIMA panel, which was focused on using interactive exhibits to draw users to a museum space, a large emphasis was placed on children and young adults. This demographic does not tend to frequent museums as often as adults, unless parents, guardians, or instructors are forcing them there. By having hands-on technology that allows children to display their own creativity rather than absorb new information directly, LICM is encouraging participation and

engagement at a level that suits the target audience. These children will still be learning indirectly without the educational element feeling forced or exhausting. For example, using Uccello will teach visitors about the skills required to be a potter or craftsperson without requiring a lecture or extensive reading on the topic.

To put it simply, “interactive exhibits are especially attractive to children and families, who form the mainstay of museum audiences” (Witcomb, 2011, p. 354).

**Exemplary Qualities**

This type of interactivity would be useful for the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association (WWBA) for several reasons. First, it is known to appeal to a younger audience. The WWBA receives visits from students who are learning about Walt in their classes and from families with young children, so it would be useful to have a portion of the exhibit that appeals to this age group. Second, the nature of my object (a hand-woven coverlet) is conducive to the type of application used by the LICM. Young visitors would be able to create their own coverlet patterns, or play with combinations of pre-existing patterns; this type of exploration would be conducive to imagination and creativity, as well as mathematical principles such as symmetry. Finally, the house as a whole could be included in an application, allowing visitors to explore it further in a virtual reality setting and change features of the rooms like the wallpaper or bedspreads.

Further, ProtoZone Interactives has designed a timeline for the Three Village Historical Society, which allows visitors to explore the time period and materials that are of most interest to them. Because Long Island has changed so drastically from the time Walt Whitman was born, it could be very interesting for visitors to see a virtual map of the island and the changes it has gone through over time. A timeline of Walt’s life would also align with the content of the site.

**Potential Audiences**

There are two potential audiences for an exhibit of this nature at WWBA. The first is families with younger children, who would be able to learn about coverlets, Walt Whitman, and the changes Long Island has undergone without being forced to listen to a lecture or audio guide that would likely not capture their attention. The second audience is artists. Walt Whitman is the most photographed poet in history, so if the WWBA could implement software that not only allows visitors to create coverlet designs, but also create portraits and draw freely, they may attract a more art-centric audience. Both of these audiences would be given the opportunity to explore their creative capabilities, while at the same time learning and engaging with the site’s exhibit.

References

Ciolfi, L. and Bannon, L.J. (2002). Designing Interactive Museum Exhibits: Enhancing visitor curiosity through augmented artefacts, Eleventh European Conference on Cognitive Ergonomics, Catania (Italy), September 2002.

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Witcomb, A. (2011). Interactivity. In S. Macdonald (Ed.), *A companion to museum studies*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.