

INVISIBLE DOORS

The Hybrid Museum: Early Childhood Virtual & In-Person Learning in Art Museums

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Organizational Context	6
Area of Inquiry	8
Literature Review	10
Museum Value for Young Learners	11
Social Nature of Museums	12
Research Design	16
Research Questions	19
Data Collection	20
Data Analysis	21
Findings	23
Recommendations	33
Conclusion	35
References	36
Appendices	40

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) is the preeminent art museum in the city of Detroit. The museum is looking to continue to increase its relationship with the community and grow its education program to best match its vision to be the town square of the community, a gathering place for everyone. Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice (CoP) framework was used to reveal how the community built around museums is important to their existence.

The study will address:

1. What other museums are doing to engage preschool-aged children, their families and educators, and how they are funding the efforts.
2. The needs/awareness of preschool teachers and parents of preschool- aged children in the area of DIA.

Research literature related to museum value for young learners and history of children's museum programming and importance of arts education, as well as the social nature of museums including community, technology, and social vulnerability, was used.

The study found:

1. Museums have taken various paths with no one set method of online hybrid experiences, yet all museums created the specific experiences in order to encourage the feeling of community among preschool aged children, their families, and educators.
2. It found that funding structures have changed at most museums interviewed due to implications of COVID-19 and there was much more systematic listening being done by the museums/education departments of their constituents. Equal access to museums for all students is a concern for education departments.

Based on the study findings, three recommendations were offered to the DIA:

1. Increase the social media presence for PreK-HS.
2. Create a teacher-based auxiliary group.
3. Lead the creation of a Detroit Arts Collaborative organization to build access to all Detroit museums.

INTRODUCTION

The Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) opened in 1885 as Detroit was going through a population boom. Between 1880 and 1890, the population of Detroit increased by 77% (“1885 in Michigan”, 2020) and the number of art works in the museum grew exponentially. In 1927, the DIA moved from Jefferson Avenue to its current location on Woodward Avenue. According to Google Arts and Culture (2020), the “DIA's collection is among the top six in the United States, comprising a multicultural and multinational survey of human creativity from prehistory through the 21st century.” With over 65,000 works of art located in a breathtaking building in the middle of the city of Detroit, the museum stands as a shining representation of the city.

After the 2008 recession and automobile industry crash in Detroit, the DIA suffered financial loss and faced bankruptcy. Discussions of selling portions of artwork swirled and museum patrons and donors were devastated. In 2012, a three-county millage was proposed and passed, granting the DIA over \$300 million over 10 years from taxpayers. At an average cost of \$15 per household per year, the millage came with free museum access to the residents of the three counties that were helping to support the cause. In 2020, the millage was renewed, with continued taxes going to support the museum through 2032.

As the impact of COVID-19 shuttered museum doors in spring 2020, museum staff had to decide how to proceed. Shifts ranged from small pivots of pausing all activities to launching full virtual programs on websites and social media. These changes to museum offerings occurred while the public assessed knowledge of a worldwide pandemic and how it was impacting them both personally and professionally. With museum doors closed, activities slowed, money became tighter and employees were furloughed or let go. This impacted the abilities to create new

programming, shift exhibits online and offer virtual learning for students and schools. At the same time, teachers, a key audience for museum offerings, were trying to manage teaching from their homes across computer screens to the students they usually had in front of them. Communities of people sharing experiences disappeared as they were confined to their homes.

Identifying possibilities for developing communities of practice for hybrid early childhood learning opportunities in the art world is important in a time when children are unable to physically access museums in a large group setting or at all. The goal of this capstone project is to identify opportunities in the areas of building community, funding structures, evaluation, and bridging gaps created from COVID closures. This capstone study aims to help the museum better understand community needs and how other museums have addressed the shift to a largely virtual world. My hope is that the information will enable the DIA to increase learning opportunities for students and virtual patronage of the DIA, and develop the community connection to the DIA. In turn, these opportunities, resources, and connections will boost future physical patronage for those who already are privileged to experience the wonder of museums, as well as those who have yet to experience such beauty and richness of the world of art.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

In March 2020, DIA Director Salvador Salort-Pons thanked residents of the three counties for the millage renewal victory: “The DIA millage renewal will ensure the museum can continue offering free field trips and free transportation to tens of thousands of students from local schools each year and free programming for local seniors.” In a news release, he said, “The millage also ensures free access to the DIA’s unique collection of art, culture and history for Macomb, Oakland and Wayne county residents” (Hall,

2020). The millage was a critical lifeline for the DIA as it allowed communities of visitors to continue to engage with the museum in person through individual visits to field trips of classes from metro Detroit.

In March 2020, COVID's impact was felt immediately as trips were cancelled and doors closed. The DIA shared additional materials on their website and social media channels, allowing visitors to view inside the exhibits and teachers to use curriculum for their students. The DIA staff faced a challenge of determining how to connect with the community who was funding their existence without the traditional forms of in-person engagement through field trips and family visits.

The experienced education department staff launched virtual field trips during the 2020-2021 school year including Learning to Look (Grades 2 - 4), Shaping Identity (Grades 3-12) – A Broad Cross-Cultural Exploration, Africana, Art of the Americas, Art of the Ancient World, World Languages, and Art of the Renaissance, and S.E.L. Guided-Gallery Tour (Grades 3 - 12) for schools. They are free to all schools in Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties and cost \$5 per student for schools outside of the millage counties. In addition, they launched DIA Delivered K-12, a program for K-12 teachers and students that brings tool boxes filled with a variety of items to the classroom. According to the DIA website, the toolboxes are “designed to create a window into the DIA's world-renown collection from afar, each toolbox offers a variety of curriculum-based activities, connecting your students to some of our favorite works of art!” The program is free for teachers in the three millage counties with delivery available to schools.

Through a grant by the Walters Family Foundation, the Detroit Institute of Arts is working with Head Start qualified programs in Detroit to offer opportunities for preschool-aged children to experience art based in visual thinking strategies. Launched as an in-person experience with access to the

museum exhibits, art activities with studio instructors, with a culminating Saturday puppet show and lunch. This program pivoted to a virtual platform, and the children are able to experience the DIA in their own Pre-K classroom or at home. Materials, including an art primer designed by the DIA, are provided for all participants. As part of the grant, the DIA works with an independent evaluator who looks at the program from all sides so that the DIA will be able to reflect on the programming with the opportunity to scale this program up in the coming years.

AREA OF INQUIRY

In a meeting with the DIA Director Salort-Pons, he shared an overview of the goals of the DIA, the critical role of the millage and how the influx of funds and partnership with the surrounding three counties had increased patronage at the museum as well as school field trips over the past few years. My proposed work with the DIA, at that time, was based on a literature review that focused heavily on student identity when on a field trip through an art museum. The literature showed that some teachers prepare their trips to the museum, while many others travel through the museum with their students without a planned path. This guided my approach to look at how a child's identity is developed through their visit.

During this initial phase of work with the DIA, our world was altered by COVID-19 and on March 13, 2020, the DIA closed its doors. Shortly thereafter, I received an email that all school DIA field trips were cancelled for the remainder of the 2020-21 as all schools in Michigan had been ordered to be physically closed. These changes resulted in a shift in my problem of practice to exploring opportunities for hybrid, preschool-focused museum trips and creating recommendations for a hybrid preschool program for the DIA. As schools planned for the 2020-2021 school year, hybrid learning developed for core/special

curriculum. Hybrid museum learning experiences provide an opportunity for students to visit the museum, view and learn about various art exhibits, and enhance their school curriculum. It also gives teachers a chance to connect with museum educators and find a possible break in their day.

Beginning in mid-March of 2020, schools in metropolitan Detroit closed to in-person learning because of COVID-19. Educators began scrambling to design remote learning experiences for the children within their districts. Michigan Department of Education (2020) directed a re-evaluation of content and standards taught through virtual learning settings (present in most school districts for the 2020-2021 school year) as it would be impossible to implement all standards and curriculum. The guiding principles document for elementary schools that focuses on reading and language arts, math, social studies, and science specifically states, “schedules should provide time each day for both academics and at least one of the “specials” (including PE, music, and art)” (Michigan DOE, 2020).

As families begin to work from home and partner with faculty in teaching their children, teaching art often means creating hybrid learning experiences. Hybrid learning is when “virtual and traditional learning are combined, with virtual elements complementing the face-to-face part of the process” (Pérez, 2011). Due to the impact of COVID on health and safety for students and teachers, the hybrid live-synchronous-classroom environment provides a richer learning experience than asynchronous learning (Park & Bonk, 2007). Park & Bonk looked at synchronous online learning in a blended environment. While this study is not directly tied to art education, they found interaction available via synchronous learning allows for immediacy which is the verbal and non-verbal behaviors between the teacher/presenter and student (Park & Bonk, 2007).

This is an unprecedented opportunity, not only for the DIA, but for global museums to create new engaging experiences for children. The longer the schools are closed, and with the possibility that schools might not open in the fall 2020-2021 school year, the DIA has an opportunity to offer an interactive experience for children in the Detroit metro area to meet current and future needs of parents and preschool programs, and, in doing so, create future patrons of the museum upon reopening. Rethinking educational processes can be difficult during a pandemic, but Perez comments that “innovation involves deliberate and systematic changes to achieve objectives more effectively. The use of technological tools can facilitate this process of innovation, since they offer new possibilities when planning and effectuating the teaching-learning processes.” (2011)

Continuing to create museum experiences for early learners will be important as museums stay closed, schools do not take field trips, and parents are home with their children. In certain safe phases of opening, museums have been able to allow children and adults back into the museum with an adjusted model of visitation. The opening of spaces allows for a hybrid model of museum education which could allow the opportunity for children to discover art education outside of the school environment in the 2020-2021 school year.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While the phenomenon of engaging students with a museum during a pandemic is a concept that has not been studied, there is some relevant prior literature that can help shape a study of museum virtual and hybrid engagement opportunities. In this section, I will review studies regarding building community during museum visits and identifying issues of technology access and funding. My research expanded after conversations with museum educators across the country who spoke to concerns with the

ability for all schools and students to continue museum programming and the overall social vulnerability of those unable to access the museum.

Museum Value for Young Learners

History of Children’s Programming. Museums as defined in this study include art museums, historic house museums, history museums, living history museums, natural history museums, and science museums. While they might differ in appearance, exhibit design, and mission, they all stand for the common good of preserving aspects of art and history and sharing these treasures with the public. Children’s programming in museums has grown over the years.

From the start of the Brooklyn Children’s Museum in 1899 to current day, children have had access to museums with additional focus on children’s programming ramping up in the 1990s. Miller states, “The early years of life are critical to the development of lifelong learning capacity, and decades of research in this area have revealed a clear correlation between early exposure to the arts and increased long-term critical reasoning, communication, and social skills” (2014). Continuing to create museum experiences for early learners will be important as museums stay closed, schools do not take field trips, and parents are home with their children. In certain safe phases of opening, museums have been able to allow children and adults back into the museum with an adjusted model of visitation. The opening of spaces allows for a hybrid model of museum education which could allow children the opportunity to discover art education outside of the school environment in the 2020-2021 school year.

Semmel (2012) writes in the *Journal of Museum Education*, “Rarely are museums recognized as organizations well-equipped to play a more significant and relevant role in promoting effective learning” (p. 13).

Building a community through a hybrid museum program is possible and best practices were identified to make a program at the Detroit Institute of Art a reality. The identity building remains possible even with a virtual program. The children can connect with art, communicate with other students, find and share meaning, and start to create a personal history/identity within this new community. Museums are important aspects of the towns and cities in which they live. Early learners have a place within the museums and parents are able to take advantage of all that the museums have to offer even during COVID. The community built now outside the walls has the possibility of transferring inside the walls once the museum reopens. There is an opportunity for growth for museums to develop programs for early childhood learners. (Miller, 2014)

Importance of Arts Education. For many years, museums focused on collecting art but didn't spend an equal amount of time educating children about the art. When museums shifted focus to the visitor, the education of the visitor came next, thanks to the thought that knowledge came from the collection. The 1992 report by the American Association of Museums helped support this thinking by placing a focus on "re-examining museum mission statements to institutional practices, as well as thinking about education and audience." (Shaffer, 2011) Museums created comfortable environments for children and developmentally appropriate lessons, both of which encourage positive learning environments in an unfamiliar landscape.

Social Nature of Museums

Community. Creating a social presence through hybrid experiences to build trust and relationships between the teacher and student is an important way to initiate the virtual connection by building on the community of practice framework. John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking

study all aspects of learning that occur in various types of museums. In the meta analysis of five separate studies, they found that the “visitor’s attention during a museum visit is devoted to people with whom they are visiting” more than the art that was around them (Falk, 2016, p. 93). As museum tours move to hybrid experiences, the group with whom one is visiting, typically tour classmates, is no longer physically available. Miller’s (2014) master’s thesis highlights best practices for early childhood student experiences in museums on how to facilitate this level of engagement. Miller completed five case studies of museums with innovative early learning experiences. Her work concluded that a learner-centered philosophy met the needs of the most children through a family-oriented approach and that museums see community as important when educating children and families.

It also supports Falk’s analysis of museum experiences when he states, “Data on what visitors recall from their museum experiences, many years later, consistently indicate that the sociocultural aspects of a visit are rarely, if ever forgotten and that sometimes what a visitor recollects are primarily these aspects of the visit” (Falk, 2016, p. 93). The community built during the time at the physical museum has a chance to be replicated using technology in a synchronous learning experience. Issues for museums continue to arise through COVID-19 as people feel a strong sense of physical and mental isolation. Tiffany Eddy of the Currier Museum, in a study by Rich-Kern, describes the museum as a place for people to come together citing the ability to “share beauty, have conversations of value and stay connected (Rich-Kern, 2020).

Technology. Proctor (2010) explains the importance of the relationship between technology and museum access and speaks to museums finding most of their visitors going online to access the art. Museums closing during COVID sped up this need for museums to provide online access to

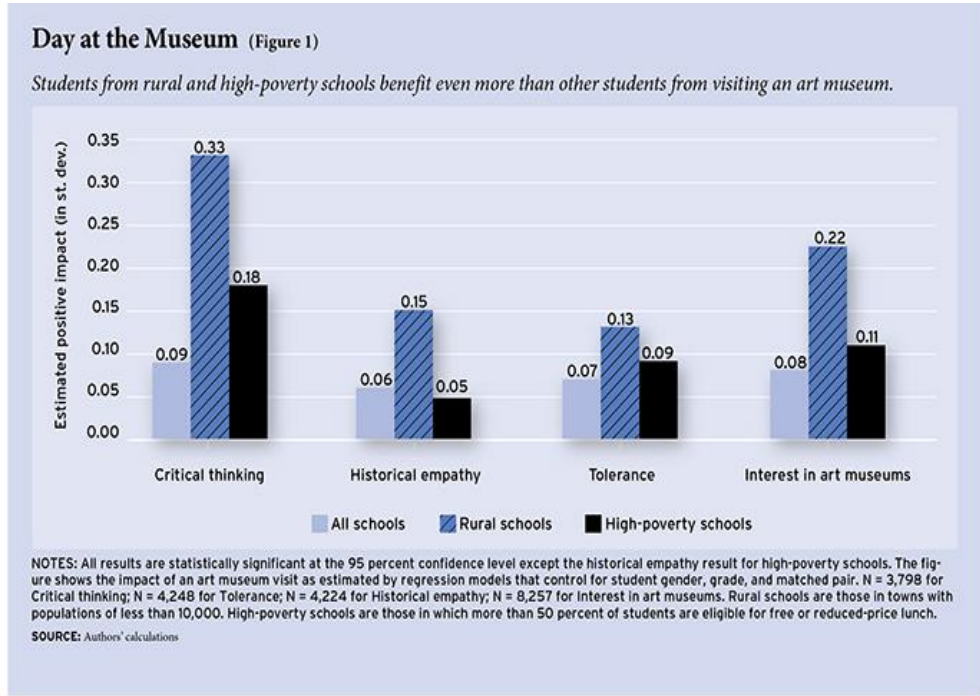
materials which allowed more visitors from miles far outside the traditional constituency. Her work is incredibly relevant in our current day and can encourage and guide museums as they transition to a presence outside of their four walls.

Although initially, educators and parents will encourage the student to connect to the museum in the only way they currently will be able – through virtual experiences - the goal will be to facilitate continued interest for the students and their families to come to the physical museum when the time is right.

There are two main reasons to link the visitor's experiences online and onsite into a 'virtuous circle'. First, such linking supports a continuous learning experience. By activating previous knowledge, it helps retain memories over time, enables the person to pursue individual interests, and allows him or her to focus more on experimentation, discovery and the aesthetic experience during the visit. Second, it can strengthen the visitor-museum relationship by driving traffic to the museum website and stimulating further interest in the digital collection. (Wang, et al., 2009 p. 5)

As Soren (2005) explains, it is important to evaluate the experience throughout the process for "assessing the impact of a virtual exhibit on the museum community, nationally and internationally" (p. 132). Maintaining and strengthening the community is important for long-term growth in learning and connection with the museum.

Social Vulnerability. While all children benefit from being enriched by all that museums have to offer, research shows that visits to a museum have



(Figure 1. Rates of positive impact on students at museums.)

strong value for all children but even more for children from rural and high-poverty schools. Access to museums which are closed is based solely on Internet connectivity, parent/guardian awareness of virtual programming, and time to support young children in exploring the programming. Perhaps rather than the “great equalizer,” COVID-19 is “the great revealer” of the persistent inequity that has caused long-standing social vulnerability. Gaynor states, “Socially vulnerable communities were created through political decisions such as redlining, gentrification, and industrializations and are less resilient in their ability to respond to and recover from natural and human-made disasters compared with higher-resourced communities.” (2020) COVID-19 will have a long-term deep impact on students’ attending museum spaces in the future. One focus of students visiting the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in

Northwest Arkansas was in the area of critical-thinking skills. The study found the following:

Students assigned by lottery to a tour of the museum improved their ability to think critically about art by 9 percent of a standard deviation relative to the control group. The benefit for disadvantaged groups is considerably larger (see Figure 1). Rural students, who live in towns with fewer than 10,000 people, experience an increase in critical-thinking skills of nearly one-third of a standard deviation. Students from high-poverty schools (those where more than 50 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunches) experience an 18 percent effect-size improvement in critical thinking about art, as do minority students. (Greene, 2014)

The impact of museum visits during COVID being accessed by schools in session (mainly private and parochial tuition- based schools) impacts the access of disadvantaged groups and deepens the social vulnerability of these groups. Although the children will not always be physically in the museum, teacher-led videos and online experiences showing exhibits and creating connections for the children while technically virtual and not on site can contribute to learning and a social connection.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Conceptual Framework

This capstone project will be guided and informed by the *community of practice* (CoP) framework as originally developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). The theory emphasizes that learning does not just occur in the heads of individuals, but within the process of co-participation, more specifically, how people use social interaction to create relationships and understanding of their various communities. Lave and Wenger's (1991) work contributes to

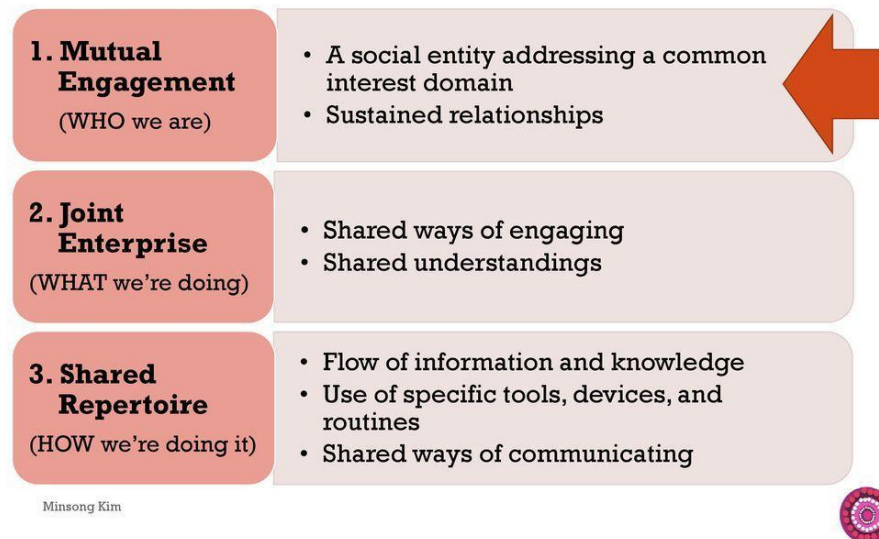
Vygotsky's (1978) discussion of the social dimensions of learning. As Falk (2016) explains, it is a social theory of learning in which one "participate(s) in activities together within the various groups they belong, interacting at a macro and microlevel with each other and with the environment while learning" (p. 45). Creating a social presence through hybrid experiences to build trust and relationships between the teacher and student is an important way to initiate the virtual connection by building on the community of practice framework. In looking at data from four separate studies focused on museum visitor experience and what visitors recall from their museum experiences, Falk (2016) reports that it is the sociocultural aspects of a visit that are rarely forgotten (Falk, 2016).

Framing hybrid early childhood learning experiences as a CoP offers many advantages. In the case of a museum such as the DIA, this framework helps emphasize the importance of integrating childhood learners into a *community of practice* that provides them *mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire* such that they want to continue to participate and self-identify as a member of the hybrid learning CoP. As we learned in the literature review, the visitor experience builds community both in person and online. This social experience develops a deeper relationship with the museum and the art.

Understanding the dynamic nature of community participation can guide and inform hybrid learning experiences to maximize the likelihood that learners will become fully engaged participants in future museum programming. In formalizing the CoP framework as a social theory of learning, Wenger (1998) suggests that the coherence of a community of practice depends on three dimensions: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire.

1. **Mutual engagement:** refers to the actions and interactions that community members share. The relationships among community members rely on both professional and social interactions as they engage in a particular activity.
2. **Joint enterprise:** the set of goals or requirements for the practice, as defined and negotiated, informally, by members of the communities.
3. **Shared repertoire:** refers to the resources that facilitate practice – tools, artifacts, definitions, and common experiences, for example.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE



(Figure 2. Definition of Communities of Practice.
Examples of each area of CoP.)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are other museums doing to engage preschool aged children and their families and educators? How are they funding the efforts?

What are the needs/awareness of preschool teachers and parents of preschool aged children in the area of DIA?

The overarching research questions for the project will be how can the Detroit Institute of Arts create/design communities of practice to best engage early childhood learners and their families in a hybrid learning environment. The research questions will address the problem of practice by looking at how social interaction, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire of students can be present in art activities with their classmates and teacher both in person and during virtual learning. They will also address how the community is built and maintained, as well as funding concerns during COVID-19 which has closed many museums.

Data Collection

To address the study questions, the capstone project will include a survey of local preschool teachers, document analysis from museum websites, and interviews with education directors at 19 museums.

Survey Process. A survey was sent out to preschool teachers in the counties of Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne to gather information regarding their awareness of the Detroit Institute of Arts, the value of field trips and art education, and interest in hybrid museum experiences. The survey (Appendix C) was designed to be anonymous and composed of questions to gain insight to local teacher awareness of the DIA, feelings of art education value, and interest in hybrid art museum experiences. The initial email with the link to the survey was sent to the school/center principals asking them to share the survey with their teachers. Of the 26 schools/school districts, 3 were schools with personal contacts. Follow up emails were sent one week later asking for participation and a closing date was issued for the survey.

Museum Identification Process. Museums were selected for interviews in two ways. The first set of museums were ones that I had visited, lived near, or had heard of. The second set of museums were located on the American Alliance of Museums website, specifically identified on their Distance Learning Database. All additional museums were recommended by museum educators during the semi-structured interview process. Tracking of the evaluation of each museum's website was placed on an Excel spreadsheet with a marking of yes or no values for whether the museum was open or closed, museum virtual offerings, in-person field trip, virtual field trip, cost, hours, funding. The spreadsheet also tracked semi-structured interviews and contact information.

Interview Process. One-on-one 30-minute semi-structured interviews occurred and questions were asked such as describing your museum’s educational philosophy and goals, how early childhood learners fit within the philosophy and goals, preparation and planning experience for the creation of the virtual museum learning for early childhood learners, defining characteristics of the program, and describing opportunities for the future. The interview questions (Appendix B) tied back to who we are, what we’re doing, and how we’re doing it, which is part of the Community of Practice framework. Interview questions were written to encourage conversation about both in-person and hybrid learning environments.

Emails were sent to directors of education at the 54 museums identified through the process listed above. Of the emails sent out, 24 museums responded and 19 30-minute interviews were scheduled and completed with 20 museum educators. All interviews took place over Zoom and were recorded for the purpose of later transcription.

Data Analysis

In this section, I will describe the methods used to analyze the interview, survey and website data. The data collection tools and analysis methods were informed by the Communities of Practice framework in an effort to support the value of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire.

Interview Data. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants with leadership roles in the education department of their museum. The semi-structured interviews allowed for systematic collection of information with opportunities to follow up or ask probing questions to clarify details and better understand the museum decision making around their education offerings (Woolf, 2017). Often, the conversations that

stemmed off those original questions/answers led to a much deeper understanding of museum work and the impact of COVID-19.

I used MAXQDA, a CAQDAS “Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software” to organize, code, and analyze the nine hours of transcripts from my semi-structured interviews. Coding of each interview was completed using MAXQDA which allowed for a systematic qualitative content analysis. The coding system included high frequency words centered around the interview questions and common themes during interviews.

(Table 1. Qualitative Coding Themes)

Code System	Frequency	Code System	Frequency
Virtual learning	126	Reopening	13
Field Trips	51	Outdoor space use	9
Tech	47	Family Programming	8
Access	39	Teacher communication	8
Fee	35	Members	7
Funding	32	Summer Camp	7
Education department	31	Pre-Covid priorities	7
Community	26	Marketing - Awareness	6
Evaluation	26	Pre School	6
Staffing	23	No trips	3
Post-Covid priorities	21	Async	2
Teachers	20	Art curriculum roadblock	2

Survey Data. The survey was completed by seven preschool teachers and one first grade teacher, but people were generally unresponsive. Despite the survey going to teachers in Macomb and Oakland Counties as well, only Wayne County teachers responded. Because of the limited response rate, only descriptive analysis will be performed to look at the item-level responses to the survey questions. I will be looking at the number of respondents who selected the response options.

FINDINGS

Question 1: What are other museums doing to engage preschool- aged children and their families and educators?

Finding 1: Museums have taken various paths with no one set method of online hybrid experiences. Yet all museums created the experiences for a common purpose: to encourage the feeling of community among preschool-aged children, their families, and educators. During the interviews, the museum educators spoke about offering virtual learning opportunities, their arts education missions, the importance of community presence and connection, and increasing access for more children. In the following sections, I describe findings around each of these areas.

Virtual Learning. There were 126 references to virtual learning opportunities within the interviews. Virtual learning was brought up in 19 of the 20 interviews. The strongest connection to virtual learning on the Code Map (see Appendix E). The museum educators shared the sentiment that virtual learning was not only important but critical to help the museum have a presence in front of their current and potential constituents. One museum educator said:

We have to keep people remembering that we're here. Even though we're doing online programs, it's better they see me than they see nothing, and and at least maybe they'll be excited to come when the doors open, they'll **recognize me** when the doors open. If you don't stay focused on trying to **stay top of mind** with everything else going on, who's to say people are going to come back when doors reopen?

Continuing to be a familiar face when museums open and staying top of mind for their members and visitors was a common sentiment across the interviews.

Museum directors also spoke to issues of technology with virtual learning. They mentioned challenges from the introduction of new technology to staff members, need for professional development, identifying staff members who could share their knowledge of certain technology tools, along with conversations tying technology to community engagement. One director shared:

It's ironic to me that at this time, we're really utilizing a lot of technology in a whole new way to be able to make these strong connections to people that we can't see in person, we can only see them through technology.

Building relationships through technology still held value despite the high desire by all of the museums to be able to have their constituents have full access to the artwork, historic buildings, and any hands-on materials.

During an interview, one museum director shared:

If we're already their trusted source for that type of material, hopefully, they're looking to us for some of that already. So we need to provide something. We might not have the most polished or, you know, the vast array of options that some of the larger museums would have, but we can at least provide them with something. And then they know the quality that they're going to get and the kind of expertise or at least the local aspect of it.

Education. Connection with virtual learning and technology were conversations around education of the students in a virtual or hybrid setting. Shared by a museum educator:

Oftentimes, and it's not just museums, there are a lot of organizations that hold a sort of an educational sense about them. The sense that I'm going to tell you what you need. I'm going to provide for you the education you need to be a better person. In reality that's still not what they are looking for and will go somewhere else to find it. You're better off digging in and getting a sense of it.”

Common threads in all interviews included 14 directors talking about education, all 19 speaking about teachers, and 12 connecting their work to PreK students.. The education departments shared what they were doing to support teachers and many started the school year by surveying the teachers and asking them what they were looking for to support their classroom work. They did the work in advance to learn what the teachers needed. While some teachers responded by saying, “we’ll take anything you have,” others said “they could not add another thing” and would reach back at a later date.

A resounding 100% of participants strongly agreed the experience of visiting an art museum is one that every child deserves. The survey showed positive answers regarding interest in a preschool hybrid learning program with seven participants strongly agreeing and one agreeing in a five point scale. Concerns around funding and access started to be revealed in questions regarding ability to pay for extra curricular funding (six participants strongly agreed or agreed compared to two participants who responded neutrally to strongly disagree). Technology access was shared in how many classrooms had projectors but no screen set up.

museum at the same rate as students in private and parochial school settings. One museum director said:

It raises a lot of questions for us about equity and access, like the people who are able to do the pay as you wish, are probably the people who are already tapping into the museum programming. It's sort of the people that we're missing on site that we're sort of doubly missing virtually because of other access issues.

As museums started to offer group virtual learning opportunities, the interviews found that those who participated in the group activities were private and parochial schools (tuition based), then public schools, and finally Title One public schools. In addition, members/donors were invited to participate in activities early on in over half of the museums interviewed.

While there were issues of access that caused concern, there was one very specific conversation around transportation and how it had a positive impact on access to the museum. Without the need to arrive at the museum physically in order to participate in activities and see the art, families were able to stay at home in the comfort of their homes, with snacks available, and bathrooms close by, with no transportation needed. One interviewee shared:

I really liked the idea of meeting families where they are. I like they don't have to look for parking or feel stressed about getting on the Metro dealing with strollers, things like that. So there's been a real accessibility plus with this platform that I'm delighted to see. It's also another huge bonus for us is that we're not limited to what's on the walls so we can work with works on paper that are not as accessible because of their fragility. We can work with photographs and if we want we can work with sculpture.”

Access may need to be pushed out and not pushed in. The method of pushing out brings the museum to the community. One interviewee spoke of physically going to the children/families as they have so many obstacles keeping them from pushing into the museum, especially during COVID-19.

Question 2: How are they funding their efforts?

Finding 2: Funding structures have changed at most museums interviewed due to implications of COVID-19. The changes vary at each museum from moving to free entry, pay your way structures, or specific member only benefits. In addition to changes in fee structures, museums have found ways to encourage participation including virtual experiences for members, craft kits curated and shipped to members, and opening the outside COVID-friendly property to the local neighborhood/community. The museums have looked for ways to incorporate volunteer docents with one museum having docents tape tours of exhibits to be shared virtually.

Gate fee. Many of the fee structures have been adjusted at the 19 museums interviewed. Three of the museums moved to a “pay as you wish” model, five moved to a flat rate for tours, 12 were able to continue or start a free model, and three lowered their fees. All of the 19 museums provided free online content via their website or social media (one museum offered free virtual content to members as a member benefit). All museums with outdoor space opened the space for the community at no cost. Two museums created art kits that were donated for free to local children while four museums charged minimal cost kits to complement their online programming. Participants of the online programming were pleased to have the materials curated for them in advance. Specific interview conversations around gate fee (11 museum mentions) were tied to access (8 museums), community (12 museums), post-covid priorities (14 museums),

pre-school (12 museums), and virtual learning (17 museums) as seen on the Code Map (see Appendix E). They were tied to these factors in such a strong way such as the impact of the lack of the gate fee due to museums being closed, and therefore, the gate fee no longer being collected had a strong impact on the museum budget. Gate fee was an issue for 11 of the museums. One museum educator shared:

Another thing to keep in mind the price point. We are still offering things that are completely free, things that have some small charge (but it's optional), and then things that are fully charged. I think that is a really good model to have, a kind of payment spectrum especially right now. You don't know who is out of jobs and who is home with their kids and can or can't afford it. You can't assume right now and it's great to give people those different options.

Museums who were able to re-open or charge for programming chose various payment structures. The “pay your way” was seen as helpful to museums as people were willing to give to help the museum and felt a need to pay for the access to materials even if online. On the other hand, the “pay your way” system was considered an access issue by some of the museums as those who participated were most likely able to pay even if they decided not to. One museum offered:

It also becomes harder to get picked up in the roundups emails and things that tell you about all the great stuff you can do as a family in the virtual world. And we're less likely to get picked up if we're charging and what we're going against is free.

Most community museums with grounds (usually considered private) opened their grounds to the neighborhood for free. One museum created inexpensive signs with notes such as “If you want to keep our grounds looking beautiful, please consider donating.” with QR codes on the sign placed around the grounds. Welcome signs adorned the lawns as a way of

encouraging community involvement and a warm sentiment during a pandemic.

Funding & Staffing. Across all of the museums interviewed, there were adjustments to staffing numbers, job descriptions of education department members, and/or fee and funding structures of the museum. While some of the departments were able to keep all employees, jobs shifted to include virtual teaching, online material creation, and partnership with advancement and marketing teams. One museum educator said:

So it really has been an all hands on deck all just jumping in wherever any task needs to be accomplished. This is a good thing. You know, as management staff, we get a little stuck on the planning end, and we don't always get down to see what's happening with the frontline folks.

More than 40% of the museums I spoke to had a decrease in staffing in their education department either through furlough or permanent loss of job. The job descriptions were rewritten to complete the same museum activities (adjusted for COVID) through the remaining staff members. Despite the smaller education departments, most museums are looking to maintain their new virtual programming, in addition to in-person programming when museums resume previously run programs.

Funding & Community. Conversation about community also tied to gate fee. Museums felt an overall loss of community when their doors closed. They worked to gain a feeling of community through an online presence, especially on social media. Facebook Live played a critical role as museums ran story time and live galley tours on the Facebook platform. One museum shared that they have to consider how long offering free programming is viable. At what point should they start to charge, yet run the risk of losing community.

Question 3: *What needs do preschool teachers have and what do parents need? (re-framed) The question was slightly reframed to focus on how museum directors see a need to build community among parents and teachers during COVID. What are the needs/awareness of preschool teachers and parents of preschool aged children in the area of DIA? (Original)*

Finding 3: There was more systematic listening by the museums/education departments. The museums that gathered evidence and connected with families felt more comfortable with their approach. The DIA shows evidence of doing this as they had created a partnership with local schools and invited them in through a virtual platform when in-person was shut down due to COVID.

Awareness. There was strong evidence of teachers knowing the DIA as seven of the eight teachers who completed the survey have been to the DIA at least once. They also all feel the arts are necessary in a balanced curriculum for all students with seven respondents strongly agreeing and one agreeing to the statement.

Program Best Practices. During the interviews, there were a few best practices that were identified in museums around the country. One museum always hosts their PreK programs before the main general admission opening time of the museum. They had the museum to themselves and the children/caregivers were welcome to stay as long as they wanted. They could also access outdoor museum space and stay for lunch. A few museums moved to adding content to their websites immediately and then moved to a live virtual story time. One shared:

We're finding that by catching them when they're young that's what's making them lifelong art lovers and lifelong museum lovers. They're not intimidated by it. **They understand the rules, but they also understand the fun behind the museum.**

One museum used Zoom and limited the number of participants. This allowed for the ability to interact with the children/guests. They can then follow up with activities online. For a low fee of \$5.00, participants are able to pick up a free kit with printed instructions and most of the materials needed for the activity.

While all of the museums offered virtual programming, there were decisions made to cut certain programs and keep others. Five of the museums looked at their former programs and brought them back with great success. The tried and true programs might have been what their constituents felt comfortable seeing in an unsure time.

Multi-generational programming was also successful during COVID as families chose to stay close, find pods and travel only with those in that small group. Descriptions of parents, grandparents, and children of the same family who stayed longer than they would have on property (those with open grounds) were noted as unusual but very welcome.

When volunteer docents were mentioned during interviews it was with great passion. The docents were described as “trained to offer virtual experiences”, “very involved”, and “helpful in a hard time.”

Recommendations

Increase Social Media Presence PreK-HS: Throughout the literature and review of data gathered via interview, creating community was the most critical aspect of the museum for success. The museums all continued or launched virtual programming as a way to bring the community together during COVID and many found success creating community via social media. The DIA used their social media platforms to reach out to constituents with a perceived focus on sharing artwork, telling stories of artists, and providing live events. My recommendation is to strengthen the social media presence with a focus on PreK-HS students. This can be done as part of the overall social media marketing plan or through teacher takeover days. Encouraging teacher social takeover days would help develop the relationship between local teachers, provide content specifically for a PreK-12 audience, and build a virtual community for that audience. Recently the DIA introduced *Wimee's Words* on their Facebook page, describing Wimee as “a fun lovable robot that inspires kids to learn through creativity.” (DIA, Facebook, 2021) The DIA will share the series the fourth Saturday of each month. It will offer community engagement through chat options.

Create a Teacher- Based Auxiliary Group: While adding an advisory committee adds one more task for an education department to manage, the opportunity to reflect on the needs of the museums and teachers will bring additional success to museum education programs. Comprising both museum staff and outside early childhood and elementary educators, the advisory committee would work together to create a needs assessment for local school teachers. The group identified what they needed to continue art and museum art education in their classroom helped build community and trust back to the museum once re-opened/running familiar

programming. One museum director shared:

I think trial and error is a big thing. We've definitely had things that succeed and things that don't and you just can't get upset about it. Definitely doing the surveys I think are a huge thing. Another thing is **advisory committees and not assuming that you know what is best for people**. We have asked families what they want, we've asked our sensory families what they want, we've asked teachers, and I think that that's been a huge thing in that we're not assuming what you want.

The DIA could increase their outreach to early childhood learners by launching an ages 3-6 hybrid program modeled after their current DIA Head Start Program. Charging the advisory group with the work could help offset staffing cost concerns and also put the proposed project in the hands of the teachers whose students would benefit from the program, offering additional buy-in.

The auxiliary group could also support volunteer docents to create videos and content that could be used in both the Pre-K program and general education programs. Volunteer docents are an important part of the museum community as they are dedicated and drawn to the work they do based on their own interest and not for a paycheck.

Lead the Building Access to All Detroit Museums: *Invisible Doors*, A Detroit Museum Collaborative, is my suggested name for a collaborative organization to combine resources with other Detroit museums. Modeled after the DC Arts & Humanities Education Collaborative (mentioned in multiple interviews), ***Invisible Doors*** would be the leading organization in building community around Detroit museums and cultural centers.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the importance of community in a museum experience not only during regular times but especially during a pandemic such as COVID-19. Various ways of creating community exist from creating content that constituents can view for free or a minimal fee, reaching out to teachers and helping support their virtual classrooms, and improving overall access to all art for all children and adults.

The DIA is positioned to maintain its presence in the city of Detroit as the preeminent house of art but also act as a leader in bringing the community of museums together for the betterment of the city and its neighboring towns. Its goal of being the leader of youth museum education can grow through the work within the museum and/or the creation of an arts collaborative in Detroit.

Review of the formal evaluation of the Head Start program could indicate the success of the work and possibility of replicating the program to reach other Detroit and neighboring town Pre-K schools, either in person or in a hybrid setting. Children will build their relationship with the DIA at a young age. Inviting them in as well as bringing the museum to them via hybrid learning experiences, social media, and curriculum for teachers stands to improve the overall membership in the coming year at the DIA.

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Museums Interviewed

Andrew Jackson's Hermitage
Belle Meade Historic Site and Winery
Brandywine Conservancy Museum of Art
Burchfield Penney Art Center
Cincinnati Museum Center
Dumbarton House
East Hampton Historical Society
Ford's Theatre
Frye Art Museum
Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens
HistoryMiami Museum
Museum at Eldridge Street
The Long Island Museum
Museum of Natural and Cultural History
National Gallery of Art
Pacific Science Center
Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum
Tudor Place Historic House and Garden
Wisconsin Historical Society

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Capstone Project Lead: Jennifer Johann Kendall // Email: jennifer.j.kendall@vanderbilt.edu

Capstone Advisor: Dr. Laura Booker // Email: laura.booker@vanderbilt.edu

As part of my doctoral studies at Vanderbilt University, I am working with the Detroit Institute of Arts as they consider how to design communities of practice to engage early childhood learners and their families in a virtual/blended learning environment. I would like to interview you for this study because of your leadership position with the XXX XXX museum. DIA is interested in learning how your museum has thought about engagement with children, families, and teachers during this time.

The Zoom or phone call should take about 30-40 minutes. Participation is voluntary and your response will be kept anonymous. You will have the option to not respond to any question that you choose.

Please respond to this survey by January 19 to let me know whether you are willing to participate. If there is someone else at your museum who would be a better contact, please let me know.

If you have any questions about the project, please contact the Principal Investigator, Jennifer Johann Kendall, via email at jennifer.j.kendall@vanderbilt.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Laura Booker at laura.booker@vanderbilt.edu.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Johann Kendall

Appendix B: Interview Guide

The goal of this interview is to establish an understanding of the hybrid learning experiences your museum offers to early learners and the role of community. For the purposes of this research, “early learner” is defined as a child age 2-6, and “experience” could mean anything from a regularly scheduled program to a special family event with early learners in mind.

Preamble:

- Thank the participant for participating
- Describe the study
- Display the informed consent document
- Do you consent to being recorded? [Start the recording]

Please tell me a little bit about your role and experience at the museum.

Sustained relationships

Tell me briefly about the overall educational philosophy and goals of (Name of Museum)?

- a. How do early learners fit into the museum’s goals?
 - b. How do schools fit in?
 - c. How do families fit in?
2. What do you hope the community would gain from participating in your programs targeting early learners?
- a. *Children?*
 - b. *Teachers?*
 - c. *Families?*

What we’re doing? (Shared understanding/ways of engaging)

1. What programs do you have now?
 - a. *In person? Virtual? Hybrid?*
 - i. How has that changed because of COVID?
 - b. What did you used to have?

-
- c. If you now have hybrid, how was the initial idea to offer a hybrid early childhood programming first raised at (Name of Museum)? Please describe the program.
 2. How are staff members involved in the ongoing development of these hybrid early learning experiences?
 - a. *Who are the staff members involved?*
 3. *Do you engage educators or parents from the local communities in planning programs?*
 4. Is there any special training for educators and/or families/parents who work on and facilitate these programs?
 5. Why did you pick to highlight certain programs, activities, galleries, other approaches/these approaches over others?
 6. If you implemented a virtual program after closing, did you evaluate it prior to incorporating it into a hybrid program?
 - a. If you did, what did you learn or change prior to launching the hybrid model?
 7. In an ideal situation, what do you hope a child would gain from participating in your hybrid early learning programming?
 8. How are the hybrid learning programs funded?
 - a. Was there funding already allocated to use to build the hybrid programming?
 - b. Did the museum have to seek new funding?

How are we doing it? (Use of specific tools, shared communication)

1. What do you see as the defining characteristics of your museum's hybrid early learning experiences? (If needed, provide examples: some characteristics might be something along the lines of incorporating collections, virtual sensory exploration, virtual hands-on art making, use of movement, family engagement, or self-directed learning, etc.)
2. What technology tools did you use to implement the virtual aspects of your program?
3. How often did you communicate with the community regarding your hybrid program (learning opportunities, community experience options, etc)

-
4. Has your staff discussed how your hybrid early learning experiences might change in the future? In an ideal situation, what direction would your museum like to take its hybrid learning programming in the next 5 years?
 5. What is the best piece of advice you would give to another art museum that is considering creating hybrid early learning experiences?

Closing

1. If there was one piece you could focus on to improve any part of your hybrid learning arts education program, what should that be?
2. If another museum was deciding to enter into a similar hybrid learning opportunity, what suggestions might you make to ensure all members of the community are involved?
3. Do you have another museum that you know that offers a hybrid learning model for young children that you suggest I contact?

Appendix C: Survey

Museum Education Survey - Vanderbilt University Capstone Project - Jennifer Kendall

* Required Information

* 1. Have you ever been to the Detroit Institute of Arts?

- Yes
- No
- Never heard of it

* 2. How many times have you been?

- Never
- Just Once
- Two-three times
- More than 3 times

3. If you have been to the Detroit Institute of Arts, what was the purpose of your visit to DIA? (select all that apply)

- Pleasure
- Field Trip

Create a Survey ^

* 4. Have you ever been to the Detroit Institute of Arts on a field trip as an educator?

- Yes
- No

5. I take my students on field trips at least once a year.

- Yes
- No

6. I am most interested in lessons that strengthen what subject areas? (Please rate in order of importance with 1 being least important and 4 being most important)

[Please rank all option(s).]

Language Arts

-Rank - v ≡

Math

-Rank - v ≡

Science

-Rank - v ≡

Social Studies

-Rank - v ≡

Create a Survey ^

7. The arts have a positive impact on my students.

- Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

8. I believe the arts are necessary in a balanced curriculum for all students.

- Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

9. I give my students the opportunity to express ideas from other content areas through the arts.

- Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. I regularly collaborate and plan lessons with certified in-school arts teachers.

- Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

11. I believe that the experience of visiting an art museum is one that every child deserves.

- Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

12. I have money available in my district to pay for extra-curricular activities inside or outside the classroom.

- Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

13. I would incorporate an education packet from the museum into my lesson planning.

- Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14. I believe that an early childhood hybrid learning program from the DIA would enrich my curriculum.

- Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. I believe my students would take advantage of DIA online materials at home.

- Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16. The biggest obstacle to taking advantage of extra-curricular resources for my students is?

- (a) Lack of Time --Select--
- (b) Inflexible schedule --Select--
- (c) Testing --Select--
- (d) School policies --Select--
- (e) Busing --Select--
- (f) Money --Select--

17. I would be likely to take advantage of the following museum program at the DIA.

- (a) In person trip --Select--
- (b) Online only --Select--
- (c) Hybrid (learning online followed by in person trip) --Select--

18. The best time to incorporate museum education into my schedule is:

- Early fall
- Late fall
- Winter
- Early spring
- Late spring

19. My district provides funds and transportation for field trips for my students:

- Once a year
- Twice a year
- More than twice a year
- Not at all

Museum Education Survey - Vanderbilt University Capstone Project - Jennifer Kendall

20. Do you have a projector setup in your classroom?

- Yes
- No

21. Do you have a screen setup in your classroom?

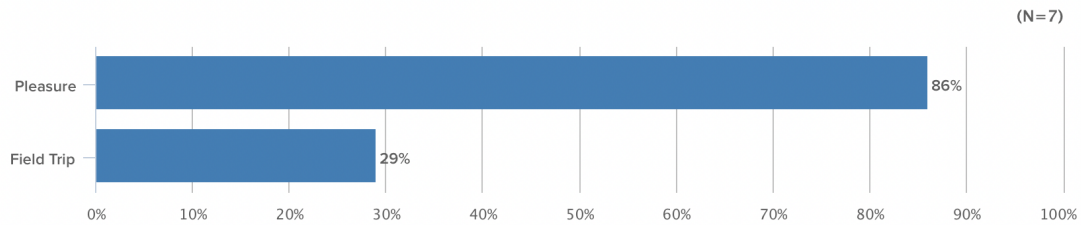
- Yes
- No

22. My school is located in the following county:

- Macomb
- Oakland
- Wayne
- Other (Please specify)

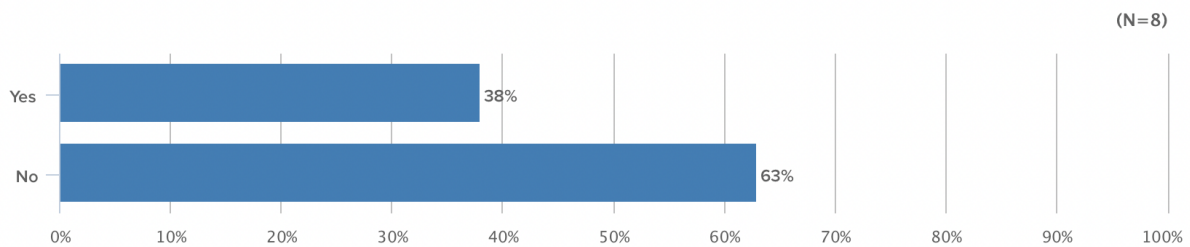
Appendix D: Survey Results

3. If you have been to the Detroit Institute of Arts, what was the purpose of your visit to DIA? (select all that apply)

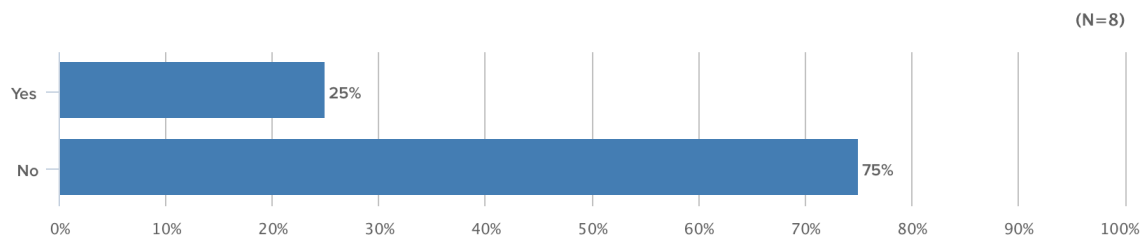


Because multiple answers per participant are possible, the total percentage may exceed 100%.

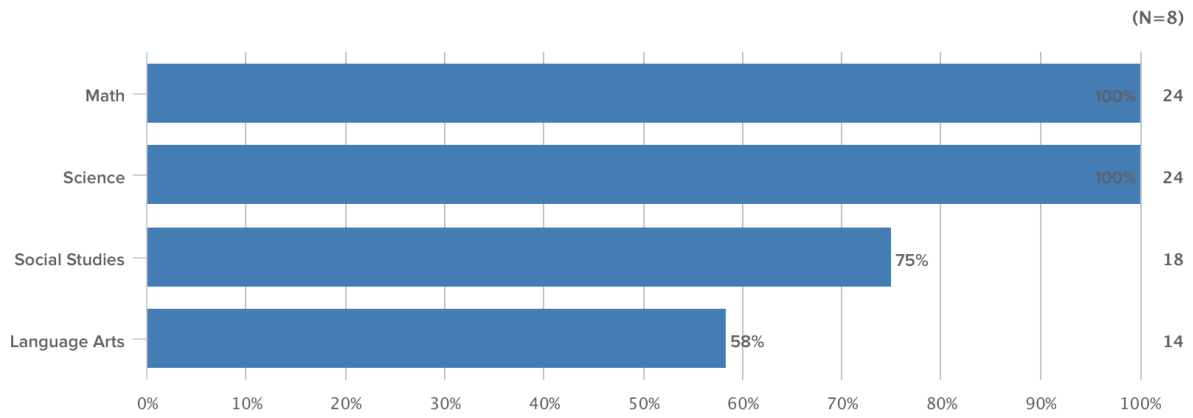
4. Have you ever been to the Detroit Institute of Arts on a field trip as an educator?



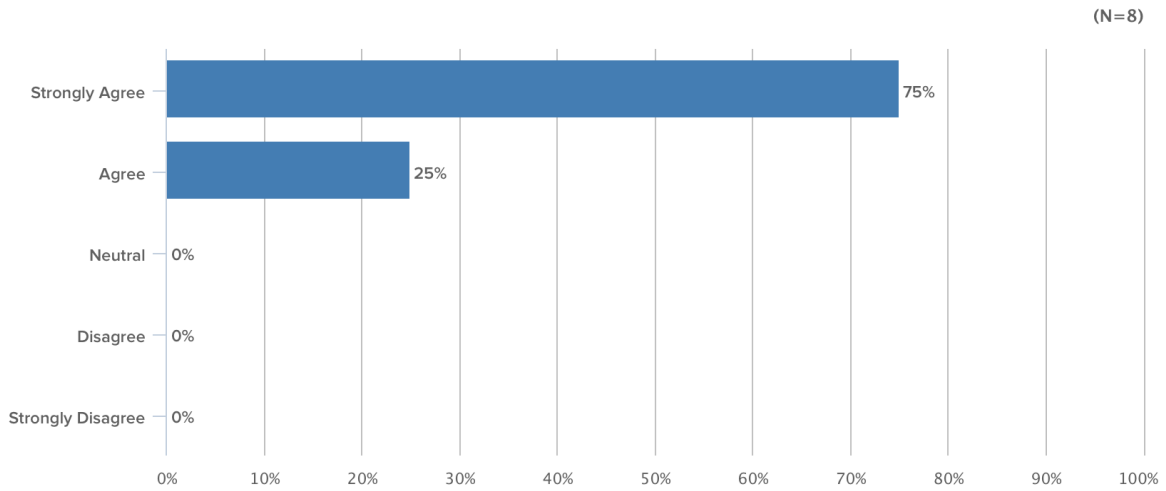
5. I take my students on field trips at least once a year.



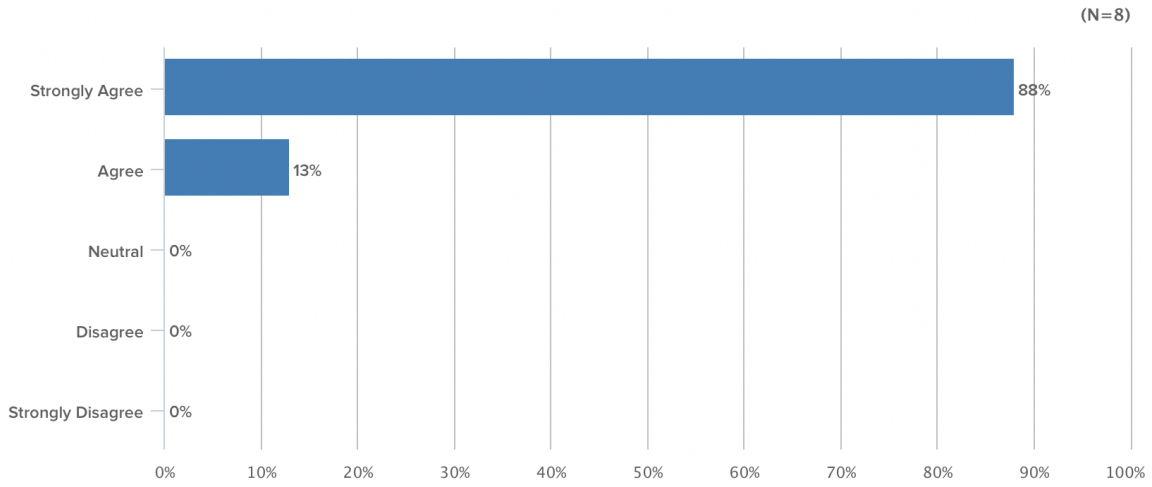
6. I am most interested in lessons that strengthen what subject areas? (Please rate in order of importance with 1 being least important and 4 being most important)



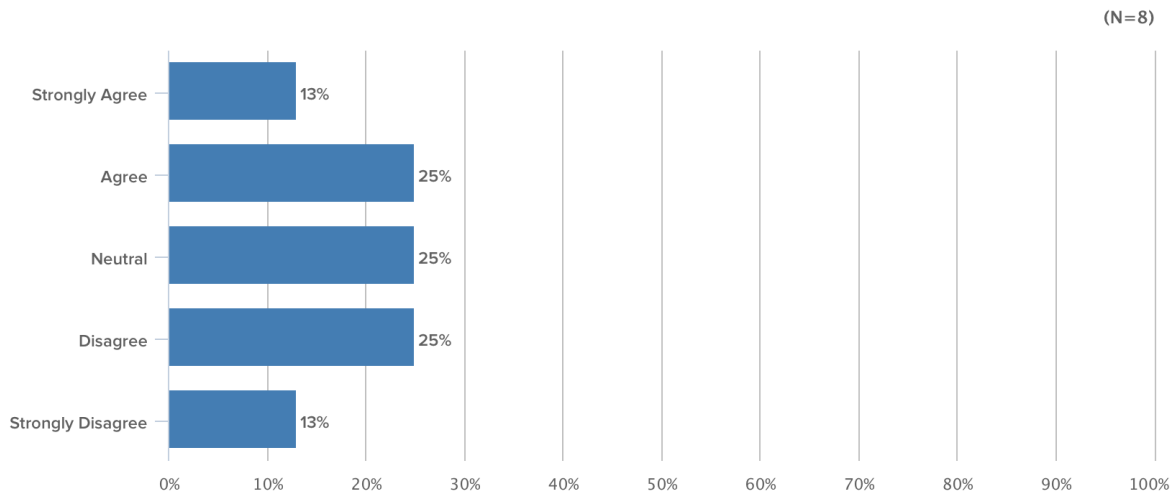
7. The arts have a positive impact on my students.



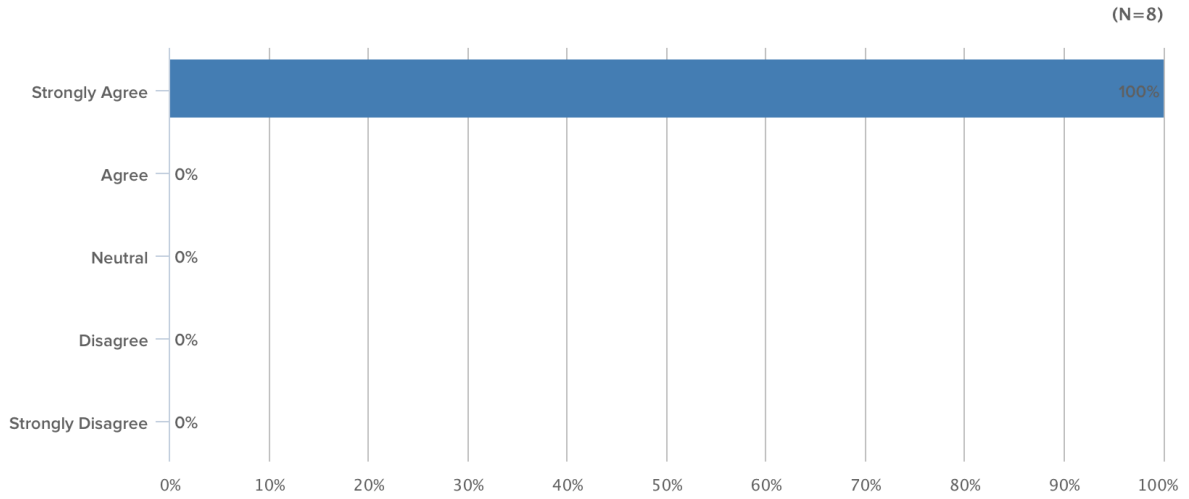
8. I believe the arts are necessary in a balanced curriculum for all students.



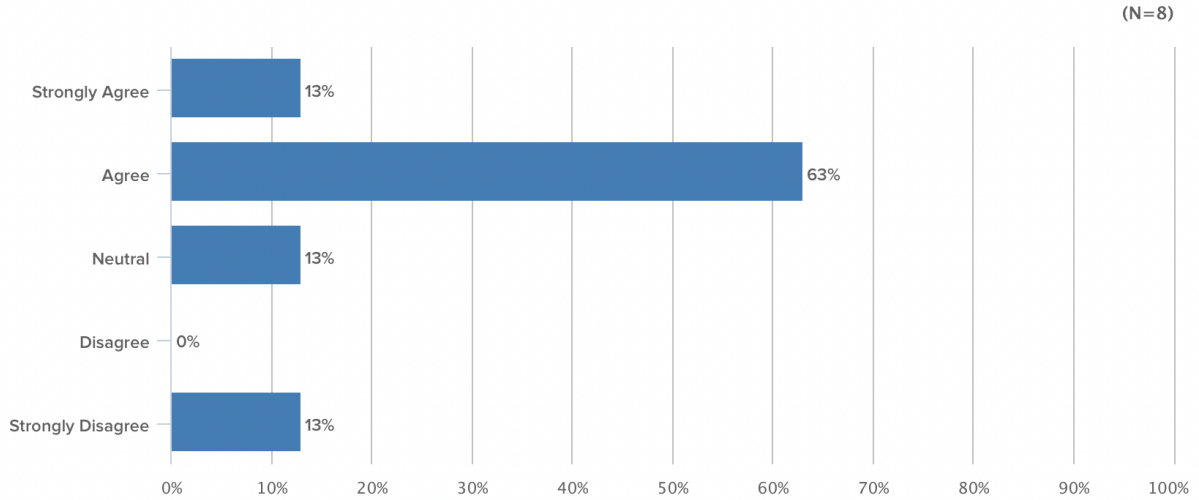
10. I regularly collaborate and plan lessons with certified in-school arts teachers.



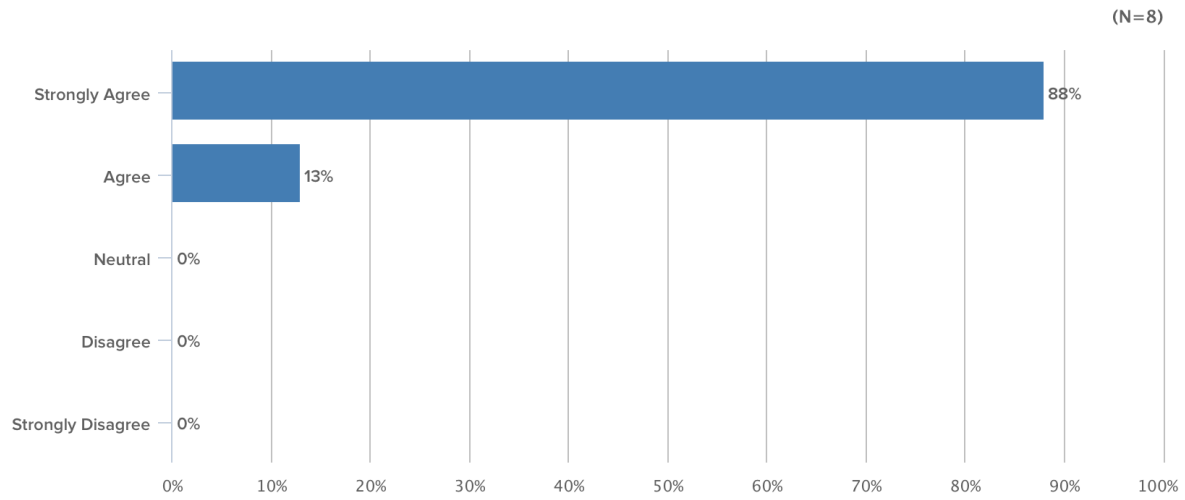
11. I believe that the experience of visiting an art museum is one that every child deserves.



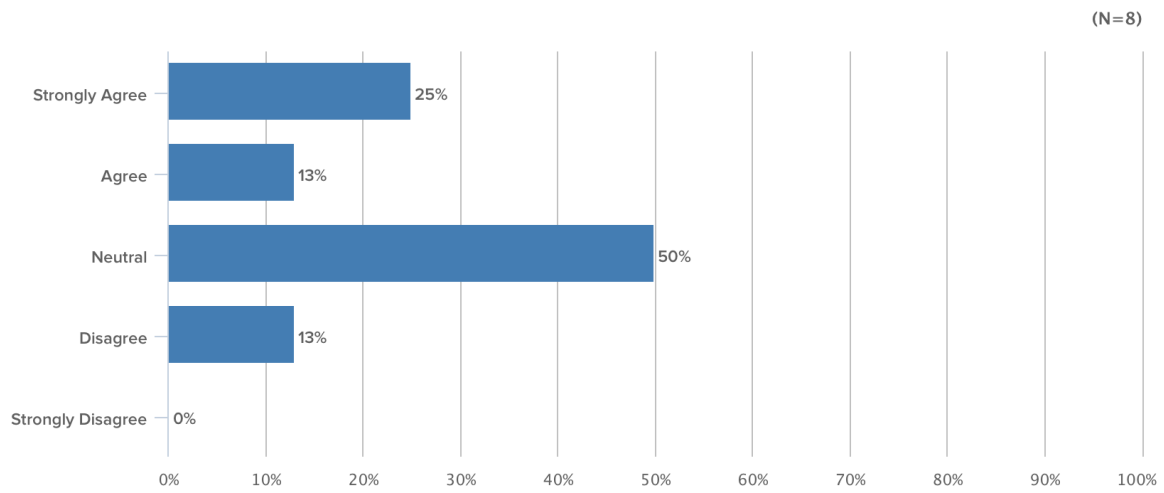
12. I have money available in my district to pay for extra-curricular activities inside or outside the classroom.



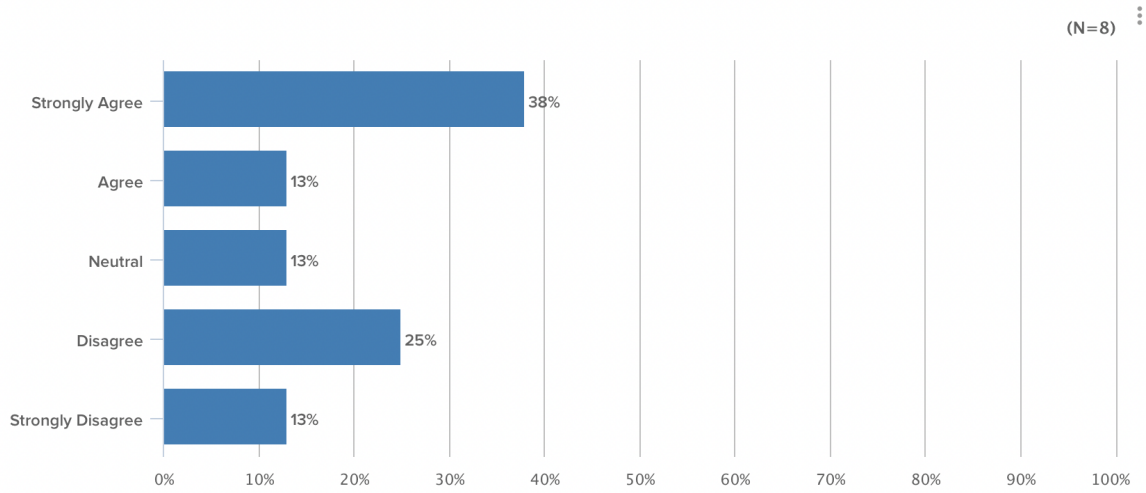
14. I believe that an early childhood hybrid learning program from the DIA would enrich my curriculum.



15. I believe my students would take advantage of DIA online materials at home.

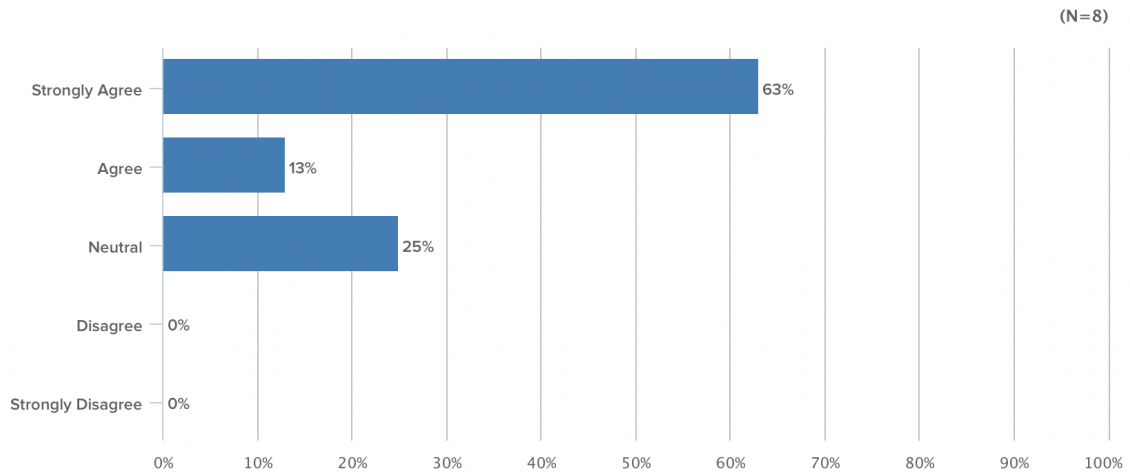


16 e. Busing

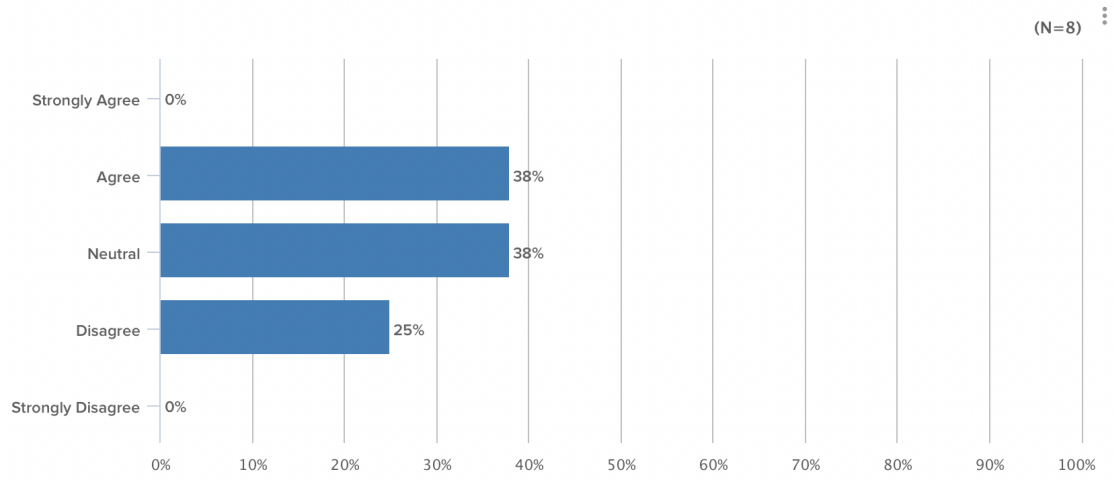


17. I would be likely to take advantage of the following museum program at the DIA.

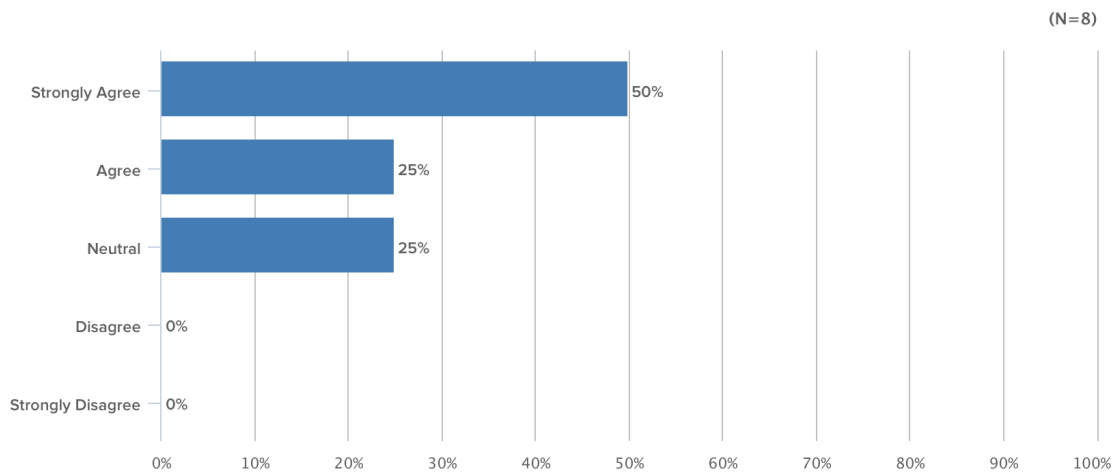
17 a. In person trip



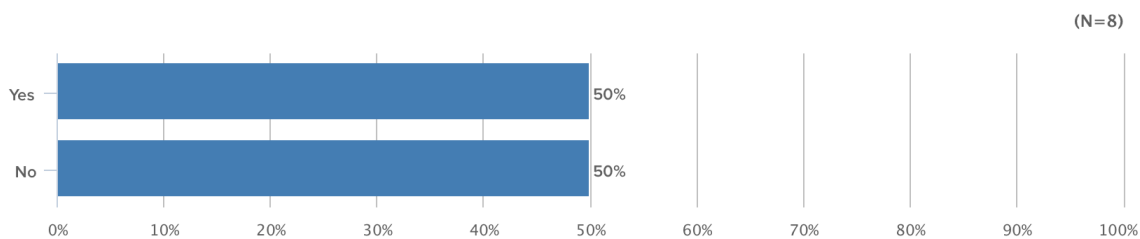
17 b. Online only



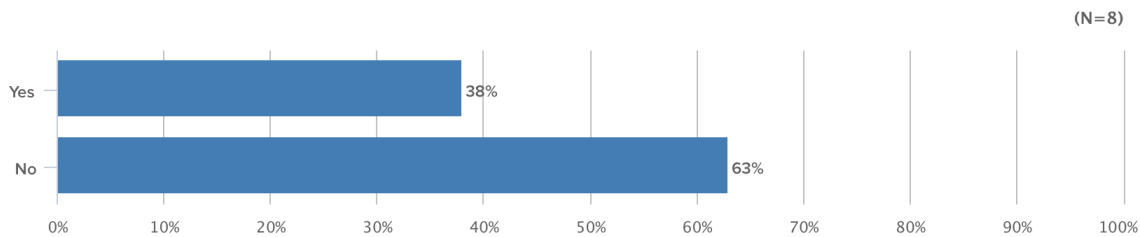
17 c. Hybrid (learning online followed by in person trip)



20. Do you have a projector setup in your classroom?



21. Do you have a screen setup in your classroom?



Appendix E: Code Map

