Participant Observation at the Makerfaire

Assignment 1

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EDTC 809

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Fall 2015

Overview of Location

On Saturday, September 26, 2015, the researcher gathered observational data at the 6th annual World Maker Faire New York. Tens of thousands of participants attended the two-day event which was held on the grounds of the New York Hall of Science located in the borough of Queens. The event featured seven stages and six attraction areas with over 200 scheduled presentations. Maker Faire is a family-friendly event that attracts tech enthusiasts of all ages. Crafters, tinkerers, engineers, students, authors and hobbyist are also fascinated by meeting new people and being exposed to countless experiences at Maker Faire.

The Maker Faire took place in an open area with strategically positioned stages, exhibitor tents, vendors, activity stations, picnic area tables and a vast number of food trucks. There were six main zones in all including: Zone 1 (NYSCI’s Connected World), Zone 2 (Robot Resurrection), Zone 3 (Maker Shed), Zone 4 (Robotics), Zone 5 (Cirque Amongus) and Zone 6 (Power Racing Series). Overall, the grounds were well kept and maintained by a cleanup team. Trash/composting and recycling bins were easily accessible to all. A medical team was also on hand to address any unforeseen medical emergencies.

After the researcher toured the location, she positioned herself near Zone 3 at a picnic table across from Maker Italia. Directly behind the researcher was the Maker Pavillion which was a tented area with numerous exhibitors and vendors promoting the Maker Movement. There were also approximately 10 food trucks positioned to the left of vicinity where the researcher was located. This was a prime location to observe and record the social interactions of the participants due to the multitude of people.

Observational Notes

The observation began shortly after 2:00 p.m. Numerous participants flowed through the main walkway of the faire. One female participant made a phone call underneath the Maker Italia tent while three others females that were nearby viewed information on a cell phone. A multitude of people walked through the area to get to their next destination. A mother and a father pushed their toddler in a stroller towards Zone 2 while a father and son made their way to the food truck. As all of this was happening, one of the event workers transported several cases of water on a hand-held truck.

 Several of the participants that attended the event walked with their red canvas Makerfaire bags in hand. The crowds were comprised of families, couples and groups. Some of the participants were in transit from one destination to the next while others looked for an area to consume their recently purchased meal, snack or beverage while others stopped to check their cell phones. Others simply took a moment to take a photo of whatever captured their eye at the moment.

During the observation, it was noted that live entertainment was sprinkled into the event every 15 minutes or so. Several bands paraded through the main walkway including an eclectic band and a Caribbean marching band. The actual bands differed in the types of music played and in composition of the members of the ensemble. Shortly after the Caribbean band moved to its next destination the next form of entertainment entered the walkway. Atmel, the AVR caricature, greeted the event participants that were nearby. Three college-aged students stopped to meet Atmel. The interactions were captured by Atmel’s photographer and promoter.

The television crew from Nickelodeon was also on hand to capture highlights of the event. As the crew was strolling by, they noticed a participant with a 5ft. dinosaur structure made out of lime green straws and connectors. They stopped the individual to record footage of the newly created innovation.

While at the picnic table, a young girl and her father waited at the table while the older brother purchased a marshmallow shooter from the Maker Pavillion. As the father waited, an older couple walked by pushing their black dog in child’s stroller. Two male participants also sat at the same picnic table with the observer. They consumed their lunch and spoke to one another in their native tongue.

The young boy that was at the Maker Shed returned to the table to reunite with his father and his sister. The following is an exchange that took place between the young boy and his family:

*Boy:* “Can I have a marshmallow to see if it works?” “Wanna see what I do?” “You put it in here.”

*Mom:* “Don’t eat it (while addressing the little sister).”

*Sister:* “Why?”

*Mom:* “Because it’s dirty.”

*Boy:* “Ready?” “Olivia’s works better.”

*Mom:* “Nice one.”

*Boy:* “Oh yeah!”

*Mom:* “Don’t eat it (while addressing the little sister).”

*Boy:* “Cool.”

*Mom:* “Don’t eat it (while addressing the little sister).”

*Boy:* “Oh yeah!” Laughter is heard.

*Mom:* “Let’s get your stuff.”

Analytical Section

It would appear that the organizers of the Makerfaire have created a venue with mass appeal and an intriguing allure. There is literally something for anyone and everyone including presentations, hands-on activities, performances, live entertainment for audiences of all ages, and eclectic culinary delights for the foodies. You do not need a tech background to truly enjoy this event. The event planners have incorporated so many diverse activities that your average person is sure to become a Maker after attending this venue.

 Throughout the course of the day’s event, the observer witnessed firsthand how parents were making a concerted effort to engage their young children to the Maker Movement. Some of the parents prompted their children to play the flaming organ while others encouraged them to watch the vibrations of the water as they played a keyboard. In one way or the other, whether at the Maker Camp area or on line while purchasing an item at the Maker Shed, both mothers and fathers were exposing their children to Science, Technology, Engineering or Math (STEM).

From the types of informal conversations that were observed, it was evident that many of the parents had a STEM background and they were taking this as an opportunity to expose their children to the field at an early age. By exposing these young makers to the movement, it may peak their curiosity and increase the likelihood that they will want to pursue their interests further.

References

World Maker Faire New York. (2015). Retreived from <http://makerfaire.com/>.