



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
National Building Museum, Washington, DC
Patterns: Here, There, & Everywhere School Tour
Evaluation
August 2008

The National Building Museum Education Department sought to better understand how and what children learn while on the Patterns tour, a hands-on guided experience for K-2 students. Audience Focus created a mixed-method design of observations, embedded assessment, and post-visit interviews to address the following evaluation questions:

- During the Museum visit, how and to what degree do students employ the skills identified in the learning outcomes?
- To what degree do teachers use the Educators Resource Packet for pre-visit preparation and post-visit reinforcement?

Twenty classes were observed during the Museum visit and nine of the twenty teachers were sampled after the visit. Reasons that teachers wanted to bring their students to the Museum for this tour included: the tour aligned well with what they did in the classroom; the Museum had a good reputation and teachers felt confident that any experience there would be beneficial; and the fact that guided tour was free was an important draw.

The Patterns unit is an engaging hands-on experience for young children. Teachers recognize the learning opportunities and appreciate how the program supports their classroom teaching. The skills targeted by the Museum staff as key learning in this Patterns program are appropriate for the age level and happen – when tour guides engage students in those activities. Children enjoyed the activities and were proud when they successfully completed a task. The scavenger hunt and art-making activities were favorites for both children and teachers. Two factors appeared to most strongly influence whether or not children were successful: 1) clarity and frequency of adult instruction and guidance; and 2) some prior experience with the skills, such as cooperative learning and manipulating art materials.

Use of the Resource Packet was slight among the teachers in this sample. About half of the teachers did not receive it or had no memory of receiving it. Of the few who did receive the packet, even fewer used it before the visit. It seemed that time was the primary reason for not using it. Teachers tended to prepare their students for the visit by going over behavioral expectations and doing hands-on pattern activities, most through their classroom math curriculum.

When compared to other field trip opportunities, teachers noted that the Patterns tour stood out because it was more hands-on than at other places and because they had a guide. Teachers believed that students gained new knowledge while on the trip and appreciated that the experience met their expectations of reinforcing their classroom teaching. For many teachers, the strongest part of the program was the building itself and the opportunity to learn through play on an age-appropriate level. Teachers observed that students responded very positively to the scavenger hunt and the art-making activities. Suggestions for strengthening the experience included making it longer so that the art-making activity would not be as rushed, giving more explanation and guidance to the children, more physical movement and less sitting in the shape activity, and keeping groups small. We encourage the NBM education staff to use the findings and recommendations from this report as stimulation for a series of discussions on how to further strengthen a largely successful and effective learning experience.