

# Educational Value of Zoos & Aquariums: Results from Research on the Perceptions of Teachers and Parents

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# How does the public value zoos & aquariums?



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# Stakeholder Groups Included

Zoo/Aquarium Visitors

Parents

Teachers

Politicians

Volunteers

Media

Field Biologists

Spiritual Leaders



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# The Zoo/Aquarium Perspective



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# Education in Zoos: Some Examples

School Programs – classes led by zoo educators or volunteers

Outreach – programs brought directly into the schools or community

Exhibits – for self-guided learning for all audiences

“Biofacts” Touch Carts – to enhance self-guided learning

Family Programs – classes, programs on weekends for families

Curricula – full curricula, lesson plans provided to teachers to enhance visits

Professional Development – teacher training courses or workshops



But what do teachers actually  
value about the  
zoo/aquarium experience?



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# Our Study

## Phase One:

- New York area educators
  - Unique value of zoos and aquariums?
  - Value for your teaching, your classroom?



# Our Study

## Phase One:

- New York area educators
  - Unique value of zoos and aquariums?
  - Value for your teaching, your classroom?

## Phase Two:

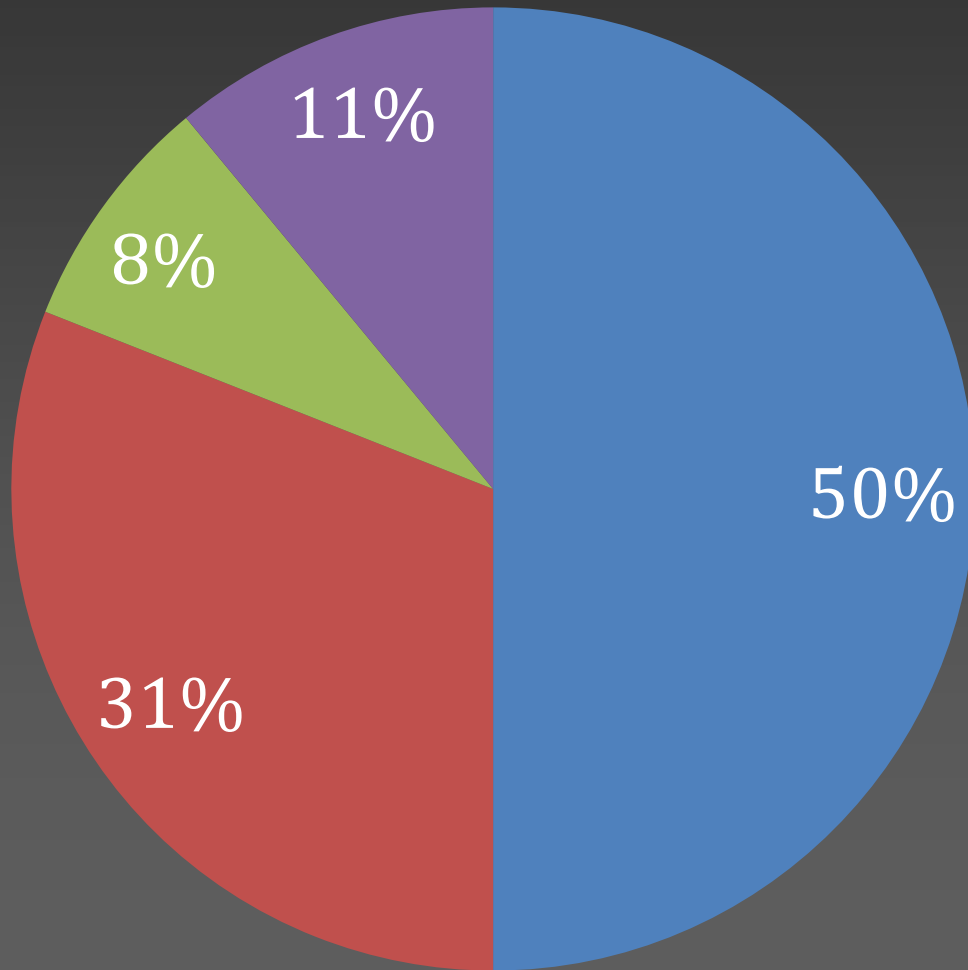
- National Panel of educators
  - Rating value on a set of scales in value areas
  - N=983 teachers and administrators



# How do teachers use zoos and aquariums?

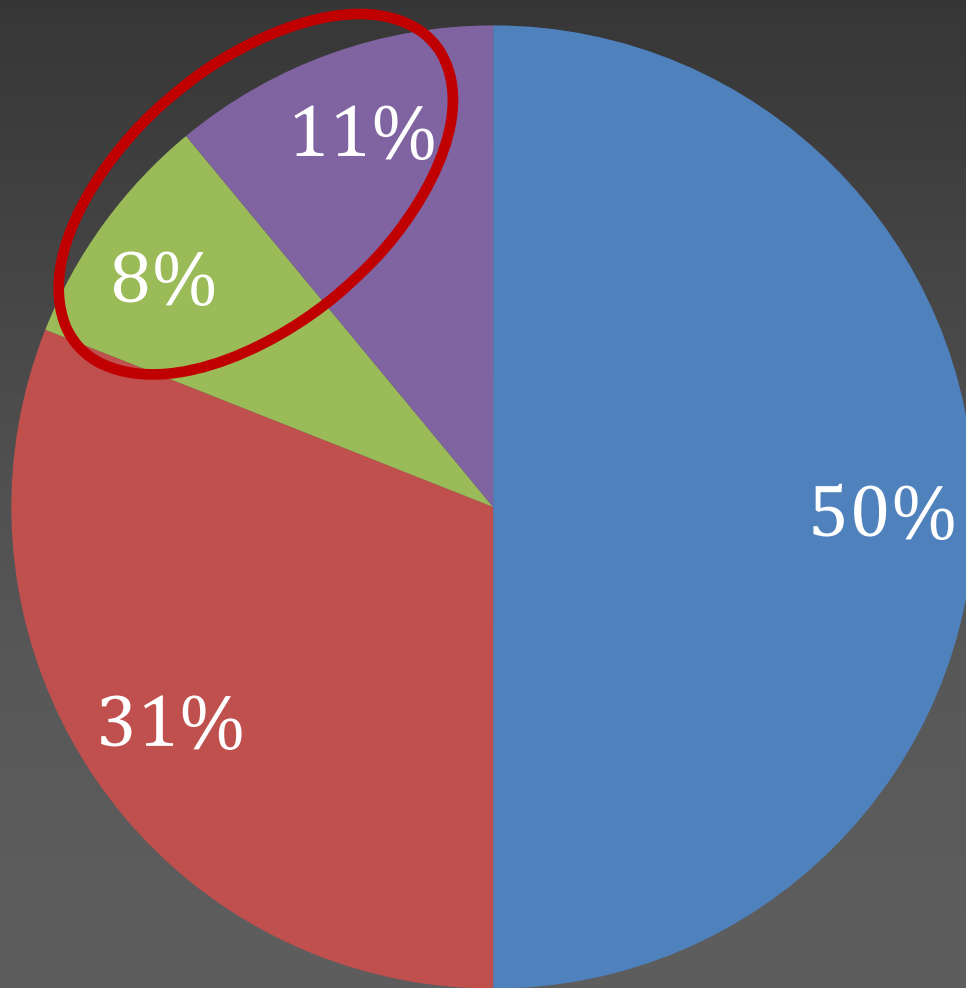


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- Self-guided field trip - NO lesson
- Self-guided field trip - teacher's lesson plan
- Self-guided field trip - zoo-provided lesson plan
- Program/Tour/Class led by zoo staff

# Only 19% of field trips use zoo-designed lessons



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# What do teachers value?



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# Animals



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“The students learn more by seeing real life animals. They see and study their features and habitat.”

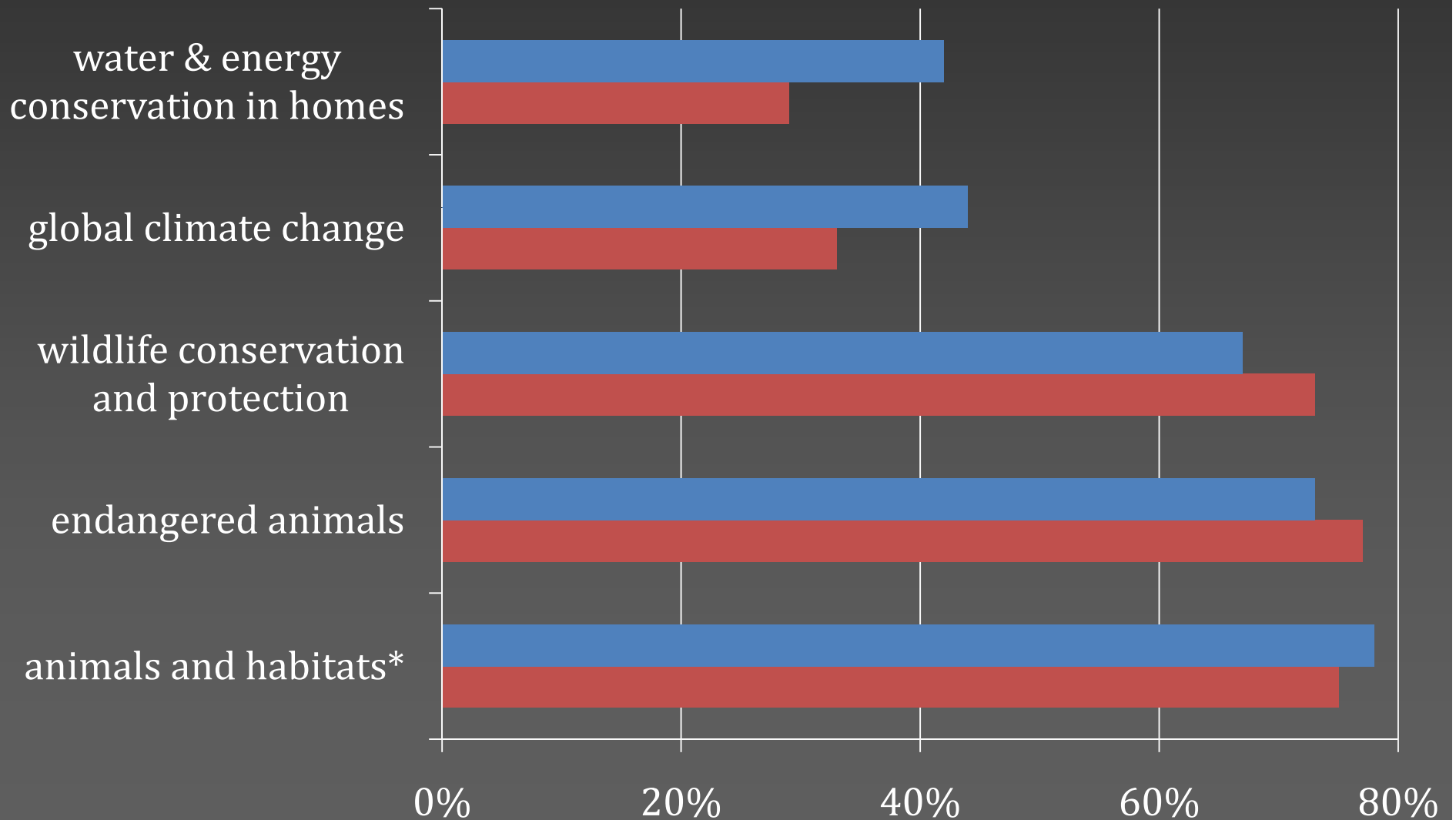
(Elementary Science Teacher, NYC Public School)



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# % Teachers Who Strongly Valued Zoo/Aquarium as information source about...

■ Aquarium ■ Zoo



# Experience vs. Content



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# Strongly Valued

- Learning to value animals, natural resources
- Learning from close-up experiences with living animals
- Motivating and exciting students to learn



# Less Valued

- Science Content
- Non-Science Content
- Environmental information (not about animals)

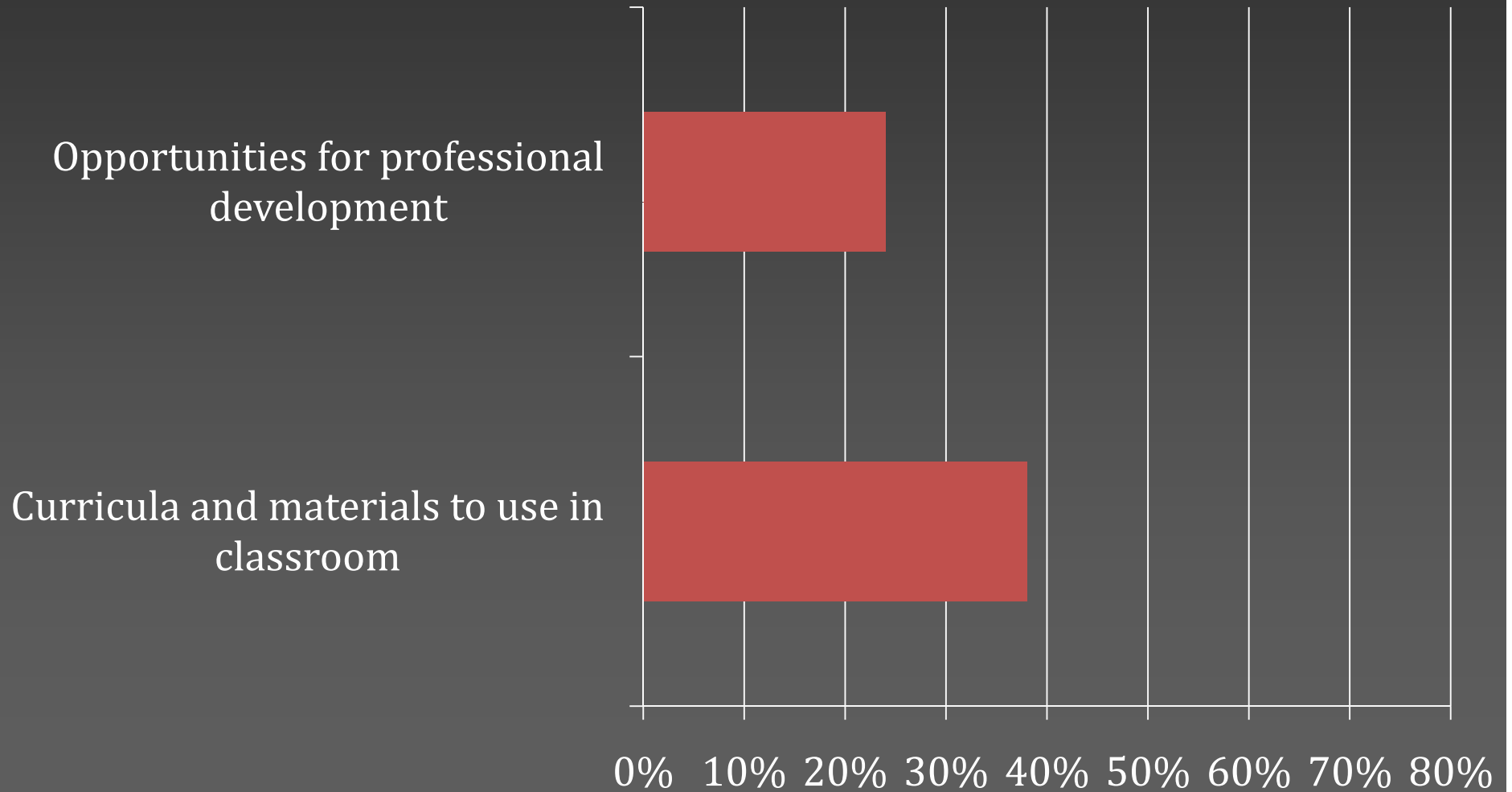


# Student Learning vs. Teacher Learning



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# % Teachers Who Strongly Valued Zoo/Aquarium for...



# What do parents value?



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# Family Zoo Visits: What Parents Value

- Promoting altruism, caring, empathy
- Instilling environmental values
- Developing and fostering self-esteem
- Reinforcing cultural values or norms



Mr. Baker: They learn about family. To survive they've got to be together. They have to stick together. The little one learn from their parents just like us to survive.

Interviewer: Do you talk about this when you're at the zoo?

Mr. Baker: I think they can see it.

Mr. Fielding:

“Because he soaks it all in. And then you turn around, maybe a month later, a month and a half later, and you’ll see that he will act upon what he believes. And you find out, every now and then, you get a glimpse that you’re going in the right direction.”

What does this mean for  
zoos and aquariums?



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# CREATING AN ACTION PLAN

WHY ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS MATTER  
Working with Community Perceptions  
to Achieve Your Goals

## WHAT?

What individual steps do you need to take?  
What tasks do you need to carry out?

## WHY?

Why is it important to make this change?  
In what ways will your institution benefit because of this change?

## WHO?

Who are the team members you could/should work with  
(include names, departments, and contact information)?  
What will each team member contribute to your  
objective?

## HOW?

What do you anticipate as possible challenges?  
Are there any expenses involved in implementing this change?

## ESTABLISH OBJECTIVES

Using the research findings you examined and discussed,  
what positive changes could you bring about at your institution?

## WHEN?

When are the approximate start/end dates for this?  
When will you do this (i.e. describe specific time in your day)?

## NOTES

# Implications: Results of Action Plans

- Re-think teacher professional development programs
  - Not perceived as a valuable element
  - Cost / Benefit of these programs
  - Alternative ways to approach



# Implications: Results of Action Plans

- Re-think presentation of content
  - Can't forego standards, of course
  - Emphasis on the experience, unique value proposition
  - Root messages in the animal and the habitat



# Implications: Results of Action Plans

- Reframing school programs and family programs
  - School Programs: animals, habitats, value for nature, experience, authenticity
  - Family Programs: shared experience; togetherness, showing care for animals





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