

Alternative Conceptual Approaches to Label Development

There are many ways that one can approach designing labels in informal learning settings. Only a few will be mentioned here.

Learning Styles

Several theories of learning styles have been applied to visitor learning. Only one empirical study could be found that attempted to test the notion of learning styles.

Vance, C., & Schroeder, D. (1991). Matching visitor learning style with exhibit type: Implications for learning in informal settings. In *Visitor studies: Theory, research & practice, vol. 4*. Jacksonville, AL: Center for Social Design. Pp. 185-200.

Introduction

This is the only study (known to me) that empirically tied learning style to label design.

Method

This study used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to place visitors into intuitive or sensing-type learners. The S-N index on this test was designed to measure an individual's preference for perceiving things. Sensing types prefer concrete, sensory information, while intuitive types prefer abstractions and inferred meanings.

Labels were developed to accommodate both intuitive and sensing styles of learning. The intuitive labels were designed to appeal to those who like to solve problems, be original, and learn on their own. The sensing labels, on the other hand, attempted to appeal to those who prefer to directly apply their five senses.

Results

Intuitive-style learners performed better on a test of knowledge when the intuitive-style label was installed. When the sensing-style label was installed in the second experimental condition, the performance was reversed — sensing-style performed better than intuitive-style visitors. Average time spent at the exhibit also reflected the learning style and experimental condition. When the intuitive label was installed, visitors with an intuitive style of learning viewed the exhibit longer; but, when the sensing label was installed, sensing-style visitors viewed longer.

Discussion

If this study has generality, it suggests that exhibit designers need to be sensitive to learning style in order to account for differences in their visitors.

The Denver Art Museum Approach

The Denver Art Museum has developed labels with two major goals in mind: (1) to bridge the gap between novices and experts; and (2) to design labels that "make a human connection."

McDermott-Lewis, M. (1990). Making comparisons. In McDermott-Lewis, M., *The Denver Art Museum Interpretive Project*. Denver: Denver Museum of Art. Pp. 67-70.

One of the differences between art novices and advanced amateurs is that novices fail to look for subtle differences in art work. This study attempted to teach novices to make comparisons in order to see art more like the advanced art consumer. The visitor was asked to arrange several prints of art on a scale of realism between two specific works. A table with chairs was provided for the task. This task forced visitors to make comparisons in order to come up with their own guidelines for arrangement. Visitors appeared to like the task and did not find it especially difficult.

Announcing the publication of *Visitor Studies: Theory, Research, and Practice* Volume 8, Issue No. 1

Selected papers from the 1995 Visitor Studies Conference

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