

"Matching Visitor Learning Style With Exhibit Type"

C. Vance & D. Schroeder (1991). In A. Benefield, S. Bitgood, & H. Shettel (Eds.), *Visitor Studies: Theory, Research, & Practice, Volume 4*. Jacksonville, AL: Center for Social Design. Pp. 185-200.

Summarized by
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Studies on learning style might help to better understand and deal with psychographic characteristics of visitors such as values, attitudes, perceptions, interests, expectancies, and satisfactions. With this assessment, learning style preferences can be used to better structure exhibits in informal settings. An instrument currently used to identify learning style is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The MBTI is a forced-choice, self-report personality inventory. Natural preferences are broken into two poles on each of four indices:

1. E/I (extroverted/introverted)
2. S/N (Sensing/Intuitive)
3. T/F (Thinking/Feeling)
4. J/P (Judging/Perceptive)

Four indices yield sixteen possible combinations called "types," signified by 4 letters of preference (e.g., ESTJ, INFP). The Sensing-Intuitive preference seems to be an important one for learning. Sensing individuals are more interested in immediate data taken in through their senses. Intuitive types are more interested in perceiving the relationships, meanings, and possibilities suggested by experience. Studies suggest that intuitive types are outnumbered by the sensing types.

Method

Subjects were visitors (188 males and 212 females all over the age of 18) to the "Rain Forest: Exploring Life on Earth" exhibit at the Milwaukee Public Museum. Baseline, control, and two experimental conditions each had 100 subjects. Subjects were asked to participate after having been randomly chosen either before or after they had viewed the exhibit.

As they entered the museum, the control group of 100 subjects were asked to fill out an 11-item questionnaire on target exhibits and complete the MBTI. This was done prior to viewing the exhibits of interest. The control group reflected visitors' entering knowledge. In the other three conditions (baseline and two experimental conditions) 100 visitors in each condition were asked to fill out the questionnaire and MBTI either before of

after viewing the exhibits. Observers used both cued and non-cued techniques. In the cued technique, 50 visitors were told before they entered an exhibit that they would be tracked and observed during their inspection of each exhibit. In the non-cued technique, visitors were approached after viewing an exhibit and asked to participate in a research project.

Labels were constructed for the experimental phases of the study. The first experimental condition included "intuitive" labels. These were created to appeal to the intuitive learners who are interested in reading and problem-solving. The second experimental conditions used labels that were "sensing" in nature for those learners who directly apply their five senses to each exhibit. The labels included concrete facts that explained why something is the way it is, rather than problem-solving or hypothesizing about the answer. Since there was no difference between the cued and non-cued visitors, these groups were combined for the reporting results.

Results and Discussion

In this study, 34.8% of respondents were categorized as sensing and 65.2% were intuitive. This was counter to the results of Myers and McCaulley (1985) who reported 75% of the general population are sensing, while 25% are intuitive.

Analyses were performed to measure the differences, if any, between sensing and intuitive types on the rain forest questionnaire. There were no differences in performance during baseline or control. However, intuitive visitors performed better when intuitive labels were in place and sensing learners performed better when sensing labels were used.

Using time as a variable, there was no difference in amount of time spent at each exhibit during baseline of sensing and intuitive visitors. In the first experimental condition, with intuitive labels in place, intuitive learners spent more time than sensing learners. In the second condition, no difference was observed.

Analyses were computed to determine how sensing and intuitive visitors differed in response to the rain forest questionnaire. Sensing visitors scored significantly higher in the 2nd condition than in baseline, control and the 1st condition. There were no differences in baseline, control and the first experimental condition. Intuitive visitors in the 1st condition did score higher than in the baseline, control, and the 2nd condition. No differences were found in baseline, control and the 2nd condition.

The results further emphasize the importance of matching visitor learning style with informational qualities of exhibits. Identifying these different learning styles is an important step toward taking advantage of the powerful educational opportunities available in the museum setting.