

although he lost them in an alley. When asked why he was searching under the light instead of in the alley, he responded, "Because this is where the light is." The implication here is that, like the drunk, we are looking in the wrong place for the visitor experience. But, is this really a fair criticism of visitor studies? What we do is measure what the designers and educators tell us are their exhibit objectives. The current methodology may be adequate, but the experience we wish to study needs further specification.

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**7. There is one theory or approach called "traditional learning theory."**

There is frequent reference to "traditional learning theory" as if it applies to one theory or approach. Unfortunately, there are many theories from behavioristic learning theory to Piaget's developmental theory to Gagne's cognitive instructional theory, etc. When "traditional learning theory" is criticized without identifying which theory is being attacked, it impossible to assess the validity of the arguments.

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**8. Since traditional approaches do not explain everything, they need to be replaced with new approaches.**

"Recent visitor studies suggest the inadequacy of traditional learning theories to explain the visitor experience." This quote is contained in the abstract of one of the sessions from the 1991 AAM Conference program. Alternative approaches are then offered. The implication seems to be that traditional approaches are inadequate and must be replaced by newer, more adequate theories. We should keep in mind that science involves a gradual process of one study building on previous studies.

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**9. "My approach to visitor studies/visitor learning is better than traditional approaches."**

There have been several examples of young, eager professionals trying to make their mark by proposing a new approach to visitor studies. In attempting to make a name for themselves, these individuals often criticize previous writings. However, the criticisms of previous writings are often inaccurate, unfair, and/or show naive understanding of the issues. Some of Alt's (1979) criticisms of Shettel's work fits into this misconception. [Note Shettel's (1978) response.] Advice to would-be critics: study the literature carefully before rejecting traditional approaches. You cannot understand, and consequently criticize, others' work without thorough knowledge of the literature.

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## The Misconceptions of Do-Not-Feed Signs

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There are two misconceptions associated with signs that attempt to control visitor misbehavior. First, that any sign will work; and second, that no sign will work. A study of three types of Do-Not-Feed signs were studied at the Birmingham Zoo to determine if the type of Do-Not-Feed message plays a role in controlling visitor behavior. The first message was simple: "Please do not feed the animals!" The second sign gave a reason: "Please do not feed. These animals are on special diets!" Finally, the last sign attempted to compare the diets of animals and children: "Please do not feed. Would you want someone feeding your child peanuts and popcorn all day? Help us keep these animals healthy by not feeding them."

During baseline before any signs were installed, it was found that about 60 percent of items thrown included peanuts or popcorn. Males were more likely than females to throw items and unauthorized feeding tended to occur in chains in which one person initiated the activity and others soon followed.

A comparison of the three Do-Not-Feed signs and baseline can be summarized as follows:

- The first sign ("Please do not feed the animals!") produced the same rate of unauthorized feeding as baseline.
- The other two signs (that added an explanation) reduced unauthorized feeding by 50%.

The results of this study suggest that unauthorized visitor behavior (such as feeding of animals) can be reduced if people are given a reason for following rules rather than simply prohibiting the behavior.