TESTING A THEORY OF EXHIBITION DESIGN

Roger Miles (1986). Lessons in 'Human Biology' - Testing a Theory of Exhibition Design. The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship. Vol. 5: 227-240.

In this article Miles described an attempt to apply to the development of an exhibit 11 "initial working assumptions" based on current educational and psychological research. The following summarizes several of the assumptions (underlined) and Miles' conclusions.

1. *The design proceeds from the exhibits (subject matter) to the gallery (space).* This caused a severe circulation problem. Although the subject matter should determine the form of the exhibit, the gallery space should be acknowledged simultaneously with subject matter development.
2. *The nature of the teaching point defines the medium to be used.* Budget restraints are as important as any other consideration, especially during the exhibit revision process. How a person learns about a particular topic provides a framework for creative exhibit design; and selecting media is also a creative endeavor, not a rule-bound procedure.
3. *There is a need to formulate appropriate objectives.* Behavioral objectives did not contribute to the exhibit design or the selection of media, and they were not used during the evaluation. They helped the design team clarify their thoughts, and they improved communication between team members.
4. *The content of the exhibit should be structured to give it coherence and to make it easier for visitors to find their way.* Gagne provided incentive to develop a learning hierarchy, but the exhibit included too many diverse concepts. In addition, this concept conflicted with another working assumption stating that visitors should choose their own route. The design team did produce a rational arrangement of ideas within the exhibit.
5. *Treatment should be at two, three, or more levels to accommodate a wide range of visitors' interests.* The attempt to organize the subject matter into two levels failed. It is best to concentrate on communicating some basic ideas on one level rather than on several levels.
6. *The physical structures of the exhibit should be independent of each other to allow for modification and revision.* Although this idea was successful, the structures were not flexible and exhibit modifications were more difficult and costly than expected.

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RESEARCH AND EVALUATION IN CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS

Jeff Hayward (in press). Research and Evaluation in Children's Museums: Negative Image, Positive Results. ILVS Review.

This article discusses several aspects of evaluation.

1. Misconceptions about research and evaluation.
   a. Evaluation means "good" vs. "bad."
   b. Evaluation is done after the project is completed.
   c. Evaluation costs a lot of money.
   d. Anyone can do it.
2. Why use evaluation?
   a. Required for funding agency.
   b. Organizational changes.
   c. Innovative new program or exhibit.
   d. Problem solving.
3. Possible measures of effectiveness.
   a. Visitor attendance.
   b. Enjoyment.
   c. Learning.
   d. Attitude change.
   e. Behavioral measures (duration of use, interaction patterns).
   f. Reactions by staff.
4. Some questions answered by effective evaluation.
   a. Have you understood the museum from the visitors' point of view?
   b. Have you investigated behavior as well as attitudes and perceptions?
   c. Have you studied the staff as well as visitors?
   d. Have you been rigorous in your research methods?
   e. Have you compared the experience of different types of visitors?
   f. Have you used the research results to revise the exhibit (program)?

GLOSSARY

Summative evaluation: Evaluation after the installation of an exhibit; used to judge the worth of an exhibit.

Formative evaluation: Evaluation in which information collected is used to develop a more effective exhibit.

[See Screven (1976), "Exhibit Evaluation: A Goal-Referenced Approach." Curator, V.19,#4]