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

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McDermott-Lewis, M. (1990). Making comparisons. In 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.

Introduction

This is the only study (known to me) that empirically tied visitor 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.”


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