



Program Evaluation And Research Group

**Seminar for Museum Educators:
Jyväskylä, Finland
9 November 2005**

**The Role of Museums in Society:
Education and Social Action**

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Are museums educational institutions?

What is the appropriate education theory for museums?

Does education include a social role?

My thanks Ms. Outi Nummi and the Finnish Museums Association for the invitation to speak at this seminar and to the Public Affairs Office, U. S. Embassy in Helsinki for their support that made this trip possible.

Are museums educational institutions?

Yes, Museum = Education

What is the appropriate education theory for museums?

Constructivism (Progressive Education)

Does education include a social role?

Yes, it is an essential component of education.

1. Types of Museums:

Art, history (and historic houses) technology, science, aquaria, zoos, natural history, science centers, outdoor, farm, children's, maritime, eco-museums, specialized collections, music, popular culture, nature centers, historic sites, nature centers, etc.

Statistics:

Number of museums

Europe, more than 15,000

*Finland: 163 museums responsible for a total of 321
museum sites and locations*

Visitation:

- Up to 50% of population annually in some countries
(4.8 million visits in Finland, 2004)*
- In USA: ~16,000 museums,
More visits to museums annually than
to professional sports*

**Museums are a major expression of cultural
Identity In every society:**

2. Changing Definition of Museums

1946: The word "museums" includes all **collections open to the public**, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms. (International Council of Museums, ICOM).

2001: A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, **communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment.** (...) (ICOM)

(Note: A similar shift in definition exists in AAM documents, 1969—2002.)

***Period Pieces* are short plays with two or more characters designed to examine historical issues and universal themes. Lasting 15 minutes or longer, these scenes are presented in the galleries and among the exhibits.**

**Kentucky Historical
Society**

http://history.ky.gov/Programs/Period_Pieces.htm

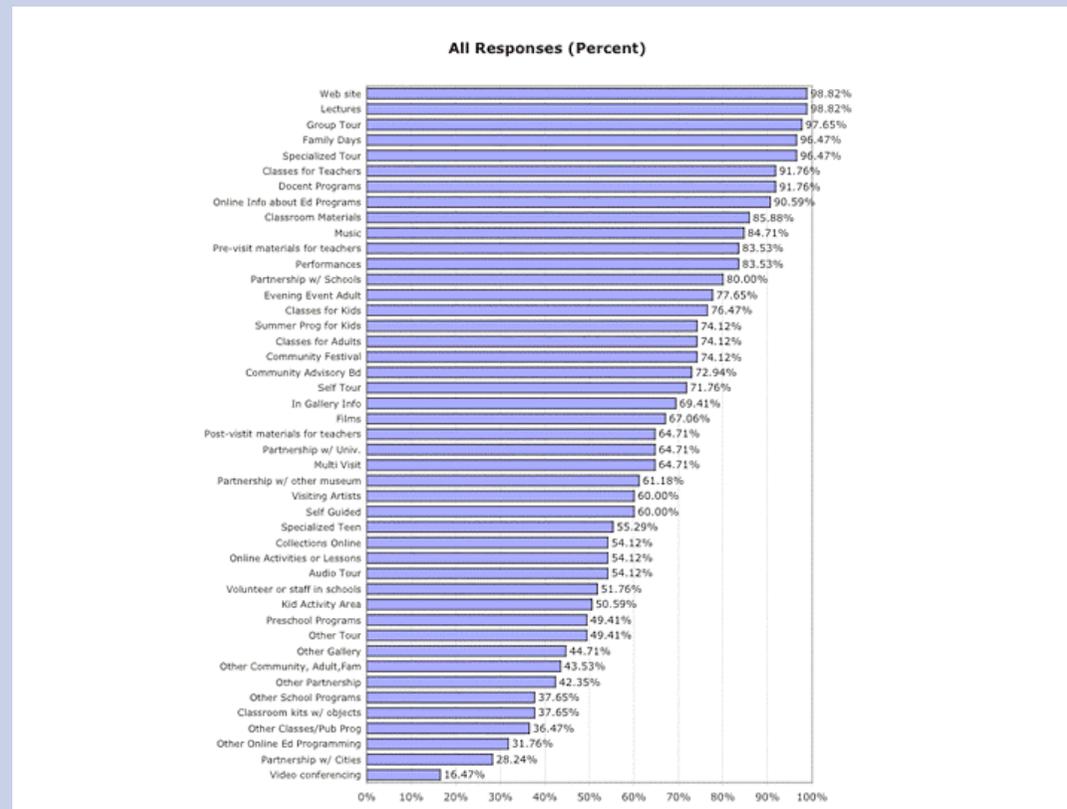
Museum Theatre

A museum is only alive when it is open
and visitors are present.

Everything that concerns visitors is the
focus of museum education, — and all
museum functions impact the visitor
experience!

3. The Scope of Museum Education

Wetterlund, K. & Sayre, S. 2003 *Art Museum Education Programs Survey*. Available at: <http://www.museum-ed.org/>



Museum Educational Work is very broad:

- Organize and carry out programs for exhibition visitors
- Programs outside visiting hours or in special settings
- Education methods include: dance, theatre, music, movement, etc.
- Develop educational materials, resources
- Outreach activities to classrooms, community centers, etc.
- Participate in other museum activities: exhibition design, accessibility, planning
- Carry out research on visitors or for program development
- Initiate external Partnerships
- Web site and on-line related work

**Condensed from: Wetterlund, K. & Sayre, S.,
2003 *Art Museum Education Programs Survey*.
Available at: <http://www.museum-ed.org/>**

5. History

Museums were an early form of public education intended to enlighten (improve?) the general population.

The creation of the Public Museum was an expression of the eighteenth-century spirit of enlightenment which generated enthusiasm for equality of opportunity in learning. . . . In practice, the traditions of the former private collections were carried on in the public museums, notwithstanding the contrariety of purpose and of circumstances.

Wittlin, A. S. (1949) *The Museum, Its History and Its Tasks in Education*, London: Routledge and Keagan Paul.

Royal collections were opened to the public either by revolution or voluntarily —but still illustrated imperial acquisitions and values.

Musée du Louvre

“International” collections exist primarily in (formerly) imperialist countries.

6. How can museums be classified?

Aesthetic
Educational
Social

But all these are educational!

Zeller, T. (1989) "The Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Art Museum Education in America" in Berry, N. and, Mayer S., (eds.) **Museum Education History, Theory, and Practice**, Reston, VA: The National Art Education Association.

The Educational Museum

“An efficient museum . . . may be described as a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well selected specimen.”

“Ichthyologist, genealogist, historian, curator and museum administrator . . . He proudly called himself a naturalist, publishing mostly on fishes, but also working on snakes and other animals.”

Smithsonian Institution Archives
George Brown Goode
(1851 - 1896)

Kohlstead, S. G. (1991) *The Origins of Natural Science in America*, DC: Washington Smithsonian Press. p. 5

I should not organize the museum primarily for the use of the people in their larval or school-going stage of existence. The public school teacher, with the illustrated textbook, diagrams, and other appliances, has in these days a professional outfit which is usually quite sufficient to enable him to teach his pupils. School days last, at the most, only from four to fifteen years, and they end with the majority of mankind, before the minds have reached the stage of growth favorable for the reception and assimilation of the best and most useful thought.

G.B. Goode, "Museum History and Museums of History,"
in Kohlstedt, S. (1991) **The Origins of Natural Science
in America**, Washington: Smithsonian Press, p. 307.

The Aesthetic Museum

“A museum of art is primarily an institution of culture and only secondarily a seat of learning”

Graduate training in logic and Mathematics (Johns Hopkins), Philosophy (Berlin and Harvard) Psychology. Positions at the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston) included Curator, Secretary of the Trustees, Assistant director, Temporary Director, etc.

Unpublished *curriculum vitae* (n. d.)
Museum of Fine Arts Archives.

Johns Hopkins University Archives

Benjamin Ives Gilman
(1852-1933)

“A museum of science,” he observed “is in essence a school a museum of art in essence a temple.” . . . for while objects in other types of museums are “adapted to instruct,” those in art museums are “adapted to impress.”

Boston Museum of Fine Arts then (above)
and now (below)

But, Gilman first proposed, museum instructors (he called them “docents”) developed extensive informative labels, more accessible ways of exhibiting works of art and welcomed working-class visitors.

Examples of selected label texts developed by Gilman

INFORMATION FRAME: CLASSICAL 10.

~~The lips carefully reproduced in~~
this portrait in baked clay from
the first century before Christ
represents a human who
may very possibly have spoken to
Caesar. A Roman business man with
the alert mind, decided character
and fondness for notice here ex-
pressed surely bore his part in
the momentous times of Caesar's
death, Mark Antony's defeat and th(e)
crowning of Augustus Emperor.

See the labels.

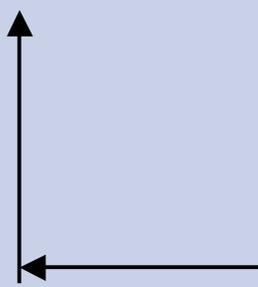
INFORMATION FRAME: CLASSICAL 3.

These figures
These ~~figures~~ *figures* minutely carved with
figures of men, animals and imag-
inary beings were cut in Greece
more than two thousand years ago
for use as seals generally in *of some important*
rings. Each one was a ~~precious~~ *precious*
possession of some old Greek ~~king~~ *king*
~~or noble~~. The seal cutter must *be*
have used some magnifier perhaps
rounded glass or a drop of water
in a pinhole through a metal plate(s).

See the labels.

*The minute delivery of
the covering letters made
without the aid of some form
of magnifying glass.*

This portrait in baked clay from the first century before Christ represents a human who may very possibly have spoken with Caesar. A Roman business man with the alert mind, decided character and fondness for notice here expressed surely bore his part in the momentous times of Caesar's death, Mark Antony's defeat and the crowning of Augustus Emperor.



What is the point of this story?

- a) Even the anti-education position of the museum has a strong educational stress since the museum by its nature is an educational institution.
- b) The attempt to classify some museums as educational and others as not (or to classify museum directors in this way) is not realistic.

Museum directors must not only know the subject, but must also know pedagogy-how to teach people who know nothing: "They may be prodigies of learning and yet unfit for their posts."

Forbes, E. (1853) "The Educational Uses of Museums," quoted in Greenwood, T., (1893) "The Place of Museums in Education," Science, xxii, 246

The Social Mission of Museums

Newark Public Library Photo

John Cotton Dana (1856-1929)

“For Dana, the true work of the museum as a service institution, was in enriching the quality of people’s lives.”

S. Weil, introduction to W. Peniston, (ed.) (1999) **The New Museum: Selected Writings of John Cotton Dana**, Washington: American Association of Museums

John Cotton Dana's Social Aims:

- Provide access to all—reach out (U. S. public library model)
- Demonstrate good (inexpensive) taste (5 and 10 cent gallery)
- Provide educational opportunities
- Celebrate local culture—Newark and U. S. arts and crafts
- Preserve immigrant cultures

© Newark Museum, used with permission

Louise Connolly 1862-1927

Educator, civic leader, supporter of women's right to vote.

Elaine Gurian's Museum Classification :

Object-Centered Museums

Narrative Museums

Client-Centered Museums

Community-Centered Museums

National (and Government) Museums

**Gurian, E. (2002) "Choosing Among the
Options: An Opinion About Museum
Definitions," *Curator*, 45[2] 75-88**

Note: All categories are educational!

Are museums educational institutions?

Yes, Museum = Education

→ What is the appropriate education theory for museums?

Does education include a social role?

If museums are educational, we need to consider:

- a) What is the role of museum educators?
- b) What should be their educational theory and practice?

Educational *theory* consists of two components

- A theory of learning (How do people learn?)
- An epistemology (What is knowledge?)

Educational *practice* requires a pedagogy that matches the proposed theory

- Constructivism/Progressive Education

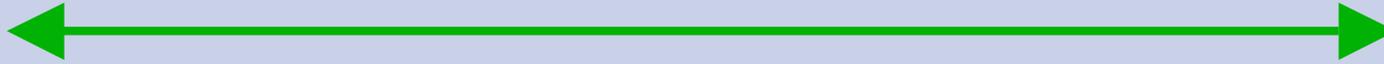
Theories of Learning



Passive and
incremental,
knowledge
added bit by
bit

Active
learner
constructs
knowledge

Theories of Knowledge



Knowledge
exists
independent of
knower

Knowledge
constructed
individually and
socially

An example of the
inevitability of personal
meaning making:

What do students do on a
formal field trip?

Meg Black Research study: systematic data
collection and analysis: interviews, written
assignment, drawing.

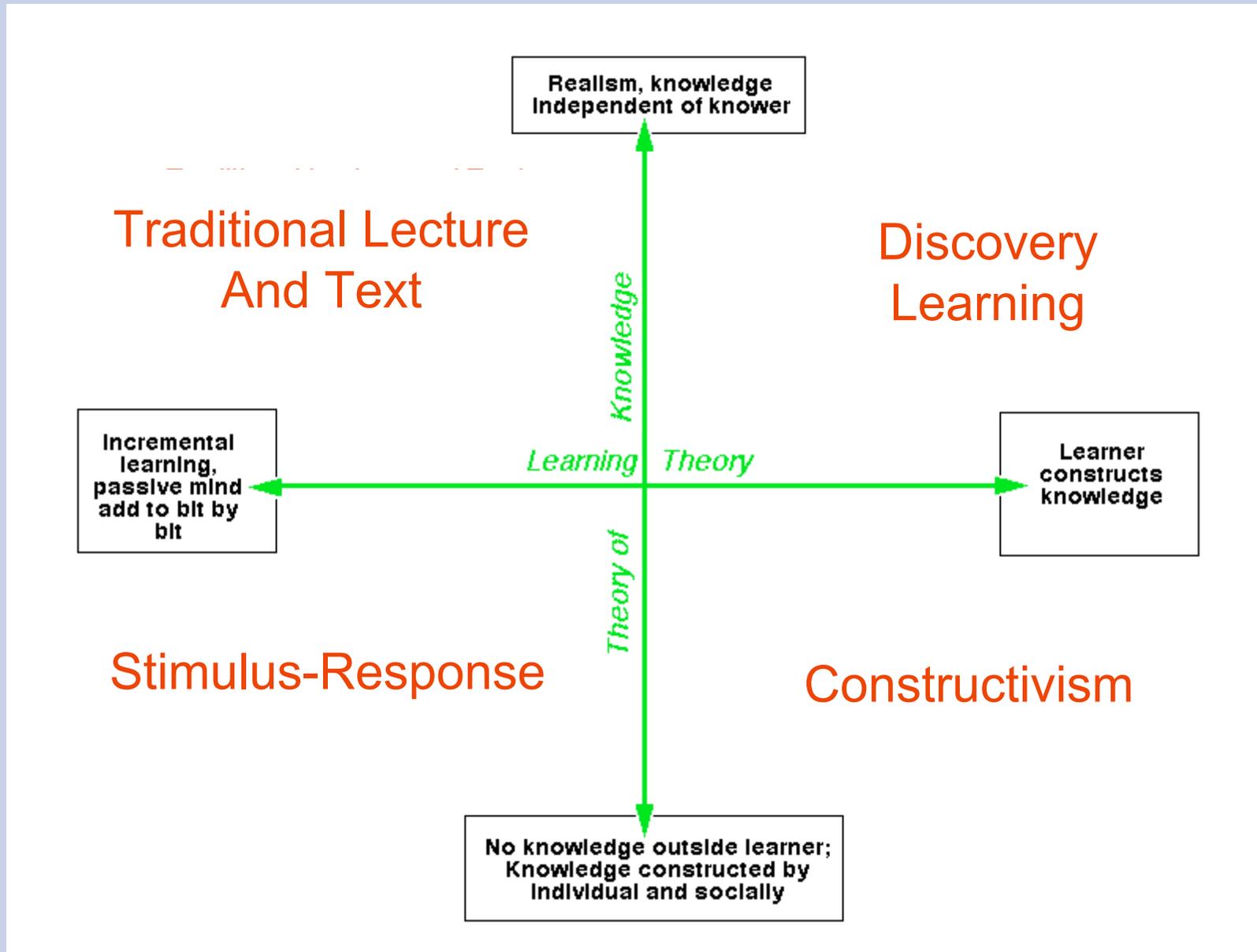
M. Black and G.E. Hein “You're Taking Us Where? Reaction and Response to a Guided Art Museum Field Trip,” in M. Xanthoudaki, L. Tickle & V. Sekules (eds.) *Researching Visual Arts Education in Museums and Galleries*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Publishers, 2003.

Favorite objects from a highly structured art museum tour:

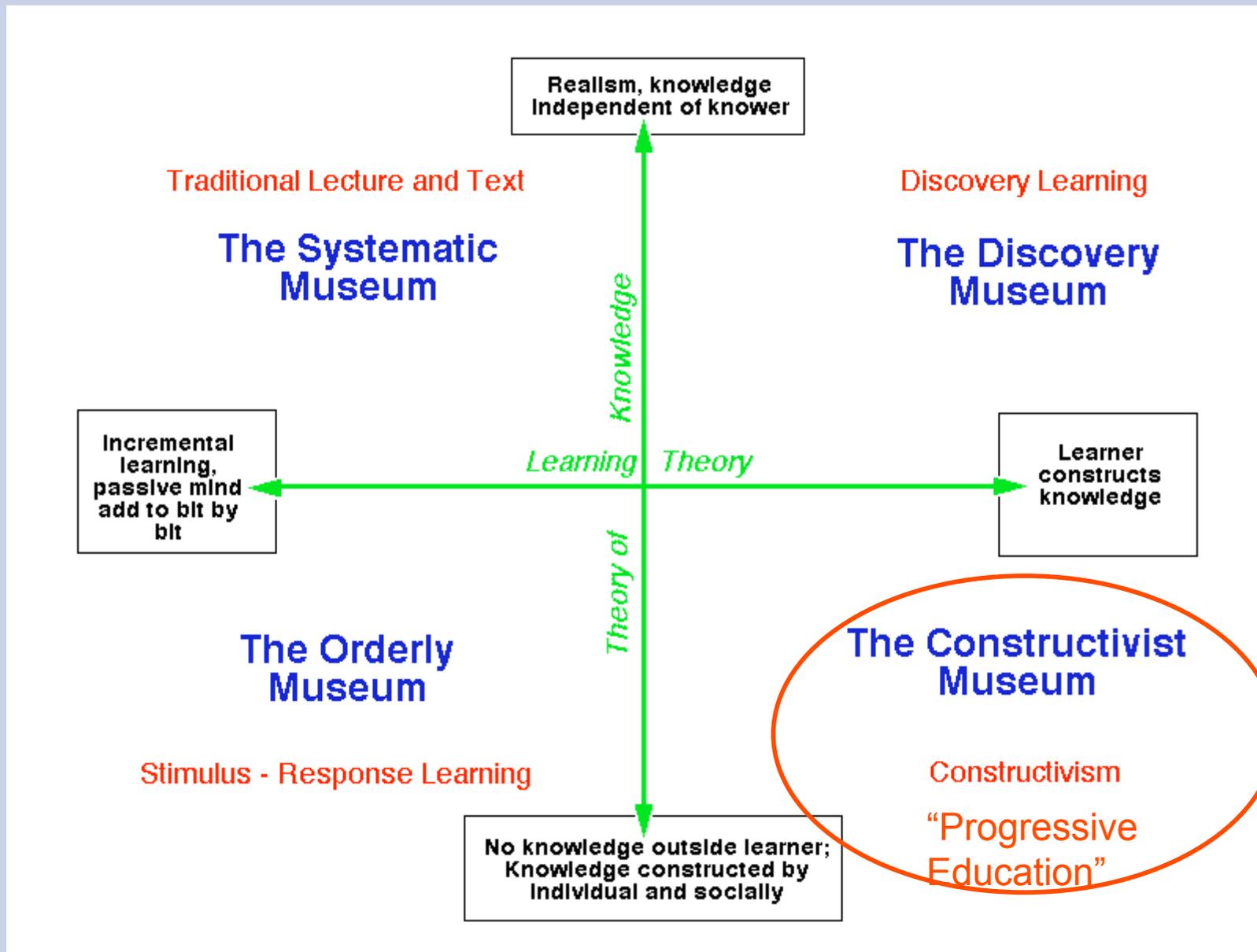
The group of 15 university students stopped only at 14 objects depicted on a museum map.

Favorite object(s):

On tour	5
Not on tour	7
Both	3



Hein, G. E., (1998) **Learning in the Museum**, London: Routledge;
<http://www.lesley.edu/faculty/ghein/default.html>



Hein, G. E., (1998) **Learning in the Museum**, London: Routledge;
<http://www.lesley.edu/faculty/ghein/default.html>

What kind of education takes place in museums?

It is primarily *Progressive* education, “modern” movement in education developed in early 20th century.

- Object-based
- Active learner
- Learning through inquiry and problem-solving.

The contemporary term for Progressive Education is Constructivism, a combination of active learning (Learning Theory) and personal meaning making (Epistemology.)

Arguments for deciding on the appropriate museum education theory or, Why constructivism? Why Progressive Education?

1. Appeal to theory: child (and adult) development
2. Appeal to history
3. Appeal to current practice
4. Appeal to world view (ideology)

Appeal to theory

20th Century developmental research:

Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, etc.

Current summaries

Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L. & Cocking, R. R. (1999)

How People Learn Washington, DC: National Academy Press

Common concepts applied to museums

“Socio-cultural theory,” “Meaning Making,”

“Post-modernism,” etc.

Educational Theory Influences Museum Education

Museum educators in America (or some at least) appear to have some difficulty abandoning, or even reviewing, an educational function that prioritizes didactic delivery of facts. In Britain, we take a different approach. Museum educators have been influenced by Dewey, Plowden, play and child centered progressive educational methods, which we have adapted very well to the museum environment.

Hooper Greenhill, E., (1999) *The Educational Role of the Museum, 2nd Edition.* , London: Routledge xii.

But, the United States also has a long history of applying educational theory to museums

The “father” of progressive education

John Dewey

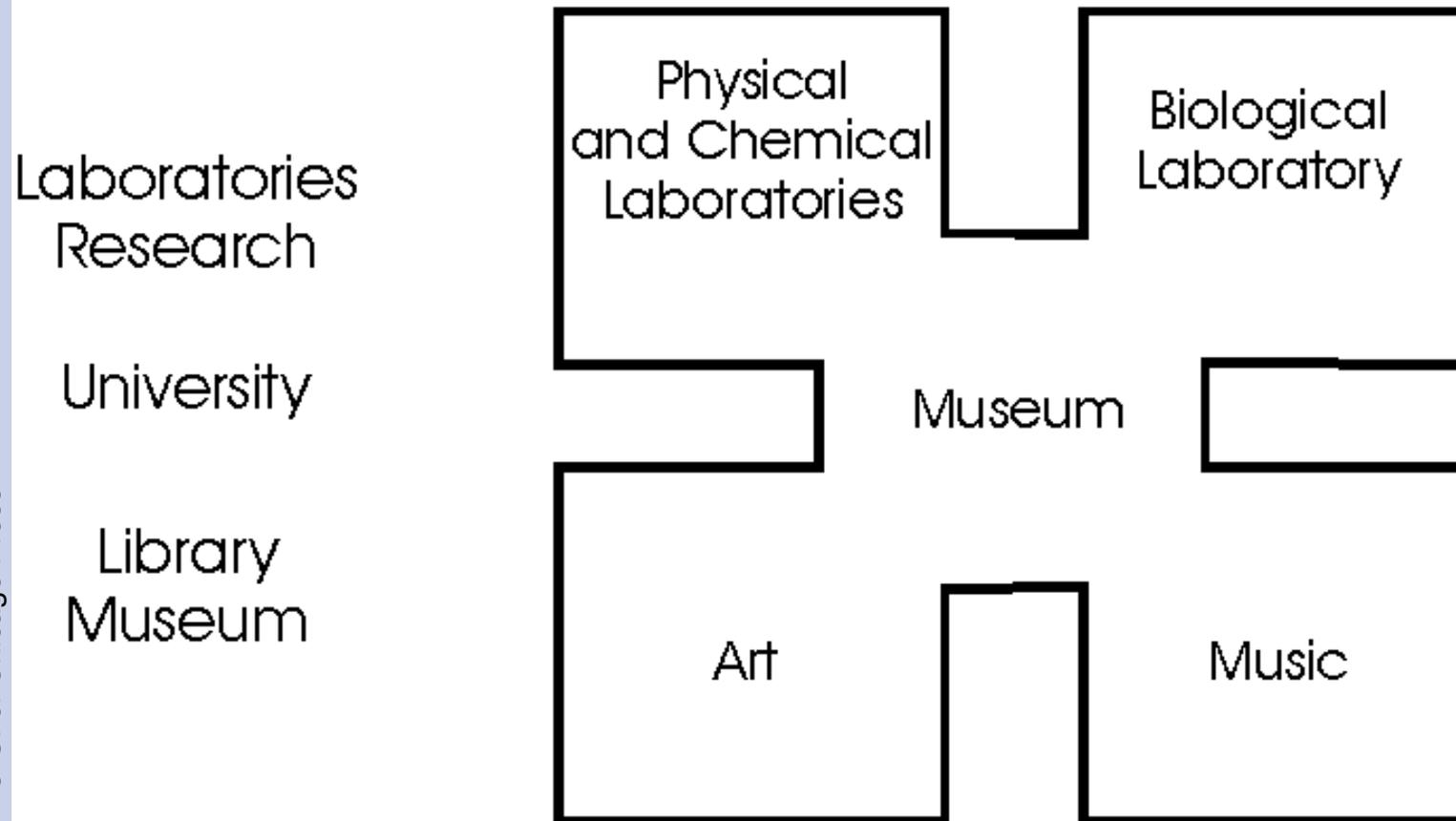
1859 - 1952

in 1880's

~1950

Education needs to start with the child's interests, Involve inquiry, questioning and problem solving, and lead to a desire to continue Education. (It also has a moral goal.)

Chart IV



© U. of Chicago Press

Chart IV, p. 87, Dewey, J. *The School and Society* (1900) Chicago: U. of Chicago Press.

Hein, G. E., (2004), John Dewey and Museum Education, *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 47[4], 413-427.

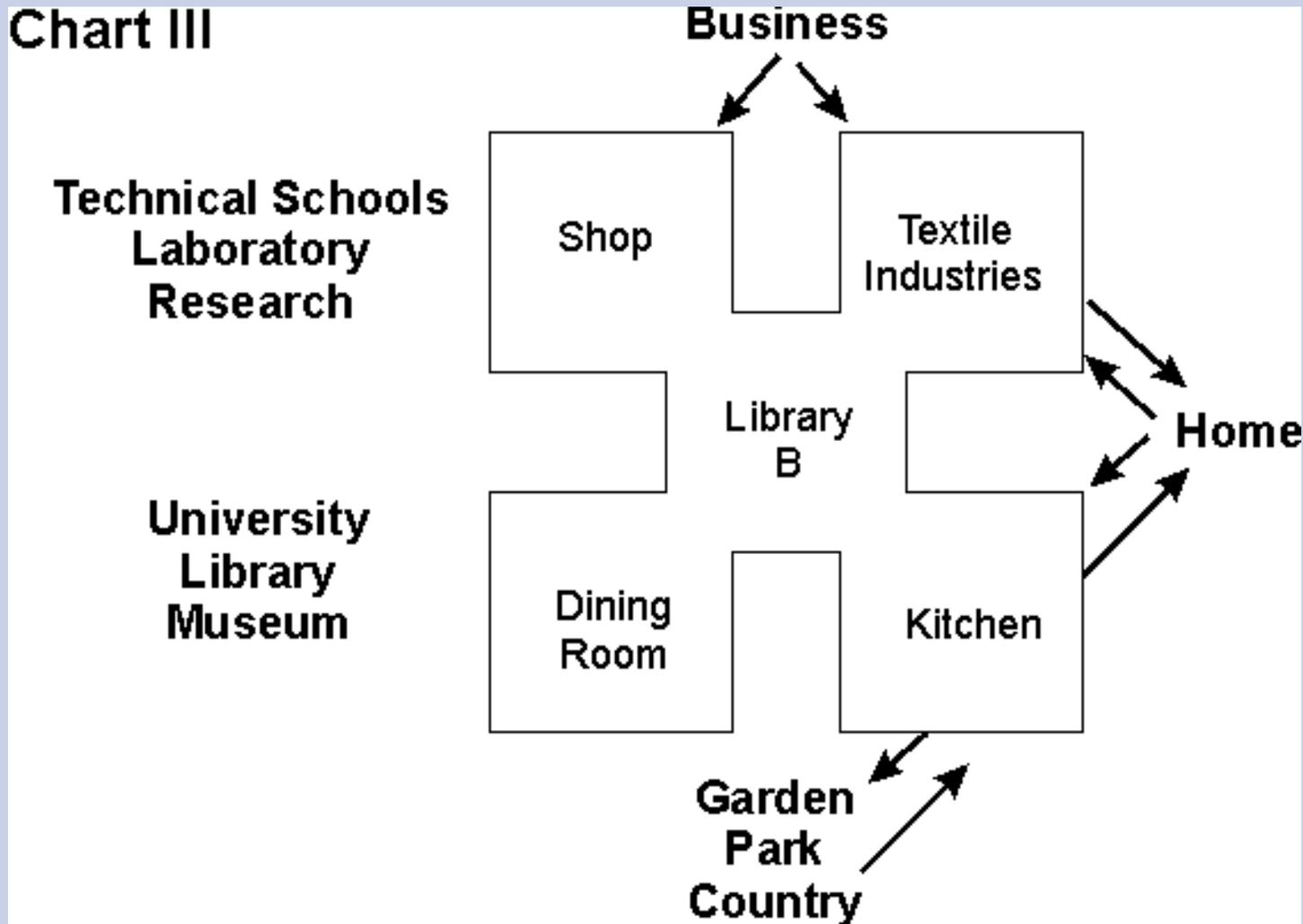


Chart III, p. 81, Dewey, J. *The School and Society* (1900) Chicago: U. of Chicago Press.

Dewey integrated museums into his actual pedagogy

“. . . Begin work after New Years on the basis of about 25 children between the ages of 6 & 9, . . . I don't know just what to say about hours, from 9-12 in the morning, but some afternoons a week to be given to going to see the country about, visit the museums &c."

John Dewey to Clara Isabelle Mitchell 11.12.1895 (00268)

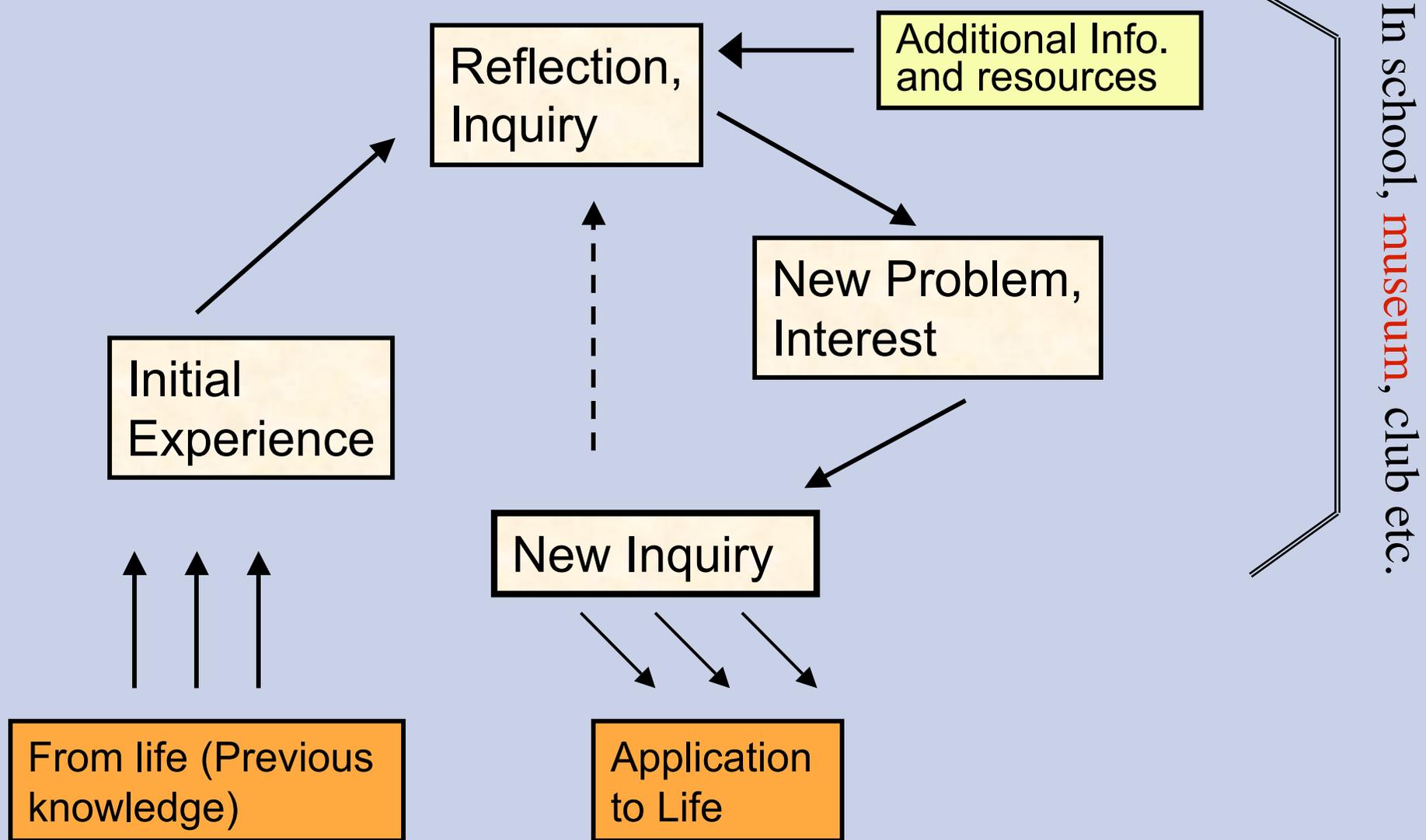
During 1896-97, an hour and a half was set aside on Monday mornings for trips to the Field Columbian Museum. . . The younger children had a plot of ground. . . Older children went to the University laboratories to see such instruments as the interferometer and spectroscope. There were also longer trips.

**Depencier, I. B. (1967) *The History of the Laboratory School*,
Chicago: Quadrangle Books, (p. 33)**

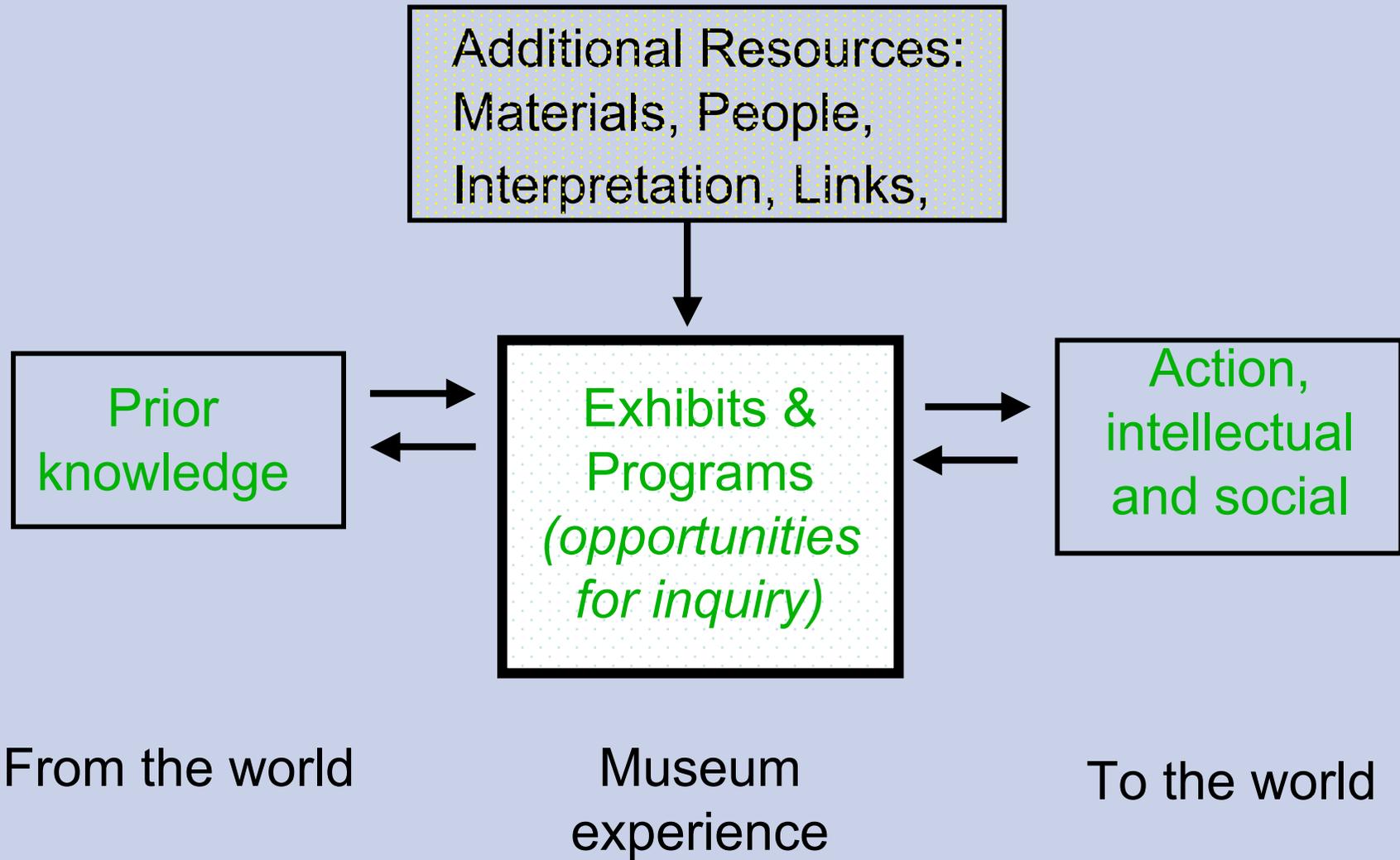
Important concepts/issues for Dewey (Pragmatism)

1. Different components fit together into one whole. (Clarity of individual topics less important than integration into a whole.)
Life, education, and work are combined, not separate.
Stress thought and action, admires activist thinkers.
2. Moral/ social philosophy takes precedence:
Faith in Democracy--education is not only intellectual, it also includes a moral dimension.
3. Rejection of all dualisms: thought vs. action, fine vs. applied art, etc. as well as the moral implications of dualisms.
4. Experience is highly complex, more than sensation. It includes a past and a future
5. Continuity and Change; Acceptance of uncertainty;
The world as it is, is the basis of knowledge and value.

An educational cycle, based on Dewey



Hein, G. E., (in press, 2006), John Dewey's "Wholly Original Philosophy" and Its Significance for Museums, *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 49[2].



Three essential questions for any museum educational experience:

1. How does it allow the visitor to connect to previous life experience?
2. What problems are provided for inquiry? And what means are provided to carry out this inquiry?
3. What resources are provided to support future action and learning?

1. How does it allow the visitor to connect to previous life experience?

- Not all previous experience is positive
- Applies to setting (building, gallery, classroom)
- Education staff and others
- Other cultural and social components
- Content

2. What problems are provided for inquiry? And what means are provided to carry out inquiry?

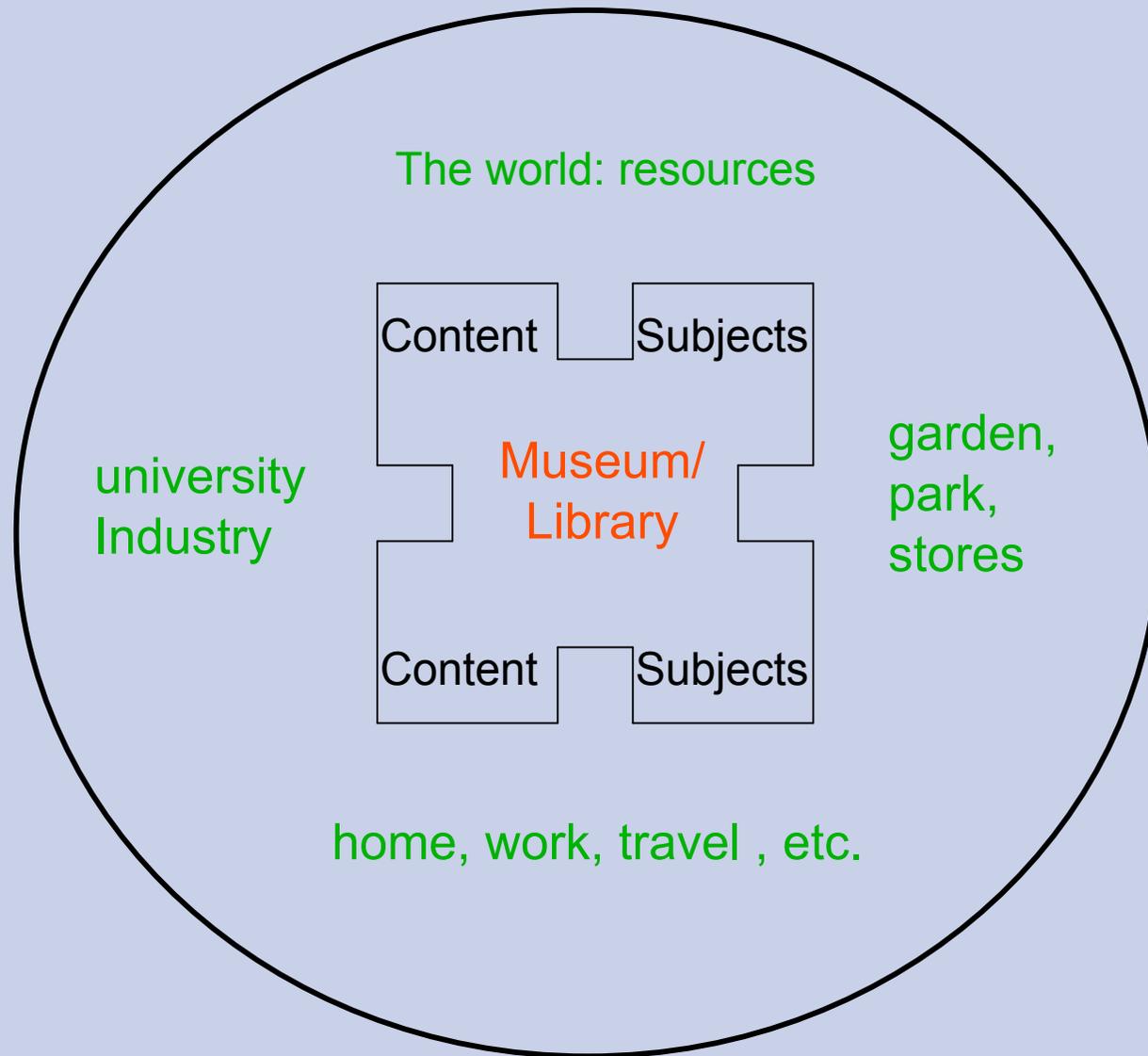
- Challenging problems are not easy to create
(pushing a button is not inquiry!)
- It's difficult to create interest, it comes from the visitor.
- Are tools to assist inquiry provided?
(text, video, physical tools, resources, etc.)

3. What resources are provided to support future action and learning

- What can the visitor take away?
- What suggestions are made for future connections?

Children's Museum of the Low Country
Charleston, South Carolina

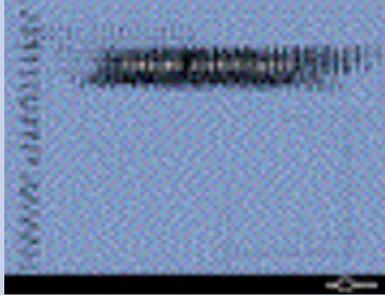
Step into our backyard and marvel at our newest exhibit, The Children's Garden. Stepping stones line the walkway to seven different gardens. The gardens are arranged in planter boxes at various heights. . . . our Seed Garden provides a special space for children to dig, plant, and water!



The dynamic relationship of museums (and libraries) to life, based on Dewey's model.

Dewey like Exhibit Development

**Exploratorium,
San Francisco, CA**



Allen, S., 2004, *Finding Significance*.

San Francisco: Exploratorium.

In this project, we viewed learning as a cycle in which learners: 1) have experiences with exhibits, 2) find something in them that is relevant or significant (the “hooks”); and 3) integrate those experiences into their previous knowledge (which may include attitudes, beliefs, memories, etc.) Ideally, knowledge integration will lead to further thinking and questioning, 4) making the learner curious to have further experiences. This creates a cycle in which experiences alternate with processes of reflection (Allen 2004, 6–7).

The social responsibility of museums follows from progressive educational theory

If education is acknowledged as the fundamental responsibility of museums, and museums recognize its progressive origins, then they must also accept their social responsibility to work towards supporting a participatory democratic society.

Why is it called “**progressive**” education?

Applying the democratic faith to education is the theme of *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916).

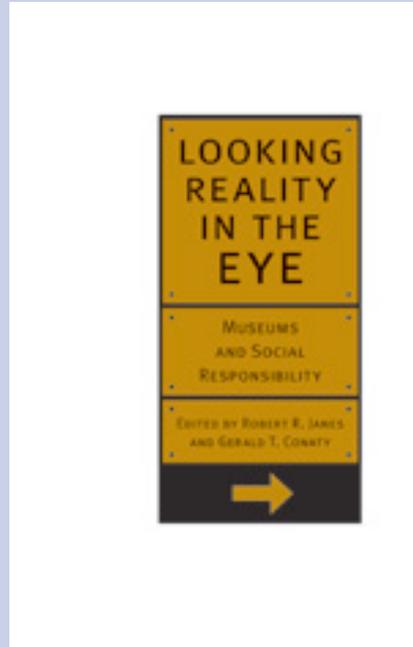
Progressive education is the education needed for a progressive society, i.e. one that strives to become more democratic; to change the status quo in the direction of ameliorating gaps between rich and poor, immigrants and native born, social classes, etc.

For this purpose citizens need to be taught how to think, how to inquire.

The term “progressive” modifies society, not education.

Important concepts/issues for Dewey (Pragmatism)

1. Different components fit together into one whole. (Clarity of individual topics less important than integration into a whole.)
Life, education, and work are combined, not separate.
Stress thought and action, admires activist thinkers.
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4. Experience is highly complex, more than sensation. It includes a past and a future
5. Continuity and Change; Acceptance of uncertainty;
The world as it is, is the basis of knowledge and value.



Robert R. Janes and Gerald T. Conaty (2005)
Looking Reality in the Eye: Museums and Social Responsibility, Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press

This book is about the search for meaning among . . . museums. . . Many museums have made a choice . . . To pursue popularity and increased revenues through high-profile exhibitions and architectural sensationalism. . . The museums portrayed in this book have chosen a different path . . . [they have] embraced a social mission.

Some Examples of Current Social Roles for Museums

<u>Category</u>	<u>Example</u>
Conservation of flora and fauna	Monterey Bay Aquarium
Post-colonial nation building	Botswana
Challenging social conditions	Fred Wilson (racism)
Community outreach	Helena Friman, Stockholm
Preserving culture (and local “empowerment”)	Bolivia
Reexamining presentation of other cultures	“Stewards of the Sacred”
Controversial topics	Enola Gay “Sites of Conscience”
Accessibility/ Universal Design	Museum of Science (Boston)
Inquiry as Social Action	Exploratorium, San Francisco
Ecomuseums/sustainability	Ithaca, NY
Social group awareness	Dialogue in the Dark

Museums engage in social action in two ways:

- The *subject and style* of exhibitions and programs
- Challenging their own practices--difficult, but necessary

(Or both!)

There is little evidence for behavior change from general conservation messages at zoos, aquaria and natural history sites

Front

Monterey Bay Aquarium
“Healthy Ocean” restaurant
seafood guide to support
sustainable fishing provides
visitors with a specific action
they can undertake.

Back

Botswana National Museum

The National Museum . . . researches on, collects, conserves and preserves Botswana's natural and cultural heritage. It also teaches about the people of Botswana, their past and their interaction with their environment: thus **promoting an understanding of Botswana's heritage as a whole. It also upholds an understanding of the cultural patterns of the diverse ethnicities which make up our nation.**

Community Outreach

Stockholm Education
(Helena Friman)

Programs for “keyworkers” --
Security (fire and police) transport,
park attendants, workers in old age
facilities, etc.

Challenging social conditions (racism)

Fred Wilson

Metalwork 1773-1880 From, "Mining the Museum",
Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992

**The exhibit case contains slave shackles
along with fine silver.**

Museum Guards (2001)

Challenging social conditions (racism) (Fred Wilson, continued)

Fred Wilson: *Cabinetmaking
1820-1960*, 1992, Mining the
Museum.

Fred Wilson: *Mine/Yours*, 1995.
Collection: Whitney Museum

Preserving culture (and local “empowerment”)

Bolivia



Working with the indigenous population to create a museum and support local development

Women have brought objects for a new local museum

Biodiversity Conservation through Integrated Management, a partnership of the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Colección Boliviana de Fauna, Museo de Historia Natural Noel Kempff Mercado, and the American Museum of Natural History's Center for Biodiversity and Conservation

Dolores Root photo

Re-examining the display of objects with religious significance for other cultures

Stewards of the Sacred: Sacred Artifacts, Religious Culture, and the Museum as Social Institution

“Museums have traditionally affirmed their missions as the exhibition, preservation, and scholarly interpretation of objects. In the last two decades, these roles are expanding and being redefined. Because a significant proportion of the material collected in museums across the globe has religious significance, often in the context of living traditions, issues of religion are entering the museum conversation of the sacred.”

<http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/research/RAI/stewardsofthesacred/>

Sullivan L. E. & Edwards, A. (eds.) 2004. *Stewards of the Sacred*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums

Controversial topics

“Enola Gay” Exhibition

The controversy is not about museum praxis, but about the interpretation; the text on the labels.

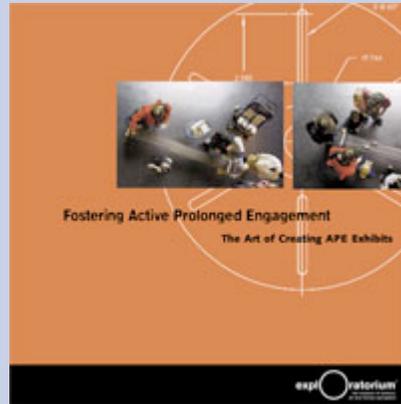
Enola Gay exhibition at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, opened June 28, 1995.

The Coalition [Sites of Conscience] is a network of historic site museums in many different parts of the world, at many stages of development, presenting and interpreting a wide variety of historic issues, events and people. We hold in common the belief that it is the obligation of historic sites to assist the public in drawing connections between the history of our site and its contemporary implications. **We view stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function.**

(www.sitesofconscience.org)

Teaching inquiry skills as social action

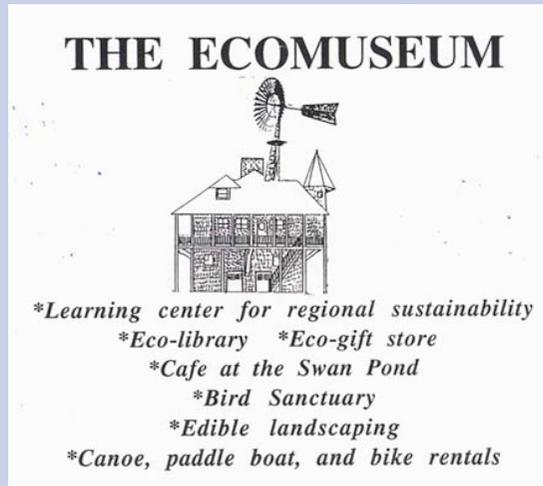
Exploratorium,
San Francisco



Humphrey, T. and J. P. Gutwill. 2005. *Fostering Active Prolonged Engagement: The Art of Creating APE Exhibits*. San Francisco, CA: The Exploratorium.

[An] important goal of the project [is] empowering visitors to pose and pursue their own questions at the exhibits APE exhibits were created to encourage visitors to explore phenomena in their own ways, answering their own questions, rather than turning to the authority in the label.

Ecomuseums/Sustainability



*Center for Environmental Sustainability/
EcoMuseum
Ithaca, NY, USA*



Definition of Environmental Sustainability:

To maintain or sustain ecosystems such that they meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations.

Accessibility

Museum of Science (Boston)

New England Habitats, making a traditional diorama exhibition accessible.
(multi-modal label)

Dr. Betty Davidson at *Investigate!* exhibition, Museum of Science

Increased accessibility improves learning for **all visitors**

The mission of Dialogue-in-the-Dark is to make visitors aware of power relationships in society and inform the public of the employability of people with disabilities.

Dialogue in the Dark, is a first model fulfilling the criteria of the Social Lab. In this exhibition for the discovery of the invisible, blind people guide visitors through a totally dark environment. The blind person is the expert in non-visual perception and orientation. During their journey through darkness, the visitors . . . experience themselves, their surroundings and all social encounters in a totally new way.