

Conversation as Interpretation: Training and Evaluating Our Interpreters

American Association of Museums Annual Meeting
May 9, 2004 - New Orleans, LA

Interpretation is conversation, guided interaction, or any communication that enriches the visitor experience by making meaningful connections between the messages and collections of our institution and the intellectual and emotional world of the visitor.

MK Cunningham, *The Interpreters Training Manual for Museums*, 2004

Learning in a museum is the meaning we create as we engage in communication with each other: communication about who we are, our place in the cultural and natural world, and relationship to the things and people around us.

Deborah Perry and Kris Morrissey in their workshop *Designing for Conversation*, 2002

[T]he range of experiences [in a museum] often requires rethinking the roles of staff and volunteers. In essence staff become facilitators rather than disseminators of information, supporting learning rather than directing it.

Lynn D. Dierking, et al., "The Family and Free Choice Learning," *Museum News*, 2001

Socially mediated learning in museums does not only occur within an individual's own social group; powerful socially mediated learning can occur with strangers perceived to be knowledgeable [including] museum explainers, docents, guides, and performers.

John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, 2000

[Successful museum programs] have conversational flavor—even if no words are spoken. These conversations have content focus—even if they are not part of an obvious lesson. There is the assumption that the visitor is not some poor soul in need of enlightenment, but a smart and capable collaborator.

Michael Spock, "Elegant Programs and Conversations," *Presence of Mind: Museums and the Spirit of Learning*, 1999

. . . when you leave a conversation you have left a circle of acquaintance . . . a society with whom you have shared a topic and something of yourself. You take away a better understanding of both the topic and the other people that were absorbed in it with you. In turn, you leave something of yourself behind. Conversation in this way is a social art, focused on mutual teaching and learning. It is a whole lot more than "talking."

Phil Parfitt, former Vice President of Education, Chicago Academy of Sciences, 1999

Learning in a museum is primarily a social process; people learn through interaction with peers. . . . Educators do not impart information as much as provide appropriate means of access to cultures of science, history, art, and other subjects.

George Hein and Mary Alexander in *Museums: Places of Learning*, 1998

If education is about the negotiation of meaning and museums are a forum for that, then our definitions of the institution must begin to allow, first, for variation in meaning and, second, for interaction between presenters and participants.

Lisa Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Education and the Changing Museum*, 1997

Our learning is intimately associated with our connection with other human beings, our teachers, our peers, our family, as well as casual acquaintances, including the people . . . next to us at the exhibit. . . .

George Hein, "The Museum and the Needs of People" 1991

Truth is not in the conclusions so much as in the process of conversation itself.

Parker Palmer, "Good Teaching: A Matter of Living the Mystery" 1990

Resources:

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