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Understanding Science Centre Engagement in Nurturing Visitor Interest and Curiosity

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Abstract

Reaching and engaging visitors within exhibitions and throughout the museum environment, recurred as an area of design concern. Using the recent experience of Science Centre Singapore, The Mind Museum Philippines and The Experimentarium Denmark, the responses of the centre managements provided initial findings towards quality visitor experience and informal learning intentions. The biggest challenge is to provide an opportunity for cognitive and affective learning while collectively facilitating enjoyment and fun. Learning and educational theory are explored with implications for the exhibition development process. Nurturing visitor interest and curiosity theme reveal the centre's approach to offer a rich and cohesive experience.

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Keywords: Exhibition design; informal learning; science centre; visitor experience

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1. Introduction

The term Quality-of-life (QOL) renowned as 'goodness of life' refers to the physical, psychological and sociological state of being. It entails factors such as enjoyment, achievement, aspiration and recollection (Mohit, 2014). QOL in informal learning environment has examined various factors that can influence learning such as engaging visitors' emotions or connecting with visitors' prior knowledge and interests. Likewise, learning environment is the key in promoting the development of children. Sahimi (2010) posit that understanding children's perspectives about their environment is an important factor to offer a more meaningful learning experience. For example, participatory process involving children in designing and renovating a learning space has contributed positively in promoting children's active use of the space as well as their positive attitude and sense of belonging toward the space (Atmodiwirjo & Andri Yatmo, 2011). Nonetheless, the children's place preferences and play behaviours in the environments are influenced by their developmental needs, individual, physical and social factors (Aziz & Said, 2011). Physical environment which are creative, comfortable, safe and user-friendly can increase the level of involvement in an overall free time physical activities (Abd-Latif et. al, 2011). Children have the opportunities to build their self-confidence and independence in surroundings which stimulate imagination and challenge them to face and overcome risks (Soltani, S.H.K., et. al.,2012). Various design environments can attract and stimulate their interest when they participate in skill enhancing activities (Noiprawa & Sahachaisaeree, 2011).

In museum learning environment such as the science centre, varieties of exhibits spanning various disciplines are incubators of scientific knowledge and emphasises hands-on exploratory learning. The style of the exhibit presentation deeply affects the kinds of thinking engaged in by visitors. The dynamic interpretation techniques do give more positive's outcome in attracting visitors (Hashim, 2014). Despite this, the study of interior elements and its effect on social behaviour is still immature. (Wardono et. al, 2011). The decrease of student interest in learning science is an environmental challenge towards the future communities (Yunus & Ali, 2013). Yet, science centre persists to accommodate science interest and lifelong learning. The primary objective of museum management can be achieved by a communication of meaning through quality displays of exhibitions and interactive apparatus of science (Ahmad, et. al., 2014). Using the recent experience of Science Centre Singapore and The Mind Museum, Philippines as case-studies and The Experimentarium, Denmark as valuable mention, this paper examines the managerial responses in order to explore the extent to which the design opportunities occurs. The research explained in this study is experience-oriented design research that focuses on understanding and enhancing visitor experiences. The theme nurturing visitor interest and curiosity represent one of the design criteria for science centre exhibition's success.

2. Relevant literature

The museum field is rich with literature that addresses the concept of informal learning or "free-choice" learning in museums (Falk & Dierking, 2000). Hein (1998) suggested that museums typically do not have set formal curriculum; rather they provide visitors with informal education opportunities. Visitors largely come by their own choice and are thus intrinsically motivated. They engage in activities in a self-directed manner and their methods of learning are varied (Greenhill, 1999). In describing the integration of intrinsic motivation into a theory of learning, Rice (2001) highlighted the task of museum educators is to move people from a recreational agenda to a learning-centered agenda through a powerful aesthetic experience. A theory of learning that integrates the function of motivation is ultimately one that can reconcile affective experiences with the construction of meaning. According to Perry (1992), requirements for an intrinsically motivating museum experience include the ability to instil curiosity, challenge, control, confidence, play and communication in the visitor's experience. To achieve intrinsic motivation, the learning theories underpinning how visitors learn and how these theories impact a museum's exhibition design efforts is briefly discussed.

Behaviorism models are drawn from traditional classroom practices and have been used to design museum exhibits in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Greenhill, 1999). This led to authoritative, didactic displays, frequently arranged to illustrate conventional epistemological hierarchies and classifications (Hein, 1998). Indeed, behaviour-based objectives are not always the most efficient approach to facilitate learning, especially in unstructured or informal learning environments. Along with the change in theories, an altered definition of learning

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