Is Educational Leisure A Contradiction in Terms? Exploring the Synergy of Education and Entertainment

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Abstract

Theoretical analysis highlights the complexity of the relationship between education and entertainment in educational leisure settings and indicates the need for research in this area. This paper contributes to developing an understanding of the connections between, and compatibility of, education and entertainment, from the perspective of visitors to educational leisure settings. Questionnaire data were collected from 49 visitors to six educational leisure settings in South-east Queensland and qualitative interviews were conducted with an additional 52 visitors. The data were analysed using three different methods: examination of visitors’ own ratings of the extent to which education and entertainment are compatible; statistical examination of relationships between education and entertainment in visitors’ goals, perceptions of the learning environment and learning experiences; and analysis of qualitative visitor interview responses. The findings support the proposition that education and entertainment are not only compatible, but synergistic, in the context of educational leisure settings. The importance of providing visitors with an experience that transcends both education and entertainment is discussed.

Introduction

As societies change from industrially-based to knowledge-based economies, individuals are increasingly accessing lifelong and free-choice learning. People today have a ‘voracious appetite for learning’ because, in present-day society, ‘knowledge is power, knowledge is security, knowledge is the ultimate means to control fate’ (Falk and Dierking, 2000: 62). Leisure settings provide an important medium through which people can acquire information, develop ideas and construct new visions for themselves and society. Indeed, for many people, ‘the information they encounter while at leisure may offer the only opportunity to learn about their bonds to the environment, or to their history and culture’ (Moscardo, 1998: 4).

Leisure settings that offer an educational component are many and varied. They include, for example, art, history and natural history museums, botanical gardens, nature centres, national parks, science centres, zoos, aquaria, historic houses, historic reconstructions and heritage and archaeological sites. Probably the best-known and most researched of these settings is the museum. In fact, the term museum has at times been used generically to include all of the above (Falk and Dierking, 1995; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999) and these different settings are seen to have much in common (Falk, Dierking and Holland, 1995).

In recent years there has been a renewed awareness of the contributions that museums and other leisure settings can make to lifelong public learning (Anderson, 1997; Downs, 1995; Edward, 1995; Falk and Dierking, 1992; Falk et al., 1995; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999; Moscardo, 1998; Schauble et al., 1996; Weiler and Ham, 2000). Consequently, education has become a major component of the experience offered to visitors as well as a major justification in the competition for public funding (Bown, 1995; Cassels, 1992; Hein, 1998; Moscardo and Pearce, 1986). A growing emphasis on professionalism, accountability and customer service has also contributed to making education a serious and central function in museums and other leisure settings (Roberts, 1997). The education component is vital to the rapidly growing ecotourism industry, as well as other forms of sustainable tourism, and involves alerting tourists to the consequences of their actions and encouraging them to engage in sustainable behaviour (Moscardo, 1996). Interpretive sites often encourage visitors to question their values, attitudes and actions regarding contentious issues and consider themselves active agents of education and change (Ballantyne and Uzzell, 1993; Uzzell, 1998; Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998).

Not all visitors to educational leisure settings share these ideals. Commonly, visitors seek
entertainment, social or restorative experiences as well as, or in preference to, a learning experience (Schauble et al., 1996). For many people, learning is no more than an optional extra (Hedge, 1995). Although some museum educators are reluctant to consider entertainment as one of their functions, other members of the educational leisure industry deliberately cater to their visitors’ entertainment motives, while attempting to maintain an educative value:

Visitors go to places like Epcot or Disneyland primarily for entertainment. The design of exhibits in this style of theme park is such that, incidentally, the visitor learns a great deal of information about a range of issues, including social and political history, technological developments, agriculture, wildlife, evolution, conservation, cultural diversity, and futuristic possibilities. The Walt Disney company uses the term ‘Imagineering’ to describe what it is attempting to achieve with its exhibits, and, while the goal may sound fanciful, it parallels what many museum exhibit designers try to achieve. (Hedge, 1995: 106-107)

Within the museum literature in particular, debate has arisen regarding the conflict between education and entertainment (McManus, 1993) or, as those with a particular viewpoint might refer to it, ‘showmanship versus scholarship’ (Boyd, 1992). Some museums have been accused of becoming ‘too glitzy to be taken seriously’ (Bown, 1995). Museums which engage in ‘frivolous entertainment’ are criticised as ‘vulgar sideshows’, while those which emphasise ‘serious education’ are criticised as ‘elitist institutions’ (Roberts, 1997). Miles (1986) suggests that, while museum staff often take a scholarly view of the museum, as a place of learning rather than of leisure, visitors are more likely to view it as a place of entertainment.

Greenhalgh (1989) argues that this conflict between education and entertainment is a result of the perceived division between work and leisure in Western thinking. Education is seen to be bound up with work and entertainment with pleasure, and the two are assumed to be incompatible. Work, in other words, cannot be enjoyable, and leisure cannot be serious (Csikszentmihalyi and Kleiber, 1991). From this perspective, the very concept of educational leisure would appear to be a contradiction in terms. This paper explores the apparent conflict between education and entertainment from both a theoretical and empirical perspective.

Education and entertainment defined
The term ‘education’ is derived from the Latin educare, to bring up or rear, and educere, to lead out. The term is often used to signify the extent of a person’s formal schooling, but can also be understood to include informal learning experiences such as travel, reading and conversation (Ellis and Fouts, 1996). The Oxford English Reference Dictionary includes the concept of ‘development of character or mental powers’ in its definition of the term, along with the more common meaning of ‘systematic instruction’. In the following discussion, the terms education or educational are used to refer to those aspects of an experience that cognitively engage the visitor, regardless of the learning outcomes that may or may not result and the level of structure that may or may not be inherent in the experience.

The terms ‘entertainment’ and ‘entertain’ include the ideas of ‘a public performance or show’, ‘diversions or amusements for guests’, and to ‘occupy agreeably’ (Oxford English Reference Dictionary, 1996). In this discussion, the term is used to refer to those aspects of an experience that are perceived by visitors to be enjoyable or pleasant.

Falk, Moussouri and Coulson (1998: 117) shed further light on the common understanding of these terms in their observation that ‘the words “education” and “entertainment” are laden with a great deal of baggage. To the academic, “education” connotes importance and quality, while “entertainment” suggests vacuousness and frivolity’. These understandings are not necessarily shared by the visiting public, however.

In the following review, possible sources of conflict between education and entertainment in the context of educational leisure settings are identified. These are then countered by arguments for the complementarity of education and entertainment. Empirical data are presented regarding the relationships between education and entertainment from the visitor’s perspective.

Possible sources of conflict between education and entertainment
A recent Australian study (Scott, 2000) suggests that people may increasingly be seeking leisure that is fun, pleasurable, enjoyable and relaxing as an antidote to increased work pressure and the increased pace of life. If this is the case, visitors may be more interested in the entertainment and social aspects of a museum visit than in the educational aspects. Moscardo (1996; 1999) argues that many visitors are
mindless or mentally passive in their response to interpretive materials. They act out behavioural routines with little questioning or processing of new information. Similarly, Treinen (1993) uses the term ‘active dozing’ to describe the relatively planless and purposeless activity common to mass communication situations. He contends that people actively search for pleasant but purposeless mental stimulation, which must be continuously replaced in order to maintain the desired state of excitement. The majority of museum visitors, Treinen maintains, are driven more by the desire for amusement than the desire to educate themselves. Such an approach is not conducive to mindful learning which is purposeful, effort demanding and time-consuming (Berry, 1997; Salomon, 1983; Snow and Jackson, 1994).

Salomon (1981) argues that people’s perceptions of the task requirements of communication sources such as television programs, schools and museums, influence the amount and kind of mental effort invested, that is how deeply the presented information is processed. Thus, for example, if a particular medium, such as television, is perceived as not requiring effort, people will respond to it mindlessly (Salomon, 1983). It is conceivable, therefore, that educational leisure settings, by taking on the appearance of entertainment, may actually be pre-disposing visitors to adopt a mindless approach. Ansbacher (1998) also warns of the possible negative effects of the use of entertainment to make learning fun. Although such experiences may achieve the goal of relatively painless information transfer, they deny visitors the deeper satisfaction of acquiring understanding through inquiry and may lead to visitors pursuing further fun, rather than further learning. These perspectives suggest that there is a possible conflict between education and entertainment. Not only may visitors seek entertainment in preference to education, but it is also possible that the presence of entertainment may act to discourage engagement in meaningful learning.

Possible complementarities between education and entertainment

In contrast to the arguments presented above, Roberts (1997) suggests that the very nature of entertainment evokes optimal conditions for learning, such as openness and loss of self. Adults as much as children need an environment that allows them to explore, question and challenge and so gain an understanding of themselves and the world (Anderson, 1997; Mitchell, 1998). Such learning can be likened to children’s play, with surprise, adventure and discovery being key ingredients (Melamed, 1987). Educational leisure settings are well suited to such a playful approach to learning, where entertainment acts to encourage engagement in learning.

The need for novelty or change, for new sources of stimulation and adventure, to explore and understand the unknown, are seen as important motivating forces in tourism (Lee and Crompton, 1992; Mayo and Jarvis, 1981; Snepenger, 1987). Leisure is seen by many as an opportunity for self-fulfilment (Stebbins, 1982), self-development (Moscardo, 1999), education (Goodale and Cooper, 1991) or a source of meaning in life (Roberts, 1997). Learning can be enjoyable (Schiefele, 1991) and intrinsically satisfying (Brown, 1988). Learning can also be challenging, adventurous, competitive and risky, thus providing opportunities for satisfaction through mastery (Paris and Cross, 1983). Further, there is some evidence that intrinsically motivated learning may actually occur relatively automatically, without effort and without the need for conscious control (Hidi, 1990; Krapp, 1999). From this viewpoint, then, it is possible that visitors may actively seek and enjoy educational experiences and that such experiences are enhanced rather than hindered by the presence of entertainment.

Aims of the empirical study

The conflicting theoretical arguments outlined above highlight the complexity of the relationship between education and entertainment and indicate the need for research in this area. This is particularly important in the context of educational leisure settings, where both education and entertainment are seen as vital components of the visitor’s experience. The present study was designed to contribute to the development of an understanding of the connections between, and compatibility of, education and entertainment, from the perspective of visitors to educational leisure settings.

Methods

Study design

The study used three different methods:

1. visitors’ own ratings of the extent to which education and entertainment are compatible in their visit;
2. analysis of relationships between education and entertainment in visitors’ goals, perceptions of the learning environment and learning experiences; and
3. visitors’ qualitative reflections on the relationship between education and entertainment during their visit.
The data presented here are drawn from a larger study designed to explore the impact of various motivational factors on visitors’ experience of learning (Packer, 2004). The study was conducted in two stages: Stage I (June-October 2001) focussing on the quantitative methods (1 and 2 above) and Stage II (September - November 2002) focussing on the qualitative method (3 above).

Site selection

In Stage I, in order to obtain the views of a cross-section of users of educational leisure facilities, a sample of visitors to six different educational leisure settings in South-east Queensland was invited to participate in the research. This region is one of the major tourist destinations in Australia and the sites included can be considered world-class facilities. The sites chosen were a museum, an art gallery, a wildlife centre, an aquarium and guided tours of natural and cultural heritage sites. These sites have in common a concern for public education, but may differ in how they are viewed by visitors and so evoke different expectations and experiences. The six sites were chosen to represent three different types of educational leisure settings: museum sites (museum, art gallery); interpretive sites (wildlife centre, aquarium, guided history tour); and natural sites (guided forest walk).

Stage II was conducted approximately 12 months after Stage I, at just three of the six sites: the museum, aquarium and guided forest walk. One site from each category was selected in order to maximise the variation between sites, while maintaining sufficient numbers within sites to allow meaningful comparisons, given the smaller sample size necessary for qualitative research.

Sampling

In Stage I, a convenience sample (those willing to participate) of independent adult visitors to each site completed a questionnaire (tour groups and families with young children were excluded). The questionnaire was in two parts: a pre-visit component and a post-visit component. Visitors were asked to complete the pre-visit component as they arrived at the site and to keep the questionnaire with them until the end of the visit, when they completed the post-visit component and returned the questionnaire to a collection point at the exit. Each component took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Those who were willing to participate were offered a small incentive, such as a cup of tea or coffee or a free pass to an associated attraction, to encourage them and thank them for their time. Approximately 80-90 questionnaires were completed and returned at each site, resulting in a total of 499 respondents. Although the use of non-probability sampling limits the generalisability of the findings, replication of the study at six different sites does provide some basis for generalising the findings more broadly (see Limitations section below). The sample is not intended to be representative of all visitors to educational leisure settings; in particular, the findings do not necessarily apply to those groups excluded from the sample.

There were a number of reasons for this variation. At the four self-guided sites (museum, art gallery, wildlife centre and aquarium), visitors had to be willing to take time out of their visit to complete a questionnaire, while visitors on the guided tours were able to complete the questionnaires during waiting periods before and after the tour. It was also found that museum visitors were more willing to take, complete and return a questionnaire than visitors to other self-guided sites (43% participation rate at the museum, compared with 11-29% at the other three self-guided sites). This may be seen as one indication of differences in the way visitors approach the different sites and their willingness to engage in cognitive activity (Packer and Ballantyne, 2002).
Similar sampling procedures were used in Stage II of the study. A total of 52 visitors participated in brief (10-minute) semi-structured interviews on completion of their visit.

Stage I questionnaire design

The pre-visit component of the questionnaire included questions about visitors’ goals or desired outcomes for their visit, and the post-visit component included questions about visitors’ perceptions of the learning environment, aspects of the visit experience and opinions about the education versus entertainment aspects of the visit. The questionnaire was designed to measure a range of other variables, but this paper focuses only on a subset of the data that is relevant to consideration of the relationship between education and entertainment.

Goals: This pre-visit component of the questionnaire contained a set of 40 items designed to measure the importance of various desired outcomes visitors hoped to attain in their visit, including a range of education-oriented and entertainment-oriented outcomes. These items were based on a review of previous research and were refined through pilot testing. Each item was rated on a seven-point scale from ‘not important’ to ‘extremely important’.

Perceptions of the learning environment: The questionnaire contained eight post-visit items regarding visitors’ perceptions of the learning environment, in particular the extent to which it was seen as educational or entertaining. Each item was rated on a six-point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

Visitors’ experiences: Twelve post-visit items were designed to measure visitors’ reports of educational, entertainment, social and restorative experiences during their visit. Visitors indicated the extent to which they had experienced each item by placing a mark on a line anchored at one end by ‘not at all’, and at the other by ‘a great deal’. This was subsequently converted to a score out of 20. The amount of mental effort visitors reported having invested in learning activities was measured using six items each rated on a seven-point scale, ranging from ‘not at all’ to ‘a great deal’.

Learning versus entertainment: In the post-visit part of the questionnaire respondents were asked to rate the extent to which:

- ‘Learning and exploring new ideas helped or made it harder to keep me entertained’; and
- ‘Having information presented in entertaining ways helped or made it harder for me to learn and explore new ideas’.

A five-point scale was used, where -2 = ‘a lot harder’, -1 = ‘a little harder’, 0 = ‘had no influence’, +1 = ‘helped a little’, and +2 = ‘helped a lot’. These questions were embedded in a set of six questions exploring the relationships between the educational aspects of the visit and the entertainment, restorative and social aspects.

Stage II interviews

In the Stage II interviews visitors were asked: 1. whether they saw their visit as mostly educational or mostly entertaining; and 2. how those two things fitted together in their visit. These questions were asked towards the end of each interview following a range of other questions regarding the nature, value and limits of learning in educational leisure settings.

Limitations

This study has some limitations in relation to sampling and measurement issues which need to be considered in interpreting the results. The research was conducted at six educational leisure settings in South-east Queensland. Although those sites are not necessarily representative of all educational leisure settings, the extent to which there are commonalities in the data between sites does suggest some degree of universality. Selection of participants was limited to adult visitors who were competent speakers of English. Those visiting with very young children and those in organised tour groups were excluded. Data collection was carried out in Winter and Spring, on weekdays, outside of school holiday periods. These limitations are consistent with the focus on independent adult visitors. However, it is possible that there are seasonal variations in visitor types. The variations in participation rates noted above suggest a response bias towards those who are more open to cognitive engagement. This may result in an overestimate of the importance of the education component of the visit. The impact of this bias can be monitored to some extent by confirming the consistency of findings between sites, particularly those sites where response rates were higher than 50% (guided history tour and guided forest walk).

The use of exclusively self-report measures, although obtained using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches, limits the opportunities to demonstrate validity through triangulation. However, such measures are considered necessary as the major focus of this research is on individuals’ subjective perspectives and interpretations of events.
Results and Discussion

The results are presented separately for the three methods.

Method 1: Visitors’ ratings of compatibility between education and entertainment

Table 2 presents the results from the direct questions asking visitors about the relationships between education and entertainment. Almost three quarters of visitors (73%) agreed that having information presented in entertaining ways helped them to learn and explore new ideas and only 4% of visitors disagreed. Similarly, almost two thirds (65%) agreed that learning and exploring new ideas helped to keep them entertained and only 5% disagreed. The compatibility between the educational and entertainment aspects of the visit, expressed in this way, was higher than the compatibility between the educational and social aspects (47% agreed that social interaction helped learning; and 48% agreed that learning helped social interaction) or the educational and restoration aspects (66% agreed that being relaxed helped them learn and 61% agreed that learning helped them relax).

Table 2. Visitors’ ratings of the compatibility between education and entertainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disagreed</th>
<th>No influence</th>
<th>Agreed</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having information presented in entertaining ways helped me to learn and explore new ideas</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and exploring new ideas helped to keep me entertained</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method 2: Analysis of relationships between education and entertainment in visitors’ goals, perceptions of the learning environment and learning experiences

Method 2 involved exploration of statistical relationships within and between measures of visitors’ goals, perceptions of the learning environment and learning experiences, using correlations and factor analysis. These analyses were based on the premise that different items can be considered more or less compatible according to the extent to which they are positively inter-related (tend to occur concurrently) rather than negatively inter-related (tend to occur more in the other’s absence). The detailed results of these analyses are presented elsewhere (Packer, 2004; Packer and Ballantyne, 2002).

Visitor goals: The factor analysis of the 40 items addressing visitor goals results d in the identification of five factors, or constructs, accounting for 62% of the common variance. The results suggest that visitors perceive dimensions such as learning, discovery and excitement to be part of the same construct. This construct was labelled ‘Learning and Discovery’ and, in accounting for 35% of the variance, represented the essence of the experience of learning in educational leisure settings. It was distinct from, on the one hand, the deeper experiences involved in thinking about personal values and making meaning (labelled Personal Self-fulfilment) and, on the other, the more passive experiences of simple enjoyment and pleasantry (labelled Passive Enjoyment). The other two factors were labelled ‘Restoration’ (incorporating rest, relaxation and recovery from stress) and ‘Social Contact’ (being with family and friends).

These findings suggest a slightly different conceptualisation of the distinction between education and entertainment from that previously presented in the literature in this area. For example, Falk et al. (1998: 115) suggest that much of the debate regarding the relative importance of education and entertainment in the museum context, has assumed that the two variables are mutually exclusive, or ‘two ends of a single continuum’. They disagree with this view, proposing instead that ‘education and entertainment represent separate continua altogether’. Falk and Dierking (2000) emphasise the complementary nature of education and entertainment. The results of the present study support this idea of complementarity and take it one step further. It is suggested that the learning that occurs in educational leisure settings reflects a synergy of education and entertainment that differs qualitatively from the singular notions of each. Thus where Falk et al. consider the desire to see something new and interesting as an entertainment motive, and to seek informational content as an education motive, in this study, such items were found to be part of a single ‘Learning and Discovery’ factor.

Interestingly, Learning and Discovery, defined in this way, was more important to visitors as a reason for their visit than Restoration, Social Contact or Personal Self-fulfilment. These differences, based on comparing visitors’ average scores in each goal category, were statistically significant at all
sites except the guided forest walk.'

**Perceptions of the learning environment:** Factor analysis revealed that the eight items designed to measure perceptions of the learning environment could be represented by two factors, together accounting for 51% of the variance. These factors were interpreted as: 1. a belief that learning is enjoyable, and 2. a belief that learning is effortful in the context of the specific educational leisure setting. The grouping of items into factors is indicated in Table 3, and it is notable that the two items ‘the visit or tour was educational’ and ‘the visit or tour was entertaining’ did not load on separate factors. Rather, both of these items loaded on the ‘Learning is Enjoyable’ factor. This suggests that visitors’ goals, as analysed above, and their perceptions of actual experience are consistent: learning in leisure settings is seen to be part of the enjoyment of the experience.

The findings also suggest that learning does not need to be effortful in order for the visit to be perceived as educational. Indeed, as shown in Table 3, the majority of visitors’ responses to the ‘Learning is Effortful’ items were in the ‘disagreement’ range, indicating that learning in leisure settings is not generally perceived as involving effort.

Table 3. Visitors’ perceptions of the learning environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Learning is Enjoyable’ factor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are lots of opportunities to learn here</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding the information presented is important to me</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning here is a relaxing thing to do</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning here is a fun thing to do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The visit or tour was educational</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The visit or tour was entertaining</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Learning is Effortful’ factor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It takes a lot of effort to learn things here</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning here is difficult</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visitors’ experiences: The twelve items used to measure visitors’ reports of their educational, entertainment, social and restorative experiences were grouped into five categories corresponding to the five goal-related factors/constructs discussed above: Learning and Discovery (3 items); Passive Enjoyment (2 items); Restoration (2 items); Social Contact (2 items); and Personal Self-fulfilment (3 items). Average scores were computed for each category and correlations between the average category scores were examined.

As shown in Table 4, the correlations between Learning and Discovery experiences and the other categories of experience were all positive and significant, the strongest being between Learning and Discovery and Passive Enjoyment. This is consistent with the results of visitors’ responses to direct questions (Method 1 above) and again suggests that these two concepts - education and entertainment - are closely linked in visitors’ understanding.

Table 4. Correlations among visitor experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Learning &amp; Discovery</th>
<th>Passive Enjoyment</th>
<th>Restoration</th>
<th>Social Contact</th>
<th>Personal Self-fulfilment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Discovery</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Enjoyment</td>
<td>0.62**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>0.59**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Contact</td>
<td>0.35**</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Self-fulfilment</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = significant at the 0.05 level; ** = significant at the 0.01 level

Relationships between visitors’ goals and visitors’ experiences: Further evidence of the compatibility of education and entertainment lies in the positive correlations found between visitors’ goals and visitors’ experiences. If there was a conflict between the educational and entertainment aspects, for example, it would lie expected that those who valued Passive Enjoyment goals would report less of a Learning and Discovery experience. As Table 5 shows, no such negative correlations were found, Learning and Discovery experience was significantly positively correlated with all goal categories and Learning and Discovery goals were significantly and positively correlated with all experience categories.
Table 5. Correlations between visitors’ goals and experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Learning &amp; Discovery</th>
<th>Passive Enjoyment</th>
<th>Restoration</th>
<th>Social Contact</th>
<th>Personal Self-fulfilment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Discovery</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Enjoyment</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Contact</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.60**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Self-fulfilment</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationships between perceptions of the learning environment and visitors’ experiences: Contrary to the predictions of Salomon’s (1981; 1983) theory regarding the effect of perceptions of the learning environment on the amount of invested mental effort, the present study found that perceptions of the learning environment characterised by the belief that ‘Learning is Enjoyable’ correlated positively with investment of mental effort ($r = .41$, $p < .001$) while the belief that ‘Learning is Effortful’ did not correlate with investment of mental effort ($r = .04$, $p = .39$). Similarly, the belief that ‘Learning is Enjoyable’ correlated positively with visitors’ reported Learning and Discovery experience ($r = .50$, $p < .001$) while the belief that ‘Learning is Effortful’ correlated negatively with the Learning and Discovery experience ($r = -.16$, $p < .01$). Thus in educational leisure settings, it would appear that visitors are more likely to experience learning and paradoxically, to invest effort in learning, when learning is perceived to be fun and relaxing, than when it is perceived to be difficult and effortful.

Results from Method 3: Visitors’ qualitative reflections on the relationship between education and entertainment during their visit

Visitors were asked whether they considered that their experience had been mostly educational or mostly entertaining. Most visitors considered that it had been either ‘mostly entertaining’ or ‘equally entertaining and educational’. When asked how they saw education and entertainment fitting together, visitors’ responses reflected three main perspectives, as follows.

1. The entertainment element contributes to the education (you learn more when it’s fun). Those who focussed on how the entertainment element contributes to education tended to see education as potentially ‘boring’ or ‘tedious’. According to this view, the entertainment aspect was necessary to make learning palatable. Overall, this was the most prevalent view of the relationship between education and entertainment.

2. The education element contributes to the entertainment (you enjoy it more when you learn). Those who focussed on how the education element contributes to entertainment tended to see education as potentially enjoyable. According to this view, the education aspect helped to make the experience worthwhile.

3. Education and entertainment are complementary (the experience incorporates both). According to this view, the education and entertainment elements are equally valuable, compatible, or even inseparable.

Excerpts from visitors’ interview responses which illustrate these three perspectives are presented in Table 6.

1. Discovery and fascination:

   I think the exhibits are organised in such a fashion that you’ve got some stimulant there as well as an actual exhibit which teaches you something but also mildly entertains. Just the presentation of some of the things and also some of the surprising events like the tiger lying on the rock that moves. I think that all adds to the entertainment part of it, and could also lead you into an educational part.

2. Appeal to multiple senses:

   Yeah they complement each other. I think we can often learn a lot more by doing - I certainly do - as opposed to sitting in the classroom and somebody saying this is a picture of a red cedar, or looking at a computer screen, now that just leaves me dead, whereas being out and having so many other senses involved, is much better.
3. Appearance of effortlessness

Definitely [education and entertainment do fit together], otherwise it would be too much like schoolwork. It all ties in.

4. Availability of choice

When you are walking around, you don’t have to look at things when they don’t interest you. You can go to another thing and when it interests you, you stand there and you read about it. You can choose.

I think as long as people have that option... You don’t have to sit there and have someone talk to you all the time, but you can actually walk along, read and decide for yourself.

Conclusions

The theoretical analysis presented in the introduction to this paper suggests both possible conflicts and possible complementarities between education and entertainment in the context of educational leisure settings. The weight of evidence in the present study supports the conclusion that these aspects are complementary. In general, across a range of measures, the educational and entertainment aspects of a visit to an educational leisure setting were found to be not only compatible, but synergistic, that is, their combined action or cooperation produces greater effectiveness than the sum of their individual effects.

Table 6. Interview responses on the relationship between education and entertainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entertainment contributes to education (You learn more when it’s fun)</th>
<th>Education contributes to entertainment (You enjoy it more when you learn)</th>
<th>Education &amp; entertainment are complementary (Experience incorporates both)</th>
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<td>If you make it fun, people tend to learn a lot more about certain subjects... the more entertaining or the more dramatic it is, the more it sticks in your mind, so I think it’s good to have that entertainment value to educate people.</td>
<td>It makes it much more enjoyable when you’re learning something. When you’re going away thinking ‘Oh well gee I didn’t know that before’.</td>
<td>The stick insects entertained me but they also educated me... and the puzzle was fun but it was also educational to use your brain power.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you are learning, it can be very tedious, very boring, but if you are interacting with things, you find that the more entertainment there is the easier it is to actually pick up from it.</td>
<td>I think what he was telling us complemented the entertainment... just making us more aware of the wildlife, you know, what to expect, it improved it, it gave a fuller enjoyment to the day.</td>
<td>Part of the entertainment was finding out about them as well... you can have a bit of both, you know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If it’s basically like on a news type program or in papers, where they’re trying to shove it down your throat, well you just ignore it. But if they make it in an entertaining way, you’re going to learn more and respect it more, if they make it more fun.</td>
<td>I came here with the expectation to be just enjoying myself, and you do, you learn things and I suppose if you do learn things you do enjoy it.</td>
<td>But it’s very good the way everything is explained. Ifs really well done because you can see the actual fish swimming and you can read about him, or whatever it might be. So [you get] the educational side of it as well as the fun side of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education can be pretty boring, so if you make it enjoyable, it’s better. And it’s different, because it’s not the sort of thing you see all the time.</td>
<td>If you came just expecting to see entertainment and not learn anything, well you’re missing too much of what the place is.</td>
<td>You’re enjoying yourself to look at something, plus you’re learning facts as you look at it.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Pine and Gilmore (1999) argue that it is not just the presentation of information that is important to visitors, but the experience that surrounds this presentation. Similarly, providing experiences is not just about entertaining visitors, it is about engaging them in a personal, memorable way. Thus the experience transcends both the educational and the entertainment aspects of it. Falk and Dierking (2000: 75) recognise the relevance of the experience construct in the context of museums and suggest that it may provide an excellent way to get out of the learning-versus-entertainment bind.’

The findings of the present study imply that what happens in educational leisure settings, and indeed what people seek, is not a combination of two distinct experiences - education and
entertainment - but rather an experience in which education is entertainment, discovery is exciting, and learning is an adventure. Visitors perceive these as elements of the same construct, distinct from both effortful learning and passive enjoyment.

Falk et al. (1998) interpreted their findings regarding the unexpected complementarity of education and entertainment in terms of the museum context in which their study was undertaken, but the results of this study, together with the analysis of differences between sites presented in Packer and Ballantyne (2002), indicate that the synergy of education and entertainment extends beyond the museum to a range of other interpretive sites. This synergy defines the unique nature of the educational leisure or learning for fun experience.

Results of the qualitative analysis in this study highlight four important characteristics of learning in educational leisure settings that contribute to the synergy of education and entertainment: it involves a sense of discovery or fascination; it is multi-sensory; it is perceived to be effortless; and it allows choice. These characteristics are consistent with Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) proposition that customer surprise and engaging of the five senses are important ingredients in staging a memorable experience. These characteristics encapsulate what learning in educational leisure settings is perceived to be, why it is enjoyable or attractive, and how it combines the educational and entertainment elements of the experience without conflict.

The findings of this study suggest that educational leisure settings, and interpretation practitioners, are in a unique position to offer the visiting public a ‘learning for fun’ experience that combines education and entertainment in an attractive package. Further research is needed to investigate the extent to which the principles suggested by Pine and Gilmore for staging an experience can be applied to extend our understanding of the practice of interpretation. Further research is also needed to develop a greater understanding of both the process and outcomes of learning for fun.

Notes
1. t-tests for differences in importance: Restoration: $t_{472} = 7.93, p < .001$; Social Contact: $t_{474} = 19.79, p < .001$; and Personal Self-fulfilment: $t_{463} = 27.07, p < .001$.

References


