

ACTIVITY CORE

ACTIVITY CORE PROVIDES A PLACE FOR DISPLAYING COLLECTIONS IN A CONTEXTUAL ENVIRONMENT OF RELATED ACTIVITIES, AND, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, FOR CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE ROLE-PLAYING.

THE ISSUES:

Non-engaging displays have a limited impact on viewers. They relay primarily on a visual interpretation. On the other hand, the multi-sensory, interactive displays and the event-based exhibits stimulate learning, increase understanding, and reduce museum fatigue and object satiation.

As the contemporary museum practices change, more emphasis is being placed on participatory and interactive displays. Several basic types of exhibits can be identified:

1. The Glass Case: Non-interactive Exhibit

An object in a glass box, inaccessible painting, object on a pedestal, and no motivation provided for exploration. There are themes and where an authentic item simply can not be handled because it is too complex and fragile, e.g. elaborate doll house. A touchable reproduction would be a poor substitute for the evocative, delicate and rich originals. The object in a glass case is appropriate when it is a highly valued, unique item of refined grace, which is of great significance to society. These kinds of objects are often better appreciated when viewed from some distance, being in a glass box on a pedestal, literally and figuratively speaking.

2. The Single Input/Single Output Interactive Display

The simplest and easiest interactive exhibits to design, operate and maintain are the single input/single output exhibits, e.g. the user steps on a scale/the scale shows how much the user weighs.

These exhibits tend to be less engaging and more superficial since there is only one question to be asked and only one answer to be answered.

3. The Multiple Input/Multiple Output Interactive Display

As exhibits grow in complexity and the number of variables increase, so does their applicability: the number of options or alternative ways of negotiating the exhibit increases, too. The opportunities for pacing, e.g. providing a variety of entry points based on the user's age, previous experience and interest, allow for open-ended experimentation.

A very important issue in display design is the "pacing" of the interpretation -- how to allow different people, of different ages, backgrounds and experiences to deal with the display from different "entry points."

Another issue is how to convey the meaning of the display in its fullest, as related to its physical and cultural context; and how to increase the authenticity of the situation.

Activity Core provides the qualities which respond to these issues: it is a setting for multiple input/multiple output displays and events; it provides opportunities for pacing, and it has the potential to convey a rich and full experience.

QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS:

The following description of an example for activity core illustrates vividly many of the qualities and characteristics of an activity core. The description is of the "Japanese House" at the Boston Children's Museum, written by Gurian and Kamian:

"our Japanese Home is a two-story city dwelling which was inhabited for many years in Kyoto until its installation at the Children's Museum three years ago. Like every traditional Japanese home, the tatami mats which cover the floor and the paper shoji walls are replaceable . . . visitors remove their shoes and enter the home to gently explore this new environment and the interesting materials of which it is made. Activities such as paper folding, learning to use chopsticks, and trying out Japanese bedding can also take place here. The religious items, the Butsudan and the Kamidana, however, are irreplaceable as they are specific to this house. The Kamidana is above reaching height. The Butsudan, which is installed at floor

level, has a clear screen in front of it so that the visitor can see it in its authentic location but not touch it.

The environment surrounds and keeps the interest of the audience, and begins to bring some of the subtle cultural constraints into focus. For example, sitting on the floor on traditional cushions (zaboton) allows the visitor to understand that different muscles are used than in our Western chairs and that skill is involved in sitting. The audience begins to speculate what family relationships must be like if one shares the same room with one's family. How much noise is allowed? A level of cooperation or a hierarchy of roles can be speculated about who makes the decisions about going to sleep?

The subtleties of cultural understanding are the most difficult to transmit because each person looks at another from his own cultural point of view. The intermingling of environment, hands-on and hands-off, add to the ways we can understand another culture. When one adds role-playing to this mix, especially when the interpreter is well-trained in both theatre techniques and cultural information, one has gone a step further." (Gurian & Kamian, n.d.)

The qualities and characteristics can be summarized as follows:

- * Accessible, visible to users from main routes
- * Has visual and auditory buffer, to protect neighboring displays and activities.
- * A buffer to keep external distractions out.
- * Allows seating or standing room for a small group, for passive involvement (lecturing, demonstration) or active events (participatory experiments, etc.).
- * Objects and displays which allow seeing, smelling, touching, holding, using, manipulating, and experiencing.
- * An environment which integrates the objects and display components into a unified cultural and physical context.

APPROACHES FOR DESIGN:

Approaches for design deal primarily with the size and location of the activity core, and its connections:

1. LARGE SPACE OR SMALL ROOMS:

One model for an activity core is a complete, full-scale room or house within the museum's envelope. It is also possible to have the activity area displayed through a sequence of small rooms.

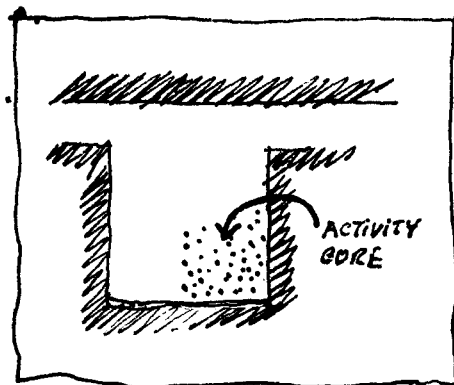
2. CONNECTION TO THE PATH:

If the activity in the core might disturb the natural flow of visitors nearby, an appropriate connection is needed between the path and the activity core.

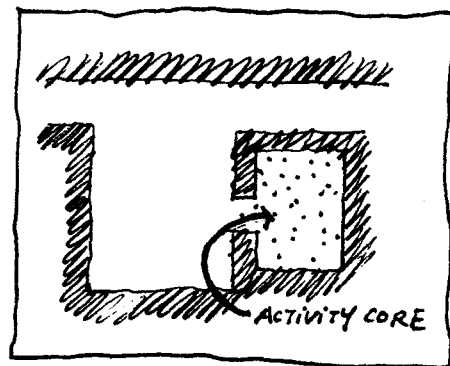
3. THE RIGHT LOCATION:

There are many possibilities. Some typical opportunities are:

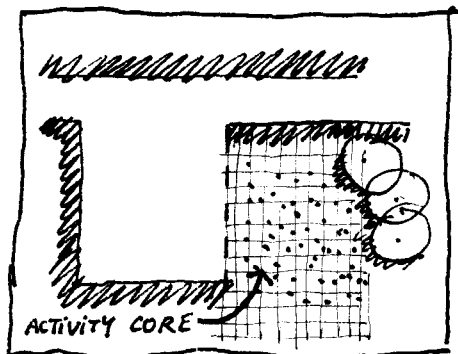
(a) A corner in a gallery



(b) A room adjoining a pavilion



(c) An outdoor room adjoining a pavilion



EXAMPLES:



City Slice,
Boston Children's Museum

A three story Victorian house is cut on one side to allow for a better understanding of its structure and the way buildings work. The authentic furnishings provide opportunities for touching or even role playing, e.g. trying on period clothes found in a foot locker at the attic.

The Japanese House
Boston Children's Museum

An authentic Japanese dwelling comes complete with furnishings. Visitors participate in the house daily "events" of the house, can touch and use its furnishings, and can even "role-play" with the help of a museum guide.



Potter's Workshop
Museum Haaretz

Tel Aviv

A bazaar dedicated to different trades is housed in an early Middle-Eastern shopping mall, complete with vaulted stores, furnishings and "store Owners" performing their skills. Visitors are allowed to touch and try tools and materials.



RELATED PRINCIPLES:

- * FOCAL POINT
- * OUTDOOR EXTENSION