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# **INFORMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS RESEARCH NEWSLETTER**

**A SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP OF THE  
AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION**

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February 1998

## **A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT**

### **Doris Ash**

As chair of the Informal Learning Environments Research (ILER) Special Interest Group (SIG) I want to welcome you as charter members to this new venture. We encourage your feedback via email, snail mail, listserv, or telephone. SIG officers are listed on the next page. Feel free to contact us.

Just what does informal learning environment research have to offer to an organization such as AERA? It has been claimed that "real" learning occurs most easily in the informal environment. Over the centuries, the human condition has been characterized by an intellectual history of inquiry-by-posing questions, and by finding answers to these burning questions. It appears that learning via inquiry occurs most naturally in informal settings such as museums, zoos, nature centers, and the outdoors. How can these contexts inform formal schools and how can classroom contexts influence museums?

One of the things we hope to explore in the ILER SIG are the linkages (present and future) between formal and informal learning settings and the research that characterizes both. After attending a two-day symposium at the Exploratorium on the possible usefulness of documents such as the National Standards in museum settings, it seems apparent that many museums are establishing long-term relationships with teachers and schools (such as museum schools).

We would like to continue the discussion of the reciprocity of the formal with informal — what each has to offer the other, what points of synergy are possible as a focus for our dialogue. We have included a draft chart of some of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the formal and informal learning settings. This is meant to be a bit provocative — with an eye towards a synergy that maximizes the best of both worlds. What would synergy look like so that each environment kept true to itself yet provided scaffolding and structure to the other? This comparison is meant to be modified. We appreciate your friendly criticism and feedback. See *ILER Forum*, page 2.

## **ANOTHER NEWSLETTER IN MY MAILBOX?**

This inaugural issue of the ILER Newsletter has been designed with the diversity of our membership in mind. We represent universities, community organizations, museums (including zoos, aquaria, botanical gardens, etc.), and numerous disciplines. In order to reflect this diversity we have created a variety of sections in this newsletter to provide basic information about the organizations, resources, and activities of our members. We have also created the ILER Forum section to encourage debate and discussion at the cutting edge of informal learning environments research.

This newsletter depends on your input. We need to be kept abreast of the activities of your organizations. Information about calls for papers and proposals are greatly appreciated. We are also soliciting brief reviews of recent publications and Websites. In addition, you are encouraged to submit commentaries to the ILER Forum.

To contribute to the newsletter or for more information, contact the newsletter editor, Kirsten Ellenbogen. (See contact information for all of the SIG officers on the next page.)

Many thanks, and we look forward to seeing you in San Diego at the AERA Annual Meeting.

### **WEBSITE**

<http://darwin.sesp.nwu.edu/informal/>

### **LISTSERV**

ILER\_SIG is a forum for discussing topics of relevance to our members. To subscribe, send e-mail to [majordomo@www.slsc.org](mailto:majordomo@www.slsc.org) with the following contents: "subscribe ILER\_SIG [your e-mail address here]"

**ILER STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

To further educational research in informal learning environments such as science centers, museums, zoos, aquariums, and nature centers, and to promote a community of practice interested in establishing and maintaining informal learning environments conducive to better understanding of teaching and learning.

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**ILER FORUM****HOW DO WE DEFINE OURSELVES?**

In this inaugural ILER Newsletter the SIG president has introduced the issue of defining informal learning. Definitions of informal learning usually depend on contrasts with definitions of formal learning. Critics point out that such definitions are based on a traditional view of formal learning and do not reflect movements away from didactic instruction in schools. In fact, there are informal learning environments that are very didactic, and formal learning environments that are very open and learner-directed. Perhaps our definitions of informal learning are hampered by our efforts to contrast it with formal learning.

How, then, should we define informal learning? Below we have provided selections from publications that define informal learning. These selections are brief and do not reflect the richness of the complete publications. Full references are provided, and we encourage you to read these publications if you are not already familiar with them. In addition Doris Ash and Kit Klein have provided a draft chart to spark discussion in future newsletters — we welcome your comments. In the next newsletter we will also include a commentary from Lynn Dierking and John Falk of the Institute for Learning Innovation on the term “free choice learning.” - *Ed.*

**DEFINITIONS OF INFORMAL LEARNING**

Why is it so difficult to define learning in a museum? “The absence of a consensus about learning in museums stems from a paradox of significant proportions, a tension of values that is inherent in the very mission of museum. Stated quite simply, the concerns of preservation and the demands of public access are a contradiction lived out in every institution.” AAM. (1984). *Museums for a new century*. Author: Washington DC. (p. 58).

Greenfield and Lave contrast some idealized characteristics of informal and formal learning: embedded in daily life activities versus set apart from the context of everyday life; learner is responsible for obtaining knowledge and skill versus teacher is responsible for imparting knowledge and skill; motivated by social contribution of novices and their participation in the adult sphere versus less strong social motivation. Greenfield, G., & Lave, J. (1982). Cognitive aspects of informal education. In D. Wagner & H.W. Stevenson (Eds.), *Cultural perspectives on child development* (pp. 181-207). San Francisco: Freeman.

See *Defining Ourselves*, page 3.

### Defining Ourselves cont...

Resnick outlines four characteristics of mental activity outside of school that contrast with typical school activities: shared cognition versus individual cognition; tool manipulation versus pure mentation; contextualized reasoning versus symbol manipulation; situation specific competencies versus generalized learning. Resnick, L.B. (1987). Learning in school and out. *Educational Researcher*, 16(9), 13-20.

Moll and Greenberg base their research on the idea that "every household, is, in a very real sense, an educational setting in which the major function is to transmit knowledge that enhances the survival of its dependents." Moll, L.C., & Greenberg, J.B. (1990). Creating zones of possibilities: Combining social contexts for instruction. In L.C. Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and education* (pp. 319-348). New York: Cambridge University Press.

"In the 1970s, when museum professionals sought to identify museums as unique learning environments, the formal/informal distinction seemed to make sense. The distinction has become largely counterproductive; one wonders what 'formal' and 'informal' refer to and whether the learning processes in these settings are somehow different, or whether the outcomes expected are different. Learning is learning." Falk, J.H., & Dierking, L.D. (1992). *The museum experience*. Washington, DC: Whalesback. (p. 99)

Crane defines informal learning as "activities that occur outside the school setting, are not developed to be part of an ongoing school curriculum, and are characterized by voluntary as opposed to mandatory participation as part of a credited school experience." Crane, V. (1994). An introduction to informal science learning research. In V. Crane, (Ed.), *Informal science learning: What the research says about television, science museums, and community-based projects*. Deham, MA: Research Communications Ltd. (p. 99)

"[Youth museums] are contrasted with schools by reliance on objects and exhibits instead of teacher communications and verbal symbols, a free and permissive environment instead of rigid 'lock-step' scheduling and a formal curriculum, open-ended visitor exploration instead of fixed time allocations to subjects of interest, and the absence of student accountability for learning instead of testing and grading." Bunch, J. (1997). Educational philosophy and program planning; Applying learning theory & research in youth museums. In M. Maher (Ed.), *Collective vision: Starting and sustaining a children's museum*. Washington, DC: Association of Youth Museums. (p. 80)

### Compared Characteristics of Learning Experiences

<u>Informal</u>	<u>Formal</u>
<i>Affect/choice</i>	
fun, enjoyable, playful voluntary personal experience	repetitive mandatory group experience
<i>Medium</i>	
visually oriented real objects authentic tasks	text oriented models and manipulatives tasks for teacher
<i>Social Context</i>	
social groups, individuals learning together cooperative activities learner directed multi-generational experiences	whole group instruction individual student work teacher directed one age group
<i>Interaction</i>	
highly interactive, learn by doing multi-dimensional interactions process oriented	didactic variable levels topic oriented
<i>Motivation</i>	
self directed intrinsic motivation "flow" experience	other directed extrinsic motivation boredom and anxiety
<i>Time</i>	
short term self-paced open-ended life-long	long term teacher sets pace limited isolated lesson or longer unit
<i>Assessment</i>	
self assessment, based on feedback	formal assessment
<i>Structure</i>	
non-structured non-linear bottom-up	highly structured linear, sequential top-down
<i>Philosophy</i>	
practice to theory	theory to practice

Ash, D. & Klein, C. (1998). *Inquiry in informal learning environments*. Manuscript in preparation.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **Call for Proposals and Workshops**

#### **1998 Visitor Studies Conference**

August 4-8, 1998, Washington, DC  
 Deadline for proposals: Friday, February 27, 1998.  
 Acceptance decisions mailed by in April.

Proposals for individual papers, posters, panel sessions, and workshops are being solicited for the 1998 Visitor Studies Conference, sponsored by the Visitor Studies Association.

For proposal information contact: Sue Allen, VSA.  
 '98 Program Chair, 830 Wilmington Rd, San Mateo,  
 CA 94402. Phone: (415) 353-0471.  
 Fax: (650) 655-7034. Email: sueallen@research.com

For workshop information contact: Minda Borun,  
 The Franklin Institute, 222 N. 20th Street,  
 Philadelphia, PA 19103. Fax: (215) 448-1103.  
 Email: mborun@erols.com

For general information about the conference: Brenda  
 Ward, VSA. Dept. of Psychology, Colorado State  
 University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1876.  
 Phone: (970) 491-4352. Email: Loomisr@juno

### **Call for Proposals for MCN '98 Annual Conference of the Museum Computer Network**

“Knowledge Creation — Knowledge Sharing —  
 Knowledge Preservation”  
 September 23 - 26, 1998, Santa Monica, CA  
 Proposals Due March 16, 1998

MCN '98 session topics may address infrastructure, software tools, hardware innovations, successful approaches to problems, or any of a variety of technical solutions to knowledge creation, sharing, and preservation issues. Proposals may address ideas and issues in any area of museum computing.

Contact: MCN '98 Program Proposals. Leslie  
 Johnston, Stanford University Museum of Art  
 Stanford, CA 94305. Phone: (650) 725-5383.  
 Fax: (650) 725-0464.  
 Email: lesliej@leland.stanford.edu  
<http://www.mcn.edu/>

### **Call for Poster Session Proposals**

#### **Museum Education Roundtable 8th Annual Research Colloquium**

“Education and Collaboration”  
 August 4-8, 1998, Washington, DC  
 Deadline for proposals: March 31, 1998

MER's annual forum for new ideas and original research in all areas relevant to museum education is an opportunity to introduce individual research projects or reflections. Research Colloquium proposals could address, but are not limited, to the following:

Historical Research: Researching the origin if ideas or practices pertaining to museum education.

Theoretical Research: Researching the scope of an idea or concept.

Applied Research: Testing hypotheses through museum education practice.

Contact: Museum Education Roundtable  
 621 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE  
 Washington, DC 20003. Phone: (202) 547-8378  
 Fax: (202) 547-8344. Email: merorg@erols.com  
<http://www.erols.com/merorg/>

### **Association of Youth Museums: Interactivity 1998**

“Innovation by Design”  
 May 7-9, 1998, Los Angeles, CA  
 The Children's Museum, San Jose, CA

Contact: AYM, 1775 K Street, NW Suite 595,  
 Washington, DC 20006. Phone: (202) 466-4144.  
 Email: aymdc@aol.com.

### **1998 American Association of Museums Annual Meeting**

“Exploring Differences, Finding Connections”  
 May 10-14, 1998, Los Angeles, CA

Contact: AAM, 1575 Eye Street, NW, Suite 400,  
 Washington, DC 20005. Phone: (202) 289-9113.  
<http://www.aam-us.org/>

**AERA 1998 ANNUAL MEETING April 13 - 17, 1998, San Diego, CA**  
**"Diversity and Citizenship in Multicultural Societies"**

For those of you planning to attend the AERA Annual Meeting,  
 here is a list of our SIG's sessions. We hope to see you there!

**Structured Poster Session** Tuesday,  
 April 14, 1998, 4:05 - 5:35 p.m., #17.31  
 Chair: Kit Klein, St. Louis Science Center

Poster 1: Formalizing the informal: Jigsawing in the  
 non-school setting.  
 Joel Wiess, Jason Nolan, OISE

Poster 2: The quality of student experience in a  
 technology-rich informal learning environment:  
 effective student learning with Lego/Logo.  
 Dean Grosshandler and Bertram C. Bruce,  
 University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Poster 3: So what did you see at the gallery? A  
 longitudinal exploration of memory and experience.  
 Maria Medved, OISE

Poster 4: A flexible approach to the formative  
 evaluation of interactive exhibits.  
 Terence P. McClafferty and Leonie J. Rennie, Curtin  
 University of Technology

Poster 5: All money ain't good money: Strategy  
 development in the game of dominoes among  
 African-American children.  
 Na'ilah Nasir, UC Los Angeles

Discussants: Leonie J. Rennie, Curtin University of  
 Technology, and Doris Ash, Exploratorium

**Membership Meeting with Invited**

**Speakers** Thursday, April 16, 1998,  
 6:15 - 7:45 p.m., #43.05

Young children's learning from interactive science  
 exhibits.  
 Leonie J. Rennie, Terence P. McClafferty and Wendy  
 Speering, Curtin University of Technology, Perth,  
 Australia

**Plan on attending the membership meeting  
 to vote or run for office!**

**Roundtables** Friday, April 17, 1998,  
 8:45 - 9:25 p.m., #46.27

Table 1: Factors affecting the efficacy of museum  
 exhibit labels.  
 Jane Marie Litwak, Albright College

Table 2: They are more rugged from a walking  
 perspective!  
 Philip Bailey, Michigan State University

**Other AERA sessions that may be of interest  
 to ILER SIG members**

**Roundtable** Tuesday, April 14, 1998,  
 2:15 - 2:55 p.m., #15.40

Children as art museum tour guides: Implications for  
 teacher education.  
 Carol S. Jeffers, California State University, LA  
 Sponsored by the Arts & Learning SIG

**Roundtable** Monday, April 13, 1998,  
 12:15 - 2:55 p.m., #3.38

A framework for investigating how children spend  
 their time outside of school.  
 Linda T. Jones, Jack Blendinger,  
 Mississippi State University; Lauren Wells,  
 Lauderdale Public Schools  
 Sponsored by the Action Research SIG

**We Need Your Notes**

**Interested in writing a brief summary of AERA  
 Annual Meeting sessions you attended? We'd like  
 to share the Meeting proceedings with fellow SIG  
 members that did not attend. Also, please keep us  
 in mind when you attend other conferences that  
 may be of interest to SIG members. Contact  
 Kirsten Ellenbogen for more information (see  
 page 2).**

**ADVANCE REGISTRATION IS DUE FEBRUARY 17, 1998  
 FOR MORE INFORMATION**

See the AERA Website <http://aera.net>  
 or call (202) 223 - 9485.

***Going to the 1998 AERA Annual Meeting?***  
***You may also be interested in the National Association for Research in Science Teaching Annual Meeting April 19 - April 22, 1998***  
***San Diego Princess Resort Hotel, San Diego, CA***

Below are selected sessions related to informal learning environments research.

**Informal Learning Session** (Strand 9)

Sunday, April 19, 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.

Using front end research & evaluation as a catalyst for change in informal science settings. Lynn D. Dierking, Institute for Learning Innovation

Understanding the role that informal science settings play in public understanding of science. John H. Falk, Institute for Learning Innovation

Formative evaluation of interactive exhibits: Research improving science centers.

Terence McClafferty, Leonie Rennie, Curtin University of Technology

From situational motivating to intrinsic motivation: New possibilities for informal science Learning. Hannu Salmi, Heureka Science Centre

**Informal Learning Session** (Strand 9)

Monday, April 20, 10:30 am - 12:00 p.m.

Development of knowledge about electricity and magnetism during a visit to a science museum and related post-visit activities.

David Anderson, Queensland University of Technology and Institute for Learning Innovation; Keith B. Lucas, Ian Ginns, Queensland University of Technology; Lynn Dierking, Institute for Learning Innovation

Increased learning of physical science concepts via multimedia exhibit compared to hands-on exhibit in a science museum.

Roberta Ayres, Claudia T. Melear, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

The effect of exhibit label copy on parent-child communication at the zoo. Joanne K. Olson, University of Southern California

Isolating exhibition characteristics that attract and hold visitor attention & comparison of two science exhibitions. Cody Sandifer, Elsa Feher, Center for Research in Math and Science Education

**Informal Learning Session** (Strand 9)

Monday, April 20, 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.

Studying sea camp: Using a collaborative approach and multiple research to better understand informal science education.

Candice Brown, University of California, Santa Barbara

Introducing high school students to authentic science through a museum research apprenticeship program. Anne Marshall Cox, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County; Susan K. Lafferty, Santa Barbara Natural History Museum

Investigating the importance of prior science experiences for majors and nonmajors.

Linda Ramey-Gassert, Wright State University

Informal science education: Avenue of opportunity for homeless children. Kimberley Yang, Teachers College, Columbia University

**Informal Learning Session** (Strand 9)

Tuesday, April 21, 2:30 - 4:00 p.m.

Public understanding of science: Is the deficit model appropriate? Luke Fletcher, Susan M. Stocklmayer, The Australian National University

Biotechnology education in practice: Bringing community issues into the classroom.

Bev France, Auckland College of Education

Mental modeling in science and technology centres. John K. Gilbert, The University of Reading; Susan M. Stocklmayer, The Australian National University

Rug Rat Ratings: How young children interact with science exhibits. Wendy Speering, Leonie J. Rennie, Terence P. McClafferty, Curtin University of Technology

***ADVANCE REGISTRATION IS DUE APRIL 1, 1998***

***FOR MORE INFORMATION***

See the NARST Website <http://science.coe.uwf.edu/NARST/NARST.html>

or call (614) 292 - 3339.

## **RESOURCES TO CONSIDER**

This will be a continuing feature of this newsletter. Feel free to contribute reviews of your favorite publications, Websites, or other research resources.

We will also use this as a forum to alert our members to upcoming publications.

### **Center for Museum Studies**

#### **Museum Studies Database**

<http://www.si.edu/organiza/offices/musstud/data.htm>

The Center for Museum Studies (CMS) Museum Studies Database is an ongoing bibliographic research tool offering electronic access to information about theses, dissertations, articles, and audiotapes concerning the theory and operations of museums. Information focuses on a range of topics including the role and function of museums, their history and philosophy, and their nature and structure. Listings can be searched by author, title, related subject areas, geographical location, institution name, and key words.

Currently indexed in the Museum Studies Database are:

- 17 years of articles published in the *Journal of Museum Education* (JME) and its predecessor *Roundtable Reports*
- 21 years of articles from the American Law Institute-American Bar Association (ALI-ABA) course of study: *Legal Problems of Museum Administration*
- over 1,000 citations to masters' theses and doctoral dissertations written on museological issues at universities throughout the world
- citations to audiotapes of the 1993, 1994, and 1995 sessions of the American Association of Museums annual meetings.

### **Museum Learning Collaborative**

#### **Annotated Bibliography**

<http://mlc.lrdc.pitt.edu/mlc/>

The Museum Learning Collaborative (MLC), funded by a consortium of public agencies, exists to further theoretically driven research on learning in museums. This nationwide project includes a core of researchers and museums working together to assemble a literature base, conduct research, and build an extended network of additional researchers.

One function of the MLC is to create a comprehensive, annotated bibliography and a subsequent integrated literature review. The annotated literature will be continuously updated, and available electronically. As of February, 1998 the annotated literature database contains approximately 1500 citations, of which 175 have been reviewed and annotated. The MLC is actively working on compiling additional citations for inclusion in the database as well as expanding the number of annotated citations. In addition, work is underway to launch search capabilities which will allow the user to search the database by keyword, framework category, title, author and museum type.

*See Resources, p. 8.*

### **NOT A MEMBER OF AERA? JOIN US**

American Education Research Association members receive the *Educational Researcher*, the *Review of Education Research* and other publications. Through publications, the annual meeting, and Special Interest Groups like our own ILER SIG, members share ideas and results of research.

Each SIG is given a number of sessions at the annual meeting based on the number of members of AERA that belong to the SIG. **To have more sessions related to informal learning environments, we need more members of AERA to join our SIG and more SIG members to join AERA.** If every SIG member had one colleague join AERA we could double our sessions at the next annual meeting. Membership is \$45, student memberships are available for \$20. For more information about AERA see <http://aera.net> or call (202) 223 - 9485.

**Resources cont...****Science Education****Informal Science Education Special Issue, 81(6), November 1997**

Richard A. Duschl, Editor, Lynn D. Dierking and Laura M. W. Martin, Co-Guest Editors.

Science learning occurs in a variety of settings outside school classrooms and continues long after a person completes his or her formal education. Some examples of research being conducted in this growing area of science education are featured in this special issue of *Science Education*.

Alsop, S., Watts, M. (Roehampton Institute, England). Sources from a Somerset village: A model for informal learning about radiation and radioactivity.

Korpan, C.A., Bisanz, G.L., Bisanz, J., Boehme, C. (University of Alberta, Canada) & Lynch, M.A. (Edmonton Catholic Schools, Canada). What did you learn outside of school today? Using structured interviews to document home and community activities related to science and technology.

Jones, L.S. (University of Northern Iowa, USA). Opening doors with informal science: Exposure and access for our underserved students.

Falk, J.H. (Institute for Learning Innovation, USA). Testing a museum exhibition design assumption: The effect of explicit labeling of exhibit clusters on visitor concept development

Sandifer, C. (San Diego State University, USA). Time-based behaviors at an interactive science museum: Exploring the differences between weekday/weekend and family/nonfamily visitors.

Fisher, M. (Omaha, NE, USA). The effect of humor on learning in a planetarium.

Allen, S. (The Exploratorium, USA). Using scientific inquiry activities in exhibit explanations.

Stevens, R., & Hall, R. (University of California, Berkeley, USA). Seeing the 'Tornado': How 'Video Traces' mediate visitor understandings of (natural?) spectacles in a science museum.

Gilbert, J.K., & Priest, M. (University of Reading, England). Models & discourse: A primary school science class visit to a museum.

Griffin, J. (University of Technology, Australia) & Symington, D. (Deakin University, Australia). Moving from task-oriented to learning-oriented strategies on school excursions to museums.

Schauble, L. (University of Madison-Wisconsin, USA) & Bartlett, K. (The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, USA). Constructing a science gallery for children and families: The role of research in an innovative design process.

To subscribe to *Science Education* call (212) 850-6645 or email [subinfo@wiley.com](mailto:subinfo@wiley.com). To purchase individual copies of the special issue contact the Association of Science-Technology Centers. Phone: (202) 783-7200 ext. 140. Email: [pubs@astc.org](mailto:pubs@astc.org) <http://www.astc.org>

**Journal of Museum Education****Learning Theory Special Issue**

Gretchen Jennings, Editor, Scott Paris, Guest Editor

This two part special issue sets out to capture the excitement of contemporary discussions in museum education about defining, assessing, and promoting visitors learning in museums and related environments. This two-part series will include a variety of papers that examine learning from different perspectives in order to connect research on teaching and learning in museums with theories and research from other areas in psychology and education.

**PART I: February/March 1998**

Schauble, L. (University of Wisconsin, USA), Leinhardt, G. (University of Pittsburgh, USA), & Martin, L. (Arizona Science Center, USA). A framework for organizing a cumulative research agenda in informal learning contexts.

Discussants: Allen, S. (Exploratorium, USA), Lewin-Benham, S. (founder and former director of the National Learning Center, USA).

Paris, S. (University of Michigan, USA). Motivational perspectives on informal learning.

Discussants: Rodriguez, S. (Smithsonian Office of Education, USA), Soren, B. (Arts/Museum Education Consultant, USA).

Kindler, A. (University of British Columbia). Aesthetic development and learning in art museums: A challenge to enjoy.

Discussants: Piscitelli, B. (Queensland University of Technology, Australia), Storr, A. (University of Virginia, USA).

**PART II: April/ May 1998**

Crowley, K. (University of Pittsburgh, USA), Callanan, M. (University of California, Santa Cruz, USA). Describing and supporting collaborative scientific thinking in parent-child interactions. Discussants: Osberg, S. (San Jose Children's Discovery Museum, USA), Heinenger, M. (Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, USA).

Jeffery-Clay, K. (University of Texas at El Paso, USA). Constructivism in museums: How museums create meaningful learning environments.

Discussants: Rice, D. (Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA), Osborne, J. (University of London, England).

For more information on *the Journal of Museum Education* contact:

Museum Education Roundtable

621 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE

Washington, DC 20003.

Phone: (202) 547 - 8378. Email: [merorg@erols.com](mailto:merorg@erols.com)

<http://www.erols.com/merorg/>

## **RELATED ORGANIZATIONS**

The ILER SIG is a diverse group. We belong to a variety of research and professional organizations that reflect the richness in the field of informal learning environments research. In an effort to give some meaning to the alphabet soup of acronyms that we will see in our shared research, each newsletter will describe selected organizations that may be of interest to our members. As a courtesy to the members of our SIG who are not AERA members, we will regularly highlight the activities and publications of AERA.

### **AERA**

American Educational Research Association is concerned with improving the educational process by encouraging scholarly inquiry related to education and by promoting the dissemination and practical application of research results. AERA is the most prominent international professional organization with the primary goal of advancing educational research and its practical application. Its more than 22,000 members are educators; administrators; directors of research, testing or evaluation in federal, state and local agencies; counselors; evaluators; graduate students; and behavioral scientists. The broad range of disciplines represented by the membership includes education, psychology, statistics, sociology, history, economics, philosophy, anthropology, and political science. Among AERA's numerous publications are *Education Researcher* and *Review of Educational Research*.

AERA  
1230 Seventeenth Street NW  
Washington D.C. 20036-3078  
Phone: (202) 223 - 9485  
Email: membership@aera.net  
<http://aera.net/>

### **MER**

The Museum Education Roundtable is an active communications network encouraging leadership, scholarship, and personal development among educators and museum professionals. MER is dedicated to providing its members the resources and expertise necessary in meeting today's challenges and those of the twenty-first century. Among its publications is the *Journal of Museum Education*.

MER  
621 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20003  
Phone: (202) 547 - 8378  
Email: merorg@erols.com  
<http://www.erols.com/merorg/>

### **NARST**

The National Association for the Advancement of Research in Science Teaching is an international organization of professionals with interests in science education research. The goal of NARST is to improve science teaching and help all learners achieve science literacy. NARST promotes this goal by: 1) encouraging and supporting the application of diverse research methods from multiple disciplines to the investigation of teaching and learning in science; 2) communicating the findings of science education research to researchers, practitioners, and policy makers; and, 3) coordinating with other educational and scientific societies to influence educational policies. NARST publishes the *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*.

Dr. Arthur L. White, NARST Executive Secretary,  
The Ohio State University  
1929 Kenny Road, Room 200E  
Columbus, OH 43210-1015  
Phone: (614) 292 - 3339  
Email: TS0002@ohstmvs.aacs.ohio-state.edu  
<http://science.coe.uwf.edu/NARST/NARST.html>

### **VSA**

The goal of the Visitor Studies Association is to encourage and facilitate information exchange and studies that enhance the experience of visitors in a wide variety of settings from museums and galleries to parks and zoos. Members have a diverse set of interests with the common objective of providing the optimal experience for the visitor. Fields of interest include: visitor orientation; visitor surveys and audience development; exhibit and program evaluation; evaluation of visitor services; and, development of methodology for visitor studies. Among its publications is the newsletter, *Visitor Studies Today*.

VSA  
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***Informal Learning Environments Research***  
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