



Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences

**Young People and Museums
2012 Conference, Copenhagen 16-17 April**

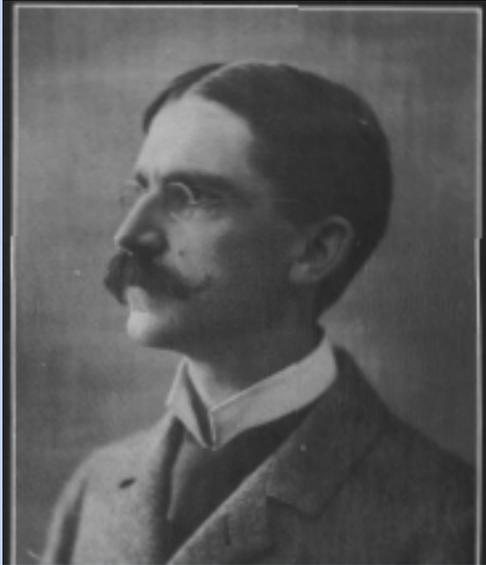
**The Social Responsibility of Museums
in a Democracy**
16 April 2012

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My argument in outline:

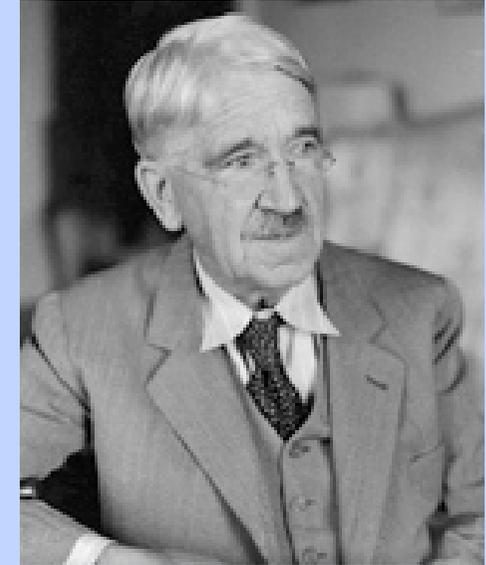
1. Museums are Educational Institutions.
2. *Education includes theories of learning, knowledge and pedagogy. An appropriate education theory for museums is constructivist, based on learning and knowledge theory.*
3. It also requires a moral/political goal; it should be “progressive” in democracies, based on political theory. We engage in educating for a purpose. Why do we educate?
4. “Progressive” education has a particular moral/political component: it aims to support democratic practice and social justice.
5. This relationship between pedagogy and educational goals was clearly described by John Dewey.
6. Examples of Museums as Democratic Educational Institutions:



in 1880's

John Dewey **1859 - 1952**

Professor,
U. of Michigan, 1884-1894;
U. Of Chicago, 1894-1904;
Columbia University, 1904-1939



~1950

- America's greatest philosopher
- Major works (and ideas) on every philosophical subject
- Comprehensive, systematic philosophy
- Connection of life and work (Pragmatism, Instrumentalism)

What does “moral/political goal” mean?

In a democratic society, that intends to include all members and strives for social progress, education must be structured and include processes and content that encourage constant individual growth within a context of supporting all members of the society, *not based only on a concept of individual freedom and development.*

“Progressivism” (US) as a political movement = Social-Democratic political movements in Europe (?)

Democracy is not only about individual freedom, but about living together in a society that tries to provide benefits to all its members and address issues of social justice. Education should contribute to this effort.

A view from Denmark:

Democratic participation in society is not only a subject taught in schools – it's competencies that Danish children and young people use in and out of school. This conference can give Denmark and other countries **good examples on how to perform active citizenship.**"

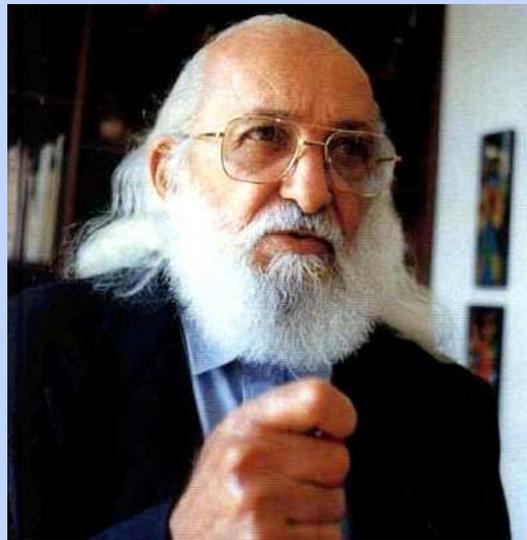
Christine Antorini, Danish Minister for Children and Education.

We are looking forward to the conference where focus is on how to foster young people's participation in society and in democratic processes – in Denmark and in the rest of Europe. **If we are going to secure a stable democracy it is vital to nurse it all the time.**

Signe Bo, chairman of The Danish Youth Council

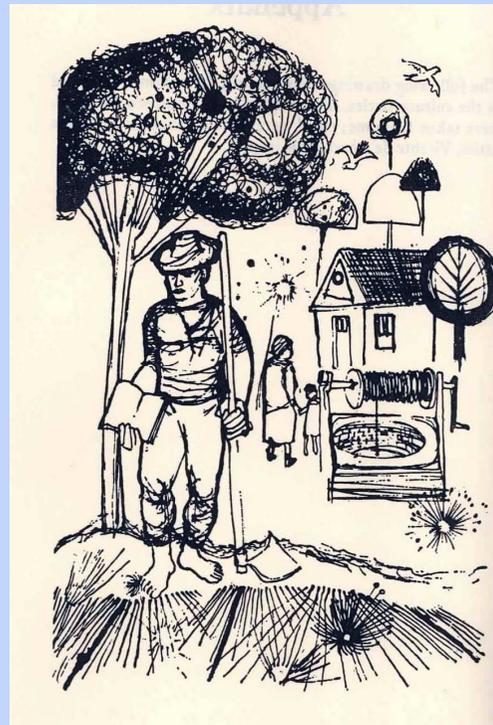
Ministry of Children and Education, press release from EU Conference in Denmark, 18-21 March 2012.

Example of Constructivist, Progressive Pedagogy for Democracy



Paulo Freire
(1921-1997)

Known for his literacy training using simple, familiar and powerful images, and discussion about them, **in the service of social action.**



Man in the world and with the world, nature and culture



Man transforms the material of nature by his work

(Why was Freire exiled?)

Illustrations from Freire, P. (1973) *Education for Critical Consciousness*.

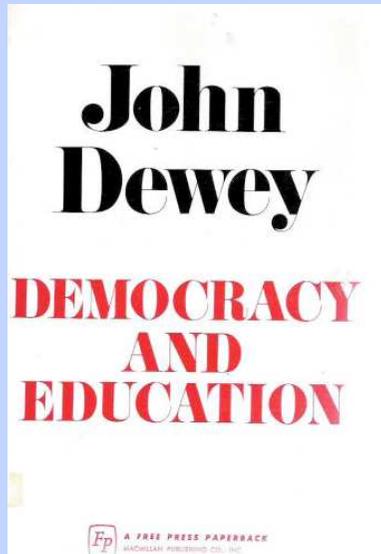
Dewey discussed major social-political issues of the 1880's-1940's that are relevant today—and how they should be addressed by education.

He believed a democratic education was the most important weapon in the constant struggle to support democracy

- Rampant capitalism, huge and increasing gaps between rich and poor.
- Attacks on immigration—anti-immigrant legislation, racism and effort to attribute all ills of society to “others.”
- Serious attacks on civil liberties (especially during and after World War I.)
- Major debates on the US role in the world.

For European interpretations—and misinterpretations—of Dewey, see *Studies in Philosophy and Education, Volume 19 [1]*, January, 2000.

Applying the democratic faith to education is the theme of *Democracy and Education* (1916)



All societies educate. Education is necessary to transmit culture from one generation to the next.

Experience is educative if it increases capacity to learn.

Formal and informal education should relate to social and political life, not be separate from other experiences.

“Static” education is sufficient for a static society;

“Progressive” education is needed for a progressive society, i.e. one that strives to improve, to become more democratic; to change the status quo in the direction of decreasing gaps between rich and poor, immigrants and native born, social classes, etc.

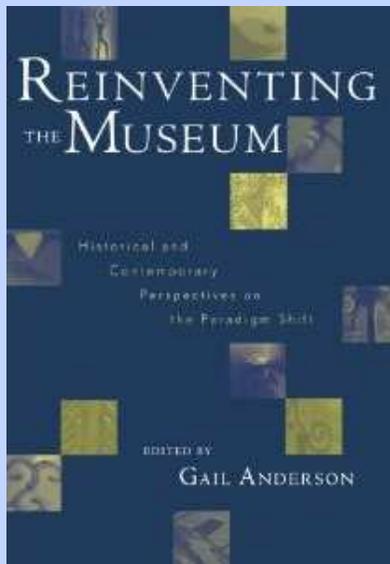
Citizens need to be taught how to think, how to inquire.

The term “progressive” modifies society, not only education.

**Public museums are primarily Educational Institutions—
and have been since their origin more than 200 years ago**

**In democratic societies, therefore, like schools and life-long
education opportunities, they need to promote democracy**

Popular view: “There has been a paradigm shift in museums . . .”
Is not correct.



Gail Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum:*
1st edition 2004: *Historical and Contemporary Perspectives
on the Paradigm Shift*

2nd edition 2012: *The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*

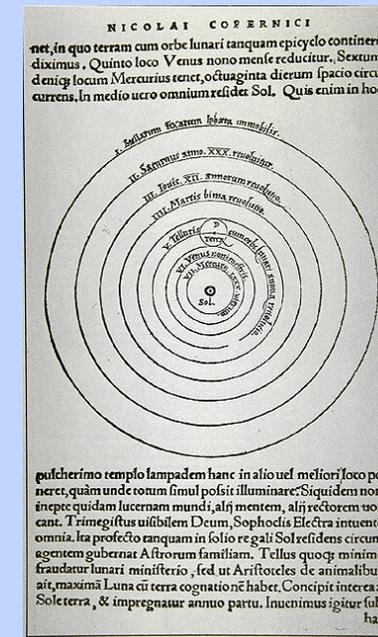
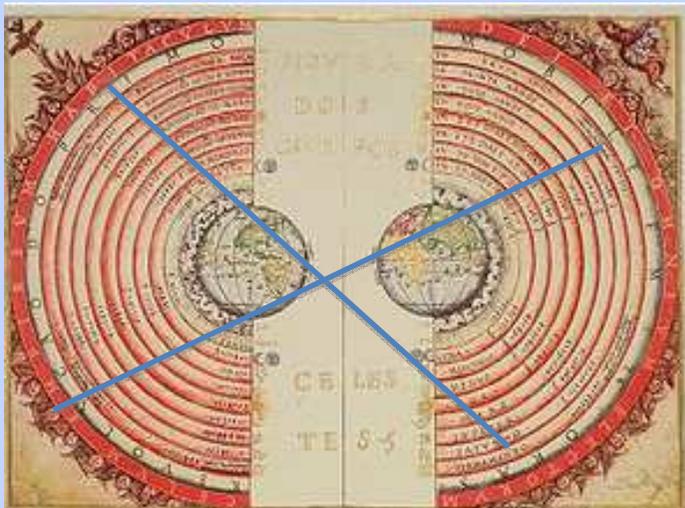
What is a “paradigm shift”?*

Copernican Revolution (with help from Tycho Brahe)

Before: little support for concept
After: universal support for concept



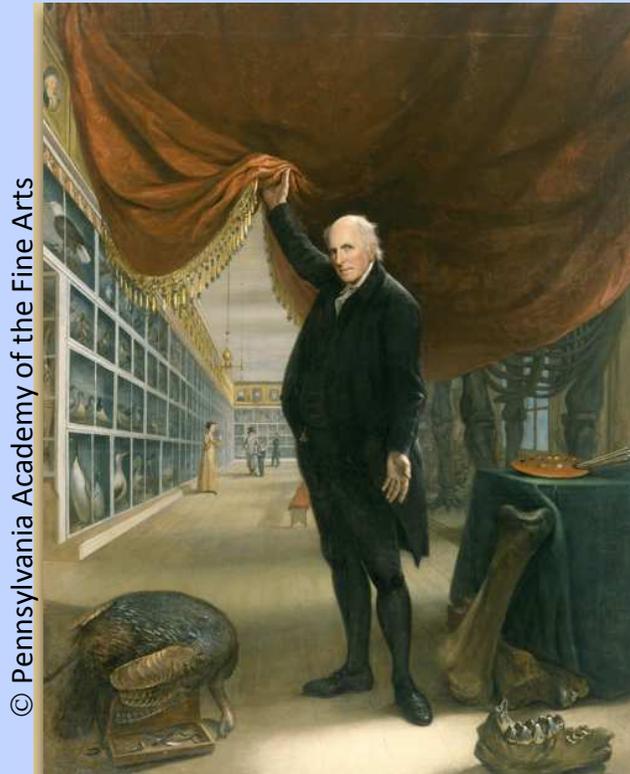
Tycho Brahe
(1546-1601)



Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*
U. Of Chicago Press, 1962

Charles Willson Peale

Founded the first major U. S. museum in Philadelphia, 1794.



© Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Charles Willson Peale
(1741-1827)



Photograph © 1990 The Detroit Institute of Arts

The largest room in Peale's Philadelphia
museum, founded 1786

“In a country whose institutions all depend upon the virtue of the people, which in its turn is secure only as they are well informed, the promotion of knowledge is the first of duties.”

Quoted in *Useful Knowledge in the New Republic - C.W. Peale* <http://www.lewis-clark.org/content/content-channel.asp?ChannelID=376>

Charles Willson Peale: Contributions to Museums for Democracy

1. Active civic life: military, public office, American Philosophical Society officer
2. Public museum – inexpensive and accessible; museum as educational before there were many public schools
3. Multiple areas: portraits, natural history, technology (each with distinct pedagogic/moral value), **based on educational goal**
4. Naturalistic displays of animals to facilitate learning
 - a. Taxidermy
 - b. Natural groupings
5. Public (popular) Lectures
6. Efforts to establish a “national” museum—gain public support

Founding of the American Association of Museums, 1906

Debated whether to join the American Education Association (a progressive organization that supported women's rights, education of all children, etc.)

“*Whereas*, Museums are institutions devoted to public welfare and to the discovery and dissemination of knowledge, and their curators devote themselves to the cause of popular education . . .” (Beginning of a resolution passed at the 1906 meeting)



Delegates at the first meeting of AAM, at The American Museum of Natural History, New York, May 15, 1906.

How can museums serve **democratic** education?

1. Acknowledge the connection between education and social goals; and state the connection clearly and openly.

(In Denmark, “medborgerskabs-museum project”)

Important to recognize how educational practices and museum structure are related to social-democratic goals.

2. Through topics related to social issues (content)

3. Challenge visitors (often includes #5)

4. Outreach (the public library model)

5. Challenge museums’ ordinary practice

3. Look at their own organizational structure

2. Topics: Social History Museum

Lower East Side Tenement Museum



The building



A kitchen



central
hallway
and stairs

Ruth Abram, founding director (not a museum director, but a political activist) :

“The museum has insisted on asking not only *What is the history?* But also *What can history do... to improve the world?*” (Abram 2005, p. 19)

- Tour guides compare then and now (sweatshops)
- “Kitchen Conversations” — discuss difficult topics
- Bilingual tour guides, often immigrants
- Publish guide to NYC services for Kennedy airport arrivals (in several languages)

2. Topics – Art Museum

Fred Wilson, “Mining the Museum” (not a curator but an artist and activist)



Metalwork 1773 -1880

From, *Mining the Museum*,
Maryland Historical
Society, Baltimore, 1992

For visitors: all of Wilson's exhibition work raises issues around racism, discrimination and cultural stereotyping.



stereotypes



Dehumanization, missing information



Class/race distinctions

For museum staff, questions about practices

Why is this in the collection?

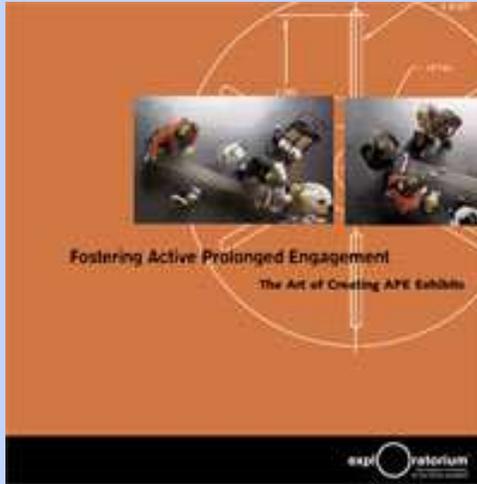
Why is it displayed/not displayed?

Why is it labeled in this way?

“Wilson’s unorthodox artistic practice impels us to question the biases and limitations of cultural institutions and how they shaped our interpretations of artistic value and historical truth.”

Topics: Science Centers

Shift from instruction to inquiry



Humphrey, T. and J. P. Gutwill. 2005. *Fostering Active Prolonged Engagement: The Art of Creating APE Exhibits*. San Francisco, CA: The Exploratorium.

“[An] important goal of the project [is] empowering visitors to pose and pursue their own questions at the exhibits . . . APE exhibits were created to encourage visitors to explore phenomena in their own ways, answering their own questions, rather than turning to the authority in the label. “

Science Centers – General approach

The Exploratorium

“I grew up in a tradition where public education was a service of society and I believe a museum really is fundamental and should be a basic service of society”
(Exploratorium web site 2012, *Frank-ly Speaking*).



Frank Oppenheimer
(1912- 1985)



Current building – Inside



THE NEW MUSEUM WILL BE HOUSED WITHIN A SUSTAINABLY REHABILITATED HISTORIC PIER STRUCTURE NEAR TELEGRAPH HILL.

New location, opening 2013

At heart, Frank built the Exploratorium as a political institution. Its ultimate goal was to get people so addicted to understanding that they would somehow become inoculated against the clever deceptions of some advertisers and politicians. He would persuade them to use those brains of theirs to get involved, to add to the collective wisdom—the only true way, he thought, to solve our pressing global problems. (Gell-Mann, in K. C. Cole, 2009).

Exploratorium has same roots as post-WW II science education effort:

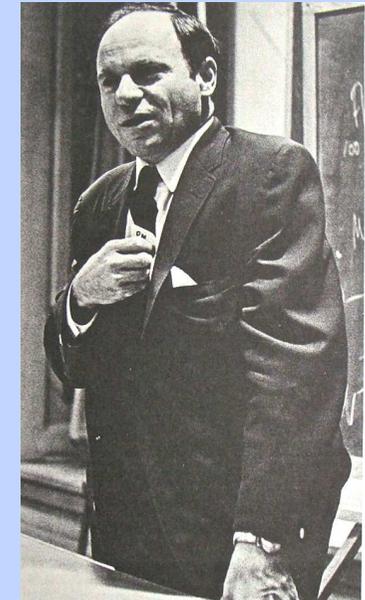
Oppenheimer, Hawkins and Morrison worked together at Elementary Science Study in 1960's



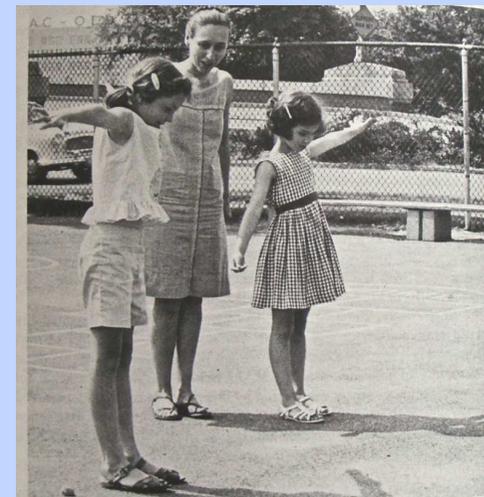
David Hawkins
(1913-2002)



Frances Hawkins (1913-2006)



Philip Morrison
(1915 – 2005)



Phylis Singer Morrison
(1927 – 2002)

Photos from Emily Romney and Mary Jane Neuendorffer
(1973) *The Elementary Science Study—A History*, Newton,
MA: Education Development Center.

Scientists' optimism, post-WW II

It was largely a matter of social conscience, I believe, that motivated us [scientists] to school work. As scientists, we seek evidence before we try to create order, or orderliness, and we do not expect, nor even hope for, complete proof....

Nevertheless . . . unsupported demagoguery has a tough time with us. A Hitler or a McCarthy could not survive in a society, which demands evidence, which can be subjected to examination, to reexamination, to doubt, to question, to cross-examination. It may be this lesson that gives us a missionary zeal. (Zacharias 1965)



Jerrold Zacharias (1905 - 1986)
in the ESI film studio, ~1960

Linking the Past to the Present



Yao, C. ed. (June 2006) **Handbook for Small Science Centers**, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, cover. Photo: Hans Juhl, Experimentarium, Denmark



Hein, G. E. (1968) **An Interview with Dorothy Welch**, Newton, MA: Education Development Center. Photos: G.Hein

4. Outreach – Branch museums, public venues

John Cotton Dana (~1910) a librarian who became a museum director, initiated branch museums

Anacostia Community Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 1969



John Kinard, founding director



Exhibition, *The Rat, Man's Invited Affliction*



Copenhagen City Museum - The Wall



September 2011

5. Challenge Museum's ordinary Structure

Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brasil:
Museum staff training for all staff, not only professional staff



Pinacoteca do Estado de
São Paulo, Brasil



Mila Milene Chiovatto

5. Challenge museum structure:

Museum staff training for all staff, not only the professional staff



Pinacoteca do Estado de
São Paulo, Brasil



Mila Milene Chiovatto

- Knowledge of departments, exhibitions and programs, staff
- Visits to other museums
- Invite children to Museum
- Literacy classes
- Career advice and training



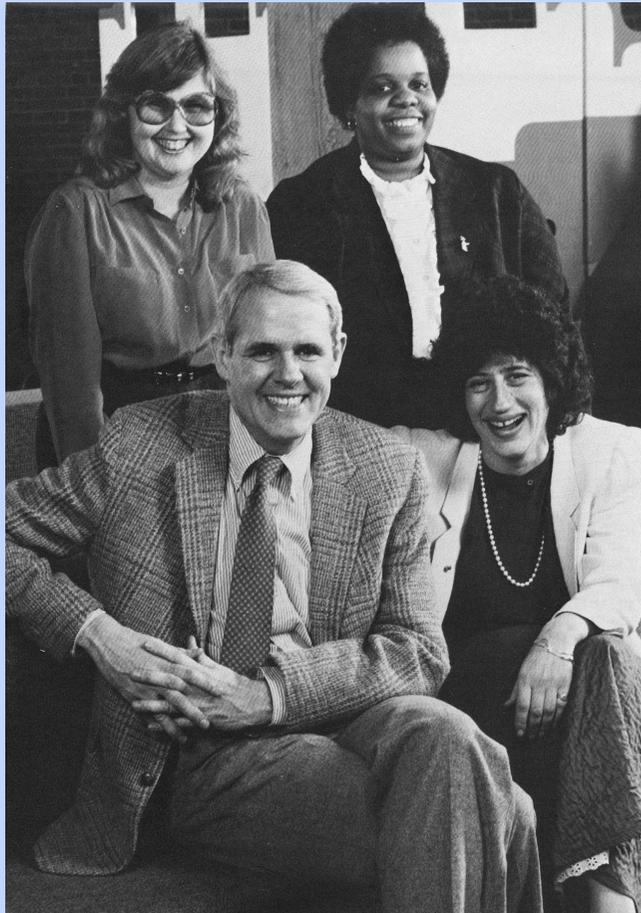
Workers' children at museum,
São Paulo, Brasil



Literacy class, São Paulo, Brasil

6. Look at their own structure

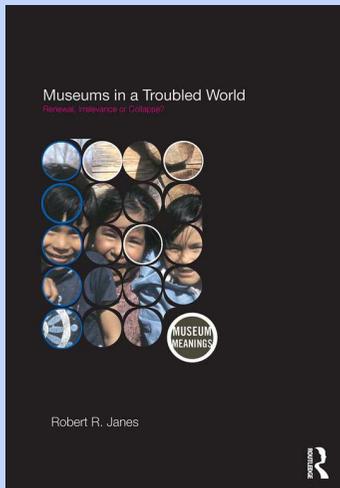
Mike Spock, Boston Children's Museum 1960s-1970s



“Frank [Oppenheimer] and I were educated in such powerful ways that we replicated those experiences at the Children's Museum and the Exploratorium.”
Michael Spock, 2012

Both went to The Ethical Culture School in New York City, founded by a friend and colleague of John Dewey. Dewey sent his two youngest children to school there.

We were the equivalent of a commune. We were, at a time in America when collective action had a brand new and politically viable currency...We were all politically left wing as was Michael Spock, and we had a deeply—each of us individually—had a deeply held belief in the value of individuals and the value of inclusion, and we worked desperately hard to make that happen. . . .We were each other’s brothers and sisters. And it was much closer to being a commune than it was at the time a business model. (Gurian 2012)



“There are basically two organizational traditions in the Western world. . . The hierarchical tradition which places one person in charge as the lone chief at the top of the organizational chart . . . [and] the *primus inter pares*, or first among equals . . . [tradition.]”

R. R. Janes, *Museums in a Troubled World*, (2009)