

Report of the Children's Section

FIRST BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS

UNESCO House
19 Avenue Kleber

June 28-July 3, 1948
Paris, France

Three hundred delegates from thirty countries journeyed to Paris to discuss ways and means of extending and improving the services of the museums which they represented, in order to foster increased knowledge and understanding of people the world over. These delegates are aware of the enormity of the task of education on a global scale, cognizant that pioneering always faces physical and psychological hurdles, but undaunted by defeatists or skeptics. Having joined their talents in the common cause, the delegates have returned to their respective countries, where even now, in thirty nations around the world, there are ideas and practices at work because three hundred professional museum people met and talked together in Paris.

To our hosts, the Directors of the Museums of Paris, to the officials of UNESCO, and to the President of the International Council of Museums, the members of the Children's Section are grateful for the opportunity to discuss common problems, to hear the ideas of scholars and great museum men, and to revel in the beauty and hospitality of Paris.

This report deals only with the Children's Section. Publications from UNESCO and ICOM will amplify other phases of the Conference. The address by Dr. Charles Russell, "A Basic Philosophy of Museum Education", is available through the Department of Education, American Museum of Natural History, New York. The chairman's report to the Conference is enclosed.

The general sessions were held June 28, 1948, first at UNESCO House where delegates from Asia and the Islands of the Pacific, Europe, Africa, and the Americas were welcomed by our hosts, and later at Ecole du Louvre, where the theme of the afternoon considered aspects of education in museums. These sessions confirmed for all the thesis of diversity with harmony.

Afternoons thereafter were devoted to general sessions in which subjects of importance to all were reported or discussed by eminent authorities: international cooperation between museums, new techniques in museography, new architectural and lighting developments, the international documentation center, problems of reproductions.

Late afternoons and evenings combined gracious sociability with special exhibitions, a musicale, and glimpses behind-the-scenes in leading museums and the Bibliothèque Nationale. It was on these occasions and later on the post-conference tour to Dijon, that fellowship among people from the far reaches of the world had opportunity to spring up and grow.

Responses to a pre-Conference questionnaire to all members of the Committee composed the agenda. Each morning from June 29 to July 3 inclusive, the Section convened at The Musée Pédagogique, where Madame Gertrude Cart, heading the

French delegation, presided jointly with the Chairman. Aided by two secretaries, one for ICOM and one for UNESCO, both proficient in French and English, the discussion was long and provocative.

Delegates from England, France, Holland, Hungary, and the United States made a regular attendance averaging 30 people daily, augmented by special guests. Individual contacts with delegates to other sections meeting at the same hour included China, Poland, Sweden, Norway, Siam, and Canada.

A resume of the chairman's report on activities of the Committee up to the Paris Conference is enclosed in order to give the background for the discussions, a method used almost exclusively in Section E, the Children's Section.

Exchange of personnel, posing a problem of finance, was deemed nevertheless the best possible investment. Traveling fellowships, grants-in-aid, outright exchange between museums were suggested. *Exchange of materials* were urged, not only between museums, but also as organized traveling exhibits designed to show accomplishments of work with children and to show countries not yet doing this work the techniques already proven successful. The *training of personnel* was recognized as essential, but the subject was not elaborated. Dr. J. W. B. Van der Stigchel, Director of the Educational Museum of The Hague, led the discussion of school-museum relations, which included preparation of the class for museum visits, understanding of child psychology in installing and interpreting exhibits, uses of publicity, correlation with recordings, films, and music. Madame Cart stressed the importance of using museum exhibits and collections in preference to time spent in the assembly room seeing films, hearing lectures or music. She cited the various kinds of museums in Paris, where direct contact with objects is considered better than all substitutes, and spoke of the French conception of a museum once confined to aesthetics, now embracing "the human value of the object exhibited."

Mr. de le Salle from the Direction des Musées de France described his book in preparation, "to tell parents as well as teachers in which museums to take their children and what to show them there." His survey shows that groups should be small (15 to 20) and of any age from 7 to 18.

Dr. Susan Lenkei, University of Budapest, advocated teaching children how to see and then let them find things out. Mrs. Grace Golden described "The Family Hour" on Sunday afternoons at the Indianapolis Children's Museum. Mrs. Molly Harrison, Director of the Geffrye Museum, London, and Miss Matilda Young, Director of the Trailermobile Museum, Washington, D.C., stressed the importance of visits and activities by individual children as well as by classes. Mr. William Currall, Horsfall Museum, Manchester, England, would like data on the average age of children in each museum. Throughout this session it was recognized that museums for children and "adult" museums working with children have different administrative problems, but it was agreed that the underlying philosophy of centering the program around the child instead of around the subject could be adapted to each.

The multiplicity of questions and topics of discussion all but overwhelmed the delegates as this session progressed. Dr. Charles Russell, Chairman of Education, The American Museum of Natural History, offered to compile and collate for the benefit of all interested museums a complete list of such questions and topics as would be sent to him. These would then represent what museum people wish to know about work with children. The answers imply a long future for international conferences of Section E.

Monsieur Michel Fare, Conservateur du Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Musée du Louvre, opened the third session with a brilliant presentation of a plan of studies dealing with "personnel - locale - collections - presentation (activities inside the museum: exhibitions - activities outside the museum), national relationship between children's museums - international relationships."

The agenda for this session centered around the permanent organization of the Children's Museum Committee. Dr. Alma Wittlin, Research Worker in Children's Museums, Ministry of Education, London, described the organizing of the English National Committee, which had met several times in 1947-48, and which convened again in July to study "exhibitions for and by children, how to choose children to whom they will show these exhibits first, the types of schools and age of children." Dr. Wittlin emphasized international exhibits and urged a European group meeting every six months in the current biennium. After much discussion, it was agreed that each country have a national committee if it suited that country's needs, that the head of each national committee be a member of the international committee, that countries without national committees designate a representative for the international committee, and that the international committee elect its own officers. Representatives of a hemisphere may be added as advisors to the members of the committee. Recruiting and finance for each national committee will be determined by it. This entire plan of organization is tentative for this biennium, and is subject to revision or adoption at the Conference set for 1950.

Every discussion in Section E was punctuated by requests for traveling exhibitions designed for children on international understanding and by reiteration of the needs and problems of work with children in museums already established as opposed to the wishful thinking about new ones. Finance continued to raise its head as questions relating to practical details came in from all sides. This led to the relation of UNESCO to the work of the Section, facts about which were laid frankly and convincingly before the Section by Dr. Grace McCann Morley, Head of the Museums Programme of UNESCO.

Resolutions from Section E to the Executive Board of ICOM which were drawn by representatives of each delegation, were presented by Madame Cart, the incoming chairman of the Children's Section for the current biennium. Madame Cart deemed it wise to limit the number of resolutions passed by the Section so that after being approved by the Executive Board, the resolutions presented to the Conference as a whole were as follows:

1. Whereas work with children in museums exists in both "adult" and children's museums, schools, botanical and zoological gardens, be it resolved that the Children's Museum Committee be known henceforth as the Children's Section of the International Council of Museums.
2. Whereas museums around the world have unique facilities and recognize their opportunities to further contribute both broadly and specifically to the education of children in schools and also in their leisure time, be it resolved that space and trained personnel be reserved for children in all museums.

The unanimous approval of these resolutions by directors and other officials of leading museums in thirty countries marks the end of a long period of pioneering, exploring, testing, and evaluating sporadically in various parts of the

world the results of experience and study of work with children in museums. It marks also the beginning of a new stage of consolidating and publicizing established methods and expanding further a suitable program for youth in all museums. The fact that these museum leaders recognize the increasing contributions which museums can make in developing the world citizens of the next generation and approve coping with problems of space, finance, administration, and the training of personnel, gives the delegates from the Children's Section renewed vigor to undertake more responsibilities and to do credit to whatever they undertake for the common goal of peace among nations.

MARGARET M. BRAYTON
Chairman, 1947-48
The Children's Section
International Council of Museums

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