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Are visitor studies professional enough?

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“There is a danger that reference to the language of professionalism has become so widespread as to be almost meaningless. In our routine conversations, we often use the term ‘professional’ as a near synonym for good”

(Cribb and Gewirtz 2015, p20)

What is a profession?

Exclusive ownership of a shared knowledge base

(Evetts, 2013; Eraut, 1994; Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001; and Macdonald, 1995)



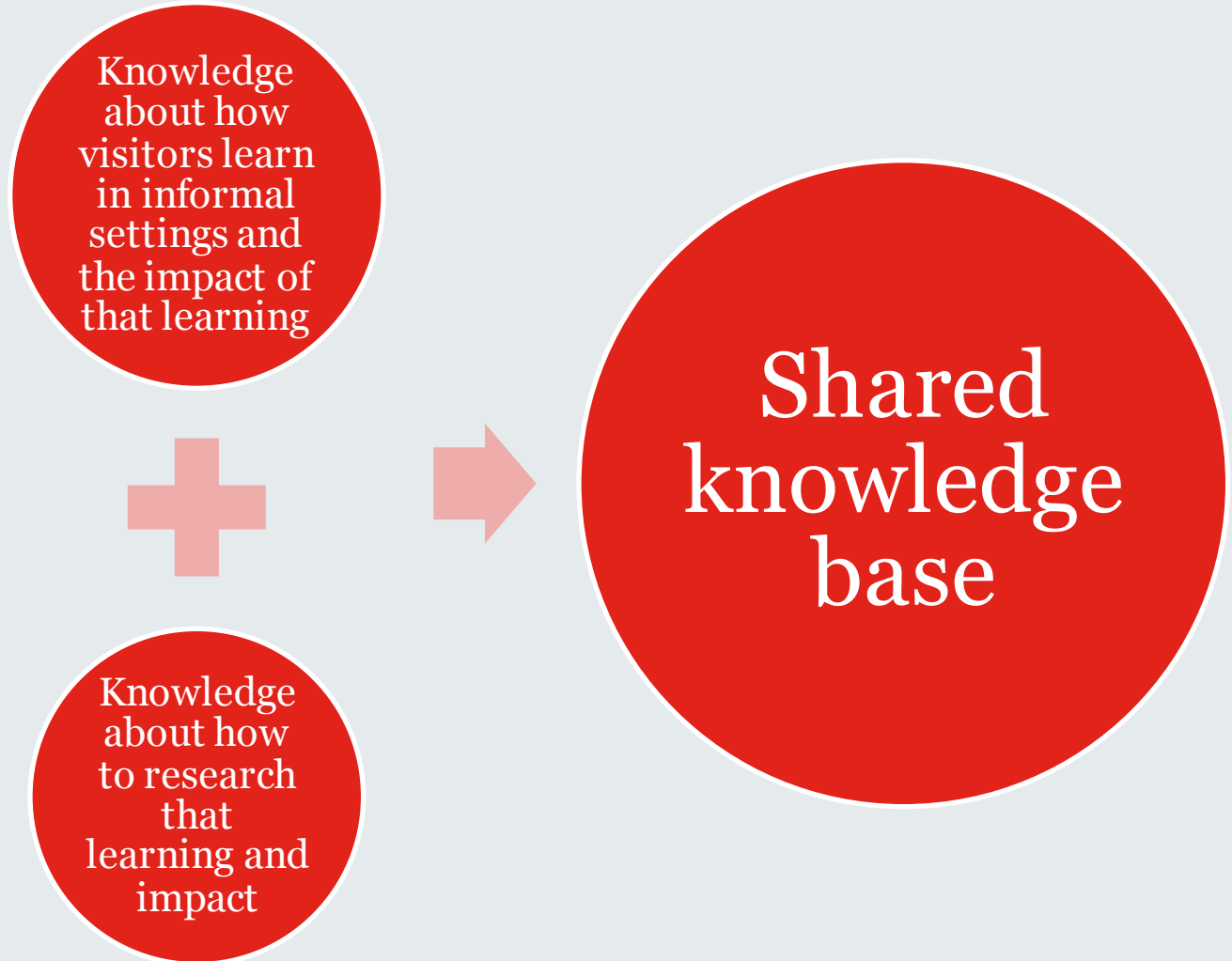
Traits

	Medicine	Evaluation
• Exclusive ownership of a shared knowledge base		
• Affiliation to a university subject		
• Accessed via a university degree		
• Standards of best practice		
• Regulatory authority or professional association		

(Eraut, 1994)

So, what should we do?

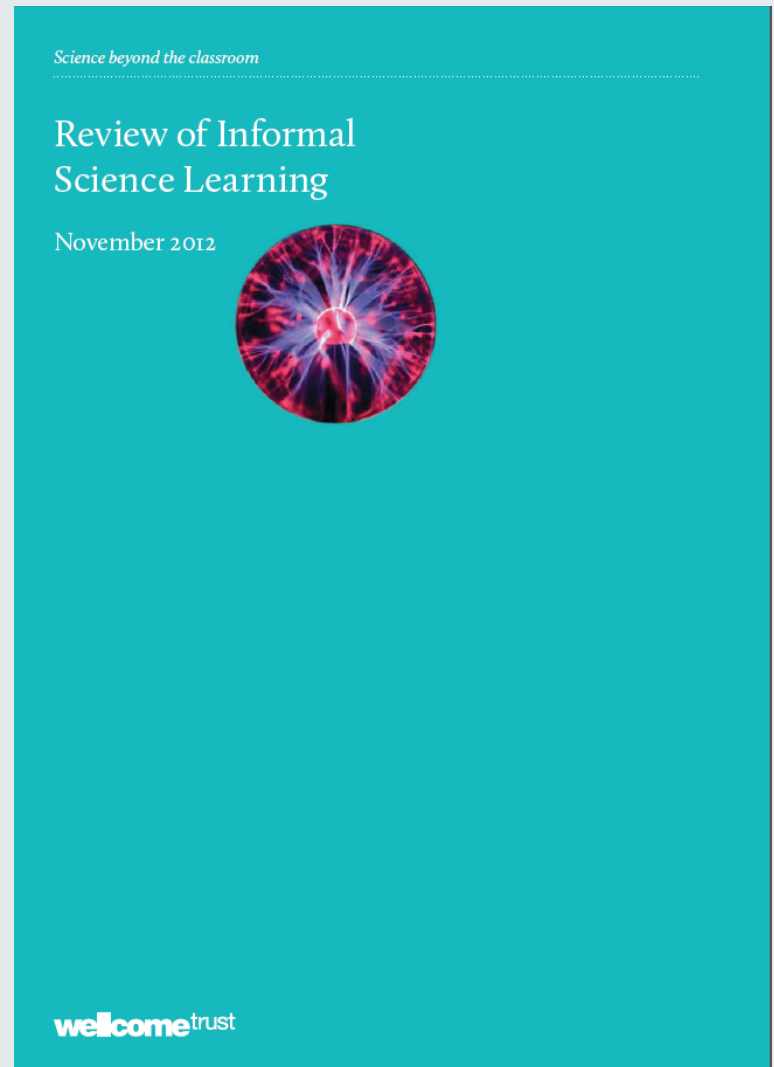
We need to change from being evaluators to being professional researchers so that we can develop a shared knowledge base consisting of two components:



To prove and improve our value

“While many may recognise the narrative about why informal learning matters, few are familiar with the supporting evidence ... Evidence does exist about the value of informal science learning experiences but is often not UK-derived and, in any case, not well known or used by practitioners. In turn policymakers and school leaders need persuading that informal science is worthwhile”

(Matterson and Holman, 2012, p3).



Why can't we do this?

- **Visitor studies has mainly focused on evaluation, rather than research**

“It has been argued that there is a lack of coherence and theoretical base for museum audience research because in the past museums conducted evaluation studies that were narrower in focus and not necessarily grounded in a theoretical framework.”

(Kelly, 2005, p62)

- **Visitor studies lacks some of the common traits associated with professions which makes sharing knowledge difficult**

So, where next?

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