Effective Training for Docents

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Achieving Balance

During my 27 years of involvement with museums and docent training, I have arrived at the opinion that the most effective docents are those who have the firmest understanding of teaching and education. Likewise, it is my observation that the most common error made in constructing and executing docent training programs is over-emphasizing the importance of subject matter content to the near exclusion of teaching methodologies. The results are almost always, in my estimation, detrimental to docent performance.

I am privileged to provide docent workshops in art, history, and science museums throughout the country. Without exception, including the largest and most advantaged institutions, I find those docents who are trained in programs that are subject matter content heavy are struggling with the most basic of educational concerns. The result is a profound reduction in their effectiveness. For instance, docents may be told to employ open-ended questions but are not well informed about their construction. Or, docents are admonished to adapt information to the age of their audience but are not told about the impact that stages of cognitive and affective development have upon learning. Or, docents are asked to construct thematic lesson plans but are provided with few models that would give them an understanding of how to do so.

It is my opinion that the reasons docents receive precious little training in educational concerns are several. First, many museum educators who are in charge of docent training know little about teaching methods, themselves. Second, there is great pressure exerted by the curatorial side of the “museum divide” to ensure that docents do not give out erroneous information. Third, it is easier to teach subject matter content than ways to teach. And fourth, museum educators do little modeling of the teaching behaviors they expect from their docents.

Once docents begin touring, however, many instinctively realize they lacked something important during training, even if they cannot articulate exactly what was missing. They just know that, regardless of the amount of information they may have been exposed to, the ability to connect to their audiences is not automatic and seems to require a separate set of skills from that of scholarship.

While knowledge of a collection and background in its subject area are essential to a docent’s accuracy and confidence when teaching, they do little to ensure that the docent will communicate effectively with an audience. In practice, it has been my experience that the most effective docent does not tend to be a scholar, but rather a good communicator. Scholarship is, after all, primarily a solitary endeavor. It does not provide a docent with the tools necessary to be an empowering leader or a motivational teacher.

The Importance of Balance

My observations have convinced me that the most effective docent training programs are structured to ensure that docents understand how to teach as well as what to teach. This means that their training program does not over-emphasize subject matter content to the neglect of teaching methods. Placing too much emphasis on academic content misdirects docents, making them believe that their primary responsibility is to tell others information about the collection when that is a job easily accomplished by text panels and labels.

Effective docent training must make docents aware that their primary responsibility is to teach others how to learn from the collection, not what to learn. In order to accomplish this, docents need to know how learning takes place, how to encourage observation and reflective consideration, as well as how to magnify their audience’s interest.

Are Docents Teachers?

Museums, historic sites, zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums, nature centers, and other cultural and scientific organizations are usually defined as “not-for-profit, educational institutions.” Almost all declare their educational intentions within their institutional mission statements. Nearly without exception, docent programs fall under the realm of an institution’s department of education. Volunteer or paid docents are engaged as educators, in order to teach visitors because their institutions recognize that many visitors do not arrive at their doors equipped to learn from direct contact with the collection. In addition, many of these institutions are obligated to provide educational assistance to the public because they solicit financial support from public sources with the promise that some of the monies provided would be used to assist citizens gain a greater understanding of, and appreciation for, the objects, artifacts, or specimens exhibited.

It was no coincidence that the very first issue of The Docent Educator (Autumn 1991) was titled “The Docent as Teacher.” Nor was
the name of this publication created capriciously. Whether they do so well or ineffectively, yes, docents do function as educators in their role with the public.

Education is a Content Area

If the adage “those who can, do; those who can’t, teach” is true, it may explain why good teachers seem to be such a rare commodity. Teaching isn’t easy, and it most definitely is not just a matter of retelling information learned. Teaching is both a talent and a field of study unto itself.

Allow me to present a simplistic example. An effective teacher knows how to reach his audience. If you teach children like adults you will lose them; if you teach adults like children you will insult them. Now for the not-so-simple part … what, precisely, are the appropriate differences in methods one should employ when teaching children and how do they differ from those used when teaching adults? And, to take this concern a step further, what differences are significant within the category of “children.” Should all children be taught in the same manner? Are second graders like fifth graders, like eighth graders, like twelfth graders?

Effective training for docents cannot focus on subject matter content and expect that “the rest” will take care of itself. Docent training must also address educational content. Such “weighty” issues as the following are essential training for an educator: a lesson planning, a the construction of educational goals and objectives, a cognitive development and age-graded lessons, a questioning strategies and other techniques to encourage audience involvement and active learning, a child development and psychology, a vocabulary, body language, and other skills of communication, a methods for accommodating special needs and disabilities, a flexibility and appropriate methods of behavioral control, a the impact of learning styles, and a methods of evaluation and revision to name but a few.

How to Teach Teaching

So, in addition to learning what to teach, docents should receive instruction in how to teach. There are abundant resources available to assist docent program supervisors and the docents themselves, with this essential component of training.

Among the most accessible resources are the teachers, administrators, and curricular specialists in your area’s public, private, and parochial schools. The curriculum of relevant subject areas should reveal how information is taught, and is adapted by age/grade level. Similar resources for adult education are often available within nearby school systems or at a local college or university.

There are myriad of education textbooks available in public libraries, bookstores, and through the internet. Request that your institutional library devote a small segment of its budget to the purchase of such reference materials. Books that detail lesson planning, inquiry teaching, promotion of thinking skills, programs for the education of gifted children, the processes of cognitive and affective development, and methods for constructing elementary and secondary education are excellent topics to use when beginning your search.

Striking the Correct Balance

Effective docent training, therefore, should have several components. Naturally, subject matter content is essential among them. Docents need to learn about their institution’s collection, and how that collection fits into the larger body of knowledge. Docents also need to learn education methods content.

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Making Connections and

by Michael J. Nelson

ne does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore.” (Andre Gide) The safety of “shore” in a docent training program can often be the security of mastering factual information about a particular museum collection. But what happens when docents move away from the shore? Are they comfortable letting go of the information from time to time and exploring the collection in light of their own ideas and experiences, or those of other people? What if docent training programs regularly focused not only on mastering collections, but on making personal connections? What new lands might be discovered?

At many museums there are two types of docent training programs, sometimes occurring simultaneously. There is training for “brand new” volunteers, who are just learning to be tour guides, and there is ongoing docent training for “veteran” volunteers. Perhaps you are considering starting a docent training program at your institution. Or, maybe you are evaluating your current program (something that should happen regularly). What should you consider as you look to the future of training your museum’s docents? For both new and ongoing training, I would suggest asking yourself the following questions:
1- How do I want visitors on a tour to experience the museum?
2- Do I teach the docents the same ways that I want docents to teach?
3- Do I provide opportunities for docents to develop personal connections with objects in the galleries before providing extensive collection and object information?
4- Do I provide docents with opportunities to work on teaching and facilitation skills, for the sake of becoming better educators?
5- Could docents at my museum go into a gallery full of objects they hadn’t seen before and facilitate a quality learning experience?

How do I want visitors on a tour to experience the museum?
Do you want visitors to come in and passively receive a lecture from a docent or do you want visitors to take an active role in the tour? Fortunately, the amount of “straight lecture” being given on museum tours is dwindling. Many lectures have been replaced by interactive tours designed to engage visitors. These days, most museum educators look for ways to get tour participants talking, asking questions, sharing stories, and even doing hands-on learning in the galleries. There is an attempt to empower visitors, to assist them in taking a lead in their learning experience.

During a tour designed to engage the audience, information on the museum and its collection is not eliminated, it is just shared in a different way. Rather than providing an up-front straight lecture to passive recipients, information is woven throughout the tour as visitors move deeper into the experience. Visitors are given a chance to look, reflect, question, and share. Then, as the visitors’ eagerness to learn increases, educators begin to intersperse factual information about the collection at a moment when such facts satisfy the participants’ curiosity.

Do I teach the docents the same way that I want docents to teach?
Most visitors enter a museum with very little information on the exhibition and have to rely on prior knowledge and personal connections to get started. Docents, on the other hand, are often trained first with extensive information on a collection and only afterward are they provided with opportunities to engage with the objects or to practice teaching skills.

Every museum and its collection is unique, and for this reason information related to the museum’s objects is critical for docents to learn. Information should not be eliminated from docent training. But, it need not be the first way to encounter the collection.

Often, docent training is “front-loaded” with information and then, if there is time, docents are challenged to “go out there with all that information and be good educators.” It is almost as if we teach the docents one way, and ask them to turn that approach around when they teach visitors. Imagine how much more successful docents would be if they had good interactive strategies that emerged from their content-based training.

Do I provide opportunities for docents to develop personal connections with objects in the galleries before providing extensive collection and object information?

If one of the goals of docent training is to make the docents’ experience more like that of the visitors’, we need to give docents the opportunity to explore the collections and objects, even if only for a short time, the way a first-time visitor
Mastering Collections

A docent shares her new skills and ideas while the staff member in charge (in this case, the author of this article) steps away from the front of the class to listen and evaluate. Photo: courtesy of the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, U. of Texas at Austin

would — before knowing everything about the collection. We need to find ways to encourage volunteers to do more looking, thinking, and reflecting, and challenge them to develop their curiosity and ask good questions.

New docent training programs provide a great opportunity for the "experience-before-you-fact-gather" approach. As men and women step forward to begin training as new docents, it is the closest they will ever get to being in the shoes of a novice museum-goer. They are often a bit intimidated, unsure of what will take place, and maybe even insecure about their own background and abilities. Instead of viewing this as something to overcome, celebrate the opportunity. Encourage docents to recognize that this is how many of their visitors feel when touring your institution. Consider this a rare and wonderful opportunity for you and for them!

Usually, the first weeks of training are filled with background information, collection information, specifics on key objects, and lectures from curators. The last few weeks of training might be reserved for interactive teaching strategies and methods. But, what if the order of this same training were reversed?

The first sessions could focus on helping docents get comfortable in the galleries, employing activities that encourage exploring, questioning, and sharing thoughts. This could be followed by specifics on teaching, such as questioning strategies, learning styles, working with special-needs audiences, and discussion facilitation. Then, in the following weeks, as the docents become more comfortable with the collection and their role with the public, they could return to the galleries to learn the history of the collection and study content specifics.

Veteran docents can also benefit from having time with the objects before learning specific information.

Experienced docents usually attend on-going training to learn about additions to the permanent collection or to learn about or visiting exhibitions. It is important that they learn details about the new objects but there a few things you can do to get them active with the objects first.

- Prepare a worksheet that would work well with students on a tour and have docents use the worksheet. Have them share their answers and experiences. Give them an opportunity to critique the worksheet.
- Instead of beginning with a lecture on the background of the ten most popular objects in the collection, give docents an activity that sends them out in small groups to explore those objects. For instance, you could

Continued on the next page.
give them a list of questions or discussion starters.

- Design an activity that sends docents to objects you think they would most likely avoid while on tour. Challenge them. Even if they still don’t use these objects while touring, they will be more comfortable with them. In a best case scenario, they may have new insights and excitement about the objects!
- Break the docent corps into smaller groups and have each group try a different touring strategy. Different activities might include: a creative thinking game created for elementary students, a group sharing exercise, an independent reflective activity, or even a hands-on experience.

Give the groups a limited amount of time (e.g. 15 minutes) and then gather together as a large group and have one person from each group give a brief report about what they did and how it worked.

Such activities can be brief, and the remainder of the training can still be dedicated to studying specific information on the collection. If time constraints seem overly pressing, consider giving information to docents using prepared handouts, or through required readings. This should allow even the most content-oriented training programs enough time for docents to experience the collection interactively.

**Do I provide docents with opportunities to work on teaching and facilitation skills, for the sake of becoming better educators?**

To improve docent teaching, dedicate full sessions to the subject. Explore new touring strategies. Bring in an outside presenter who specializes in learning theory and teaching applications. Emphasize that how docents teach is as important as what they teach.

Have docents share in the training experience. For instance, have docents consider this quote: “There are two ways of spreading light; to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.” (Edith Wharton)

Ask docents to discuss whether a good educator has to be a candle, always the one to lead the way out of darkness? Or, does a good educator focus on reflecting back to the students the light and abilities that they each have?

Could docents at my museum go into a gallery full of objects they hadn’t seen before and facilitate a quality learning experience?

The answer to this question may be the key to discerning the docents’ teaching abilities. If the docents, without any information or preparation, can still provide an engaging and interactive exploration of a gallery filled with objects new to them, then you know that their training has been successful.

Docents trained as quality teachers won’t be frozen by a lack of extensive collection information. The quality of their teaching will come out of the exchange they have with visitors. By addressing the first four questions posed in this article, the answer to this final question will be “yes.”

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Sharing Successful Techniques and Ideas

There is a long history of poets and writers who draw inspiration from the visual arts. Master poets John Keats and Percy Shelley crafted great poems like “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ozymandias,” translating the visual world into poetic language.

Using creative writing in the galleries can be an effective and powerful method of getting visitors to connect with artwork through language. In both the Dallas Museum of Art’s public programs and multiple visits programs for school groups, I design and use writing activities based on simple structures to get groups thinking imaginatively.

The acrostic is a simple poetic form in which the initial letters of each line have a meaning when read downwards. I initially implemented this writing exercise as a companion to a piece in the DMA’s collections: Sigmar Polke’s ekphrastic painting Clouds, which was inspired by a Chinese folk tale written by French writer Marguerite Yourcenar.

Changing matter, lead to gold
Like a wizard alchemist
Our painter hero Wang-Fo
Undermines the angry emperor,
Devises escape on a painted rowboat
Set out to sea.

Though the above poem is very sophisticated, this is an easy writing activity. It is appropriate for younger visitors, as well as adults, and can be adapted to suit the title of any object. Other successful variations of this exercise have included creating acrostics where a person’s first name is substituted for the vertical line.

I sometimes use a writing exercise created by the Surrealists, called, “The Exquisite Corpse.” This exercise uses an artwork for its inspiration and can be very effective with groups who may be less forthcoming in sharing their writing. In The Exquisite Corpse, one person starts off the chain of writing with a single sentence. The piece of paper is passed on to the next person, who writes the next line. Before passing the page to the next person, the page is folded down, so only the last sentence written is visible to the person who receives the page next. In this way, one person’s line is formed and influenced by the person before them. The process is repeated, until everyone has had a turn. At the end of this activity, the paper is unfolded and the poem is read aloud. Each person contributes to the writing of the poem, which makes sharing in a group less self-conscious.

The integration of creative writing into learning in the galleries can have powerful effects. Learners are invited to access visual art through language, and in doing so are given permission to transform their own creative impulses into the concrete and the poetic.

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Achieving Balance

Continued from page #3.

Unless docents understand the process and nuances of education, their teaching will always be haphazard at best. In addition, docents need to be invested with the authority and self-esteem of “teacher” status within the institution. If docents do not feel supported in their endeavors, valued for their contributions, and provided with ample training opportunities, they cannot feel the self-assurance necessary to be in charge of teaching situations.

The effectively trained docent knows how to reach and teach her audience. She is self-confident and never “bluffs” or offers information that is unsubstantiated as fact because she does not feel diminished by not knowing an answer. The effectively trained docent feels in control of the teaching situation because she knows that her responsibility is not to be an authority, but to be a teacher. She works to pry open minds and build upon interests and curiosity. She also welcomes periodic evaluation as a way to strengthen her skills. In short, the effectively trained docent is vitally aware that even the teacher is always learning.

Alan Gartenbauer
Publishing Editor
Similarities in the roles of classroom teachers and docents suggest that a review of teacher training programs may provide insights into docent training. Perhaps the best known model of teacher training was developed by Bruce R. Joyce and Beverly Showers.

According to these two scholars, staff development programs for teachers should be delivered on more than one occasion over an extended period of time. There are readiness activities as the program begins, and complex new material is presented incrementally, with repeated checking for understanding. The delivery of the program includes a variety of instructional modes and activities (individual and group learning, lecture, discussion, video, and/or role-play, etc.). As part of the program design, participants learn collegially, in cooperative situations, with and from each other. Teachers are given ample opportunity to practice newly acquired skills in relatively controlled and safe environments until a significant degree of confidence and "executive control" is acquired. "Executive control" refers to teachers learning how to learn and how to adjust new strategies as they practice them in real situations. Over succeeding weeks and months, "coaching" by peers and sustained practice ensure that the new approaches take root.

Joyce and Showers' training model consists of five major components: presentation of theory, modeling and demonstrations, practice in the workshop setting or under simulated conditions, structured feedback, and coaching for classroom application.

When used together each component has greater impact than when used alone. While Joyce and Showers's interest is in training school teachers, their research on teacher training and skill development has produced useful guidelines for helping docents acquire specific teaching skills.

The following discussion of the major components of the Joyce and Showers training model includes examples of how this model has been applied to the docent training program at the Morris Museum of Art.

Located in Augusta, Georgia, the Morris Museum of Art collects, preserves, and exhibits American works of art focusing on, but not limited to, the American South. While the museum's permanent collection is a rich resource for the study of Southern history and culture, the museum also has developed a significant research facility, the Center for the Study of Southern Painting. The educational programs offered to the community by the Morris Museum are created to meet specific local and regional needs. Educational services include pre-service and in-service training, curriculum-based resources, and student programs that emphasize art as a focal point for interdisciplinary studies in the classroom.

A corps of forty-five docents is instrumental in the delivery of tour and outreach programs.

Presentation of Theory

According to Joyce and Showers, the first component of successful training is the exploration of the theory of the skill. Theory offers an explanation of the rationale underlying a particular skill. Participants in a training event learn when a given skill should be used and how to use it. Principles governing the use of a skill are explained.

What we often consider docent training corresponds to Joyce and Showers's presentation of theory component. During a formal training program the theory of docenting is conveyed through lectures, discussions, readings, and other teaching strategies. The Morris Museum's docent training program, for instance, balances information about its Southern art collection with training in object-based teaching and touring strategies. This approach leads the docent trainees to an understanding of their role and provides them with the basic knowledge and skills required for this important responsibility.

Observation

Joyce and Showers identified observation as the second component of successful training. In addition to receiving instruction in the theory behind a particular skill, they stressed that participants in a training event need opportunity to observe the demonstration of the skill or its modeling.

Observation of tours should be a key component of docent training. During tour observations at the Morris Museum, docent trainees are asked to observe specific behaviors exhibited by both the docent and the tour group. After the tours conclude, trainees meet with the docents and trainer to discuss their observations. This collegial exchange benefits both the trainees and the docents. Docent trainees may also be given the opportunity to observe videotaped tours and then to discuss their observations.
Classroom Teachers

This strategy provides experience as a student, enables trainees to profit from each other's ideas and skills, and clarifies mistakes. Also, peer-teaching is a safer setting for skill development than a real-life teaching experience. Immediacy, feedback, and over-learning are essential to this component.

Timing is critical to the practice of a new skill because, over time, there is a loss of both understanding and ability. Equally important is the feedback provided to a teacher. The use of such feedback technology as audio or video recordings can help trainees, who have a clear idea of the skills required, critique themselves.

True to the adage of "practice makes perfect," Joyce and Showers also urged trainers of teachers to provide ample opportunities for the practice of new skills. They referred to this idea as "over-learning." They make specific recommendations as to the amount of practice required for successful transference of new skills into regular use. For instance, they suggest that to bring a teaching model of medium complexity under control requires twenty or twenty-five trials over a period of about eight to ten weeks.

This concept of practice is critical to the training of docents. At the Morris Museum, docent trainees deliver several practice tours to each other during formal training sessions. These practice tours immediately follow tour observations in the training schedule. Following the practice tours, the trainer facilitates a group discussion about the experience. Some of the items discussed include questioning strategies, voice audibility, and tour format. While the current time allotted for training does not permit the recommended twenty or twenty-five teaching experiences, multiple opportunities for practice tours are scheduled.

Coaching

Coaching is the fifth component of Joyce and Showers's training model. While the title "school coach" conjures up images of a physically fit individual, clad in a sweatshirt or jacket emblazoned with the school logo and wearing a whistle around his or her neck, the term has taken on an entirely different set of meanings in today's schools. Teachers within a department or small learning community who attend training together can emerge as peer coaches. Thereafter, they are expected to help one another implement new instructional designs.

Administrators or teachers on assignment become instructional coaches, charged with helping others on the faculty to expand their repertoire of teaching strategies. University-based educators, former teachers, and others are hired by the school district to become...
Acronyms for Effective Training

Trainers enable people to do something — catch a football, perform heart surgery, ride a bicycle. Educators enable people to know something — the dimensions of a football field, the arterial system, the history of bicycles. All training involves some knowledge imparted before and during training. Therefore, the terms are commonly used interchangeably.

I choose to separate the terms so that we might recognize when we are training and when we are educating. When planning to do anything programmatic, such as constructing a training regimen, I fall back upon a technique learned during my career in the insurance industry. I begin with the Life Insurance Management and Research Association's (LIMRA) acronym D O M E, or D (diagnosis); O (objectives); M (methods); E (evaluation).

Diagnosis

Diagnosis means analyzing or investigating. To make a diagnosis we have to ask a lot of questions. Does the museum have a training program? How much of the training time is spent educating? How effective is the present training program? What should be changed? Why? What standards are used and do the docents being trained know the standards? Are docents meeting performance standards? How do you know? Do the docents know the museum’s objectives? Are the docents meeting the museum’s objectives?

How would you classify your tour visitors? Are they novice viewers, somewhat knowledgeable, or are they among the rare visitors who are very knowledgeable and familiar with the subject and the museum’s collection? Should factual information reign over appreciation for the subject (i.e. — art history versus art appreciation)? What part should the visitor’s age, experience, and personal objectives play in the construction of the docent’s tour objectives?

Objectives

Objectives are desired outcomes, intentions, or actions expected. Only after diagnosis are we ready to consider the organization’s training objectives. I will list some generic ones here, but each institution’s diagnosis would expose needs that require specific objectives for training.

At the time of completion of training, the trainees will be able to demonstrate:

- Participatory teaching concepts by conducting a sample tour that, in less than 15 minutes and with at least three works of art, engenders excitement as demonstrated by visitor participation.
- Comprehension of academic subject matter by passing a final exam based on the study of an art history text and specified museum catalogs. (The test questions would be given to the trainees at the start of the training year.)
- Communication skills as expressed through verbal and body language, listening, reading, writing, speaking, questioning, and observing.

Methods

Methods are the ways, procedures, or techniques used to accomplish objectives. They answer the question, “how do I accomplish the objectives that have been established?” Allow me to elaborate using a personal example of my own training methods. I use as much physical activity when teaching as possible, including dancing, singing, standing, writing, drawing, reading, debating, or role playing because I believe we never forget most muscular learning. I also try to provide opportunities for discussing sensory impressions: touching, smelling, seeing, hearing, and tasting. I try to use as little passive teaching, such as lecturing, as possible.

Evaluation

The final planning step is evaluation. Evaluation refers to an ongoing examination or appraisal. While self-evaluations are useful, it is best to enlist a neutral party to evaluate results. Evaluators should be able to read and review the entire DOME process and use that information to determine whether the desired outcomes and methods used are achieving the desired objectives.

Effective Training

All trainers, educators, and trainees should know and understand the program’s objectives from the beginning. They should be able to demonstrate knowledge by reciting the objectives and being able to articulate the meaning of these clearly.

The LIMRA Training Manual states, “People learn best when there is motivation for learning, there is knowledge of progress, there is active participation in the learning, and when things are taught in the way they are to be used.” Let’s examine the implications of each of these suggestions to training.

✓ People learn best when there is motivation for learning. During recruitment and selection of docents, a written statement should be given to the applicants. This statement describes the job duties, training, and the physical and mental requirements. As training progresses, the trainee must believe that the training
offered will enable him to be successful. If so, the trainee will be motivated to diligently apply himself to that training. Training materials, therefore, should be selected with an emphasis on need-to-know, rather than nice-to-know.

✓ People learn best when there is active participation in the learning. Passive training is an oxymoron. Being subjected to a lecture is the least effective teaching and is never training. Yes, lecturing is done in schools, but it is still a poor method. And, at least in schools, note taking, textbook and supplemental readings, reciting, reporting, debating, and testing augment such teaching.

Providing people with opportunities to participate makes learning more important, more engaging, and more memorable. It also allows them to further embellish and express their enthusiasms.

✓ People learn best when things are taught the way they are to be used. Participatory training provides docents with a model for their docent work. This is not always done, however. Some trainers actually lecture trainees on how to give inquiry tours! If you would rather talk than show, rethink your program. Trainers/teachers should teach and train using the range of methods they want their trainees to employ as docents.

Remembering the Steps for Training

The first day of a training program is crucial. While we might not recall the 14th session of a program, usually we will remember the first day with great detail. Therefore, an effective trainer should set the tone for training, and convey some of the more important parts of the job, from the very first day of training.

A trainer can remember the orderly steps involved in training by using another acronym, P E S O S, or P (prepare); E (explain); S (show); O (observe); S (supervise). Let’s see how a trainers might apply this acronym on the first day of training.

✓ Prepare. On the first day, we prepare for two events: the entire training program and its first segment. Since docents work in galleries or similar exhibition environments, that is where the training should begin. Trainees should be welcomed, put at ease, and provided with written instructions about the museum’s objectives, reading and research assignments, and a schedule for the entire training program. (Written directions are far better than a long speech.) Then, the next steps of PESOS are put into play, training the trainees to make their first “baby steps” toward becoming docents.

✓ Explain. The trainer explains to trainees what he will be doing during the training session. For instance, he would tell trainees, “I will demonstrate a tour using questions, transitions, and a summary at the end. You should observe and then you will role play the same situation.” Also, explain to trainees who their audience is likely to be. (“Over 95% of our tour visitors are school group and novice viewers.”)

✓ Show. The show step is the trainer’s demonstration of what the trainees will do as docents. The trainer does not tell how to do it, he shows. He does not give out information that others could find for themselves. He does not cheat others — tour visitors or trainees — out of a valuable “ahh!” experience.

✓ Observe. This is the step where the trainer becomes an observer and encourager by having the trainees begin to act as docents. It is challenging, as the trainer must resist commenting or interrupting. Observing requires the trainer’s total concentration; he should remain focused and not be thinking of what he wants to do when the trainee stops.

The trainer might have the trainees become “one-minute” docents, having the trainees rotate as timers and stopping demonstrations after exactly one minute. The first one-minute demonstrations might be as simple as asking the trainees to introduce themselves to a fifth grade audience. Observe them and encourage them. Watch the building of confidence, communication skills, and methods as the course progresses.

✓ Supervise. Assist constructively, never destructively. To supervise means to oversee all of the trainees’ work; reading, researching, touring, and role playing. The trainer’s feedback is always non-threatening. Trainers need make few negative remarks. His most important tool is to ask the question, “If you had it to do over, what would you do differently?”

Praise in public and have conversations about possible improvements in private. The only thing better than public praise is private praise of the trainee to his spouse or friend. Also, send encouraging, motivating notes to trainee’s home. Such notes, though desired, are rarely sent. Once received, they become keepsakes.

While I, myself, do not train docents, I have used this method to train thousands of people in business, as well as volunteers in AARP and many churches. In this article, I have applied this method, which in summary is to plan with DOME and train with PESOS, to docents — volunteers who deserve an effective training program.

Bud Johnson is a docent at the Birmingham Museum of Art, past president of the Alabama Chapter of the American Society of Training and Development, and vice-chair of the National Docent Symposium Council.
Developing an Interpretive Approach

by Andrea H. Fossum

America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was dramatically transformed by new inventions and innovations in daily living and social thought that drastically altered the way we perceived ourselves and our nation’s role in the world. Satirist Mark Twain dubbed this time period “The Gilded Age,” implying there was no substance beneath the grandiose wealth and new social structure of the nation. While Twain’s view of this time had some merit, the Gilded Age can rightfully be thought of as an era in which modern America was created, a time when the social customs, technologies, and business methods ingrained in today’s American character were developed by a handful of men who deliberately shaped a new America.

Henry Morrison Flagler (1830 – 1913), founding partner of Standard Oil and developer of Florida’s east coast, was one of these men. Flagler’s career as the founding partner and legal mind behind Standard Oil provided him the necessary wealth and influence for his endeavors in Florida. In his early fifties, Flagler began building the Florida East Coast Railway from Jacksonville to Key West, linking his world-class resorts and simultaneously creating an infrastructure that supported the development of an agricultural industry, tourism industry, and the metropolitan communities that comprise South Florida today. In Palm Beach, the epicenter of the Flagler System, Flagler built Whitehall — a home to rival the mansions of his contemporaries in Newport and the Hudson Valley.

Today, Whitehall is open as the Flagler Museum with the mission to “preserve, research, and interpret Whitehall, its associated collections, and materials related to the life of Henry Morrison Flagler, as unique and important elements of Florida’s history and America’s Gilded Age.”

Defining the Interpretive Approach
When developing effective interpretation, defining the goals of the interpretive approach using the institution’s mission as a foundation is paramount. At the Flagler Museum, docent interpreters encourage visitors to consider the social, technological, and cultural forces at work during the Gilded Age using the Flagler story and Whitehall to illustrate the complexities of the time period and its impact on the world today. Interpretation should reach well beyond the show-and-tell of the objects or the perpetuation of the widely held (and erroneous) belief that Gilded Age estates were merely fantastic baubles in the empire of robber barons. Instead, historic house museums can harness the power of a place to help visitors learn about the context of the time period when the house existed and the impact of these influences on the present world.

Through effective interpretation, houses like Whitehall can be examples of Andrew Carnegie’s statement in The Gospel of Wealth, that “it is well, nay, essential, for the progress of the race that the houses of some should be homes for all that is highest and best in literature and the arts …”

Docent Training to meet Interpretive Goals
Effective docent training is crucial to the success of this interpretive approach. An effective docent
in an Historic House Museum

corps must be comprised of informed interpreters who have the appropriate skills and enthusiasm necessary to meet the institution's interpretive approach. To ensure that this is the case, an effective docent training program should focus on:

- recruiting interpreters who understand and appreciate the goals of the museum and its interpretive approach,
- training interpreters in tour management and public speaking to create a sense of confidence in working with the public,
- providing the interpreters with a broad introduction to the time period, allowing them to design a tour geared for each audience, and
- fostering a continual, individualized dialogue between the education director and every interpreter through workshops and regular evaluation.

The process begins with recruitment and applicant screening. The Flagler Museum looks for interpreters who share the enthusiasm and vision of the Museum's mission and who will benefit from the many exciting opportunities to learn about the larger issues underlying America's Gilded Age. A special recruitment brochure outlining the museum and the docent program is distributed throughout the community and given out after public speaking engagements to entice prospective interpreters. After interviewing both the education director and the chief curator. This one-day orientation outlines the basics of working in a museum, including non-profit issues, how museums are governed, and the mission of the Flagler Museum.

Interpreters attend a 60-hour training course incorporating four basic themes: tour management and public speaking, America's Gilded Age, Henry Flagler, and Whitehall and its collections. Because the Museum's interpretive approach focuses heavily on placing Flagler in the context of his time period and illustrating the importance of the Gilded Age in modern America, the docents spend several weeks becoming acquainted with the world in which Flagler lived. By understanding the larger forces at work in the culture, business, politics, society, etc. of the time, docents gain confidence and flexibility in their interpretation. This level of confidence is then translated into a tour that is not a rote speech focusing on objects and facts, but a dialogue that is specifically developed around the interests of the visitor.

Armed with a basic understanding of the time period and the house, the docent then completes his or her own tour outline with the assistance of the education director. Having docents develop their own outline rather than providing a standard script ensures that each docent's tour will have the flexibility to meet the needs of the visitors as well as communicate the docent's enthusiasm for the subject. Docents use background materials on Flagler and the Gilded Age, primary source materials from the archives, and other information concerning the collection to illustrate major ideas and themes of the Gilded Age. For example, one tour outline may highlight the

Effective docent training at any historic house museum should include instruction on tour management and public speaking, the time period of the site, the historical figure(s), and the house and collection. A broad approach to training graduates docents who feel confident and are flexible in their interaction with visitors.

photo: courtesy of the Henry Morrison Flagler Museum

Continued on the next page.
myriad of technological advancements, inventions, and innovations developed during the Gilded Age by pointing out for visitors the modern conveniences in Whitehall (indirect lighting, central heating, steel frame construction, etc.). Docents may also discuss the advent of modern business during the Gilded Age by discussing Flagler’s role as the legal mind behind Standard Oil and the development of multi-state business enterprises. Through this process, the docents convey the complex ideas of Gilded Age America using familiar objects and the Flagler story.

The ability to effectively communicate these ideas is crucial. Docent trainees engage in public speaking from the very first day of training. Each three-hour training segment is divided into three sessions, two that focus on content and one that focuses on public speaking and tour management. Every training segment incorporates either a rehearsed or impromptu public speaking activity that prepares the interpreters for different situations. Docents learn various approaches for discovering and adjusting a tour to the interests of the visitor, including the development of Socratic questions for use on tour. This practice helps docents overcome any initial misgivings they may have about speaking in front of others or being “cornered” by difficult visitors or complex questions.

Continuing education is very important to help docents perform effectively and provide quality interpretation for the museum’s visitors. Workshops for all docents focusing on new historical information and tour techniques are held periodically throughout the year. Docent trips to other museums and group viewings of movies and documentaries about the period separate fact from fiction. These group meetings provide the social environment that many volunteers seek while fulfilling the educational mission of the museum.

Perhaps the most effective tool for docent training is the tour evaluation process. This involves an ongoing commitment by the education director to work with each docent individually, accentuating strengths and identifying areas where growth is needed. By evaluating the docent’s presentation during a complete tour and then discussing various elements of the tour with the docent, the tour evaluator creates an individualized improvement program and opens a more informal and honest dialogue between the volunteer and staff that translates into a better visitor experience.

The Benefits of Interpretive Training

There are many benefits for the docents, visitors, and the museum using this approach to docent training. The most obvious is an enhanced visitor experience through more substantive tour content and an open dialogue with the docent. Docents can adjust their tour style and content to create meaning for each visitor on a tour. Visitors come to understand the symbolism and importance of these homes in American history.

Another benefit is the increased educational value of the tour. Training docents to speak intelligently about the overall time period keeps the focus on the bigger picture rather than a tour bogged down in minutia. While a decorative arts tour has a specific and valuable role in the museum field, general audiences benefit most from a tour that presents an overall appreciation of a specific time period and a deeper understanding of how American society came to be what it is today.
Making it Happen

1- Evaluate the current interpretive approach of the institution in light of its mission.

How does it support the mission? Does the current interpretive approach help lead the visitor to an understanding of substantive issues or concepts? Develop a vision statement and explain the importance of the historic site, separate from the person who lived there or its collection. How does it exemplify the time period?

2- Evaluate the current docent corps.

Why are they volunteering in your institution? Are they willing to learn new and different approaches to interpretation?

3- Evaluate the training program.

What training have the current docents received? Are they simply given a script or asked to follow more experienced docents through the museum?

4- Develop a new training program.

Docents should be trained by museum professionals. Design a program that is heavy on public speaking and tour management skills as well as instruction on the relevant time period. Only after this foundation is in place should information on the house, historic person(s), and collection be added. Docents who are confident in their speaking ability and familiar with the time period can easily converse with visitors.

5- Provide individualized feedback.

Evaluate each docent individually. Focus on their strengths and identify the areas where growth is needed. Are they good public speakers but need to stay more focused? Do they understand the time period but are challenged by applying it to the house? Working with docents individually instills a sense of trust and confidence in their interpretation.

6- Move the interpretation off-site.

The Flagler Museum's interpretive mission goes beyond the obvious house tour. The museum's website (www.flagler.org) provides additional context through linkages with other sources of information concerning the Gilded Age. The museum's Illustrated Guide uses the progressive approach to interpretation, from the Gilded Age, to information on Henry Flagler, to a discussion on Whitehall. Even the museum's membership brochures incorporate a tailored interpretive approach to convey the appropriate message to the intended audience. For example, the corporate membership brochure discusses Flagler's role in the formation of modern American business while the individual membership brochure highlights the importance of individual opportunity and initiative in America.

This approach to interpretation and docent training is not exclusive to Gilded Age mansions or National Historic Landmarks. Any historic house museum can create a meaningful experience for their visitors by clearly defining the goals of interpretation in light of the institution's mission and broadening the interpretive approach to focus on historical context rather than just on decorative arts or facts about the occupants.

With a deeper understanding of an historic site in the context of the time period in which it existed, museum goers will gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of American history and the role house museums play in furthering this understanding.

Andrea H. Fossum is the education director at the Flagler Museum in Palm Beach, Florida. She holds a Master's degree in public history and has acquired education and interpretive experience through her work at various museums in Connecticut, Tennessee, and Florida.
The museum was small, and the budget even smaller, when I undertook to write my first docent manual almost twenty years ago. The docents I had recruited all volunteered to “help” in our small town’s first and only museum. Many of the volunteers, and most of the town, had never heard the term “docent” before. One fellow asked me if docents were “baby deer.” And, the local newspaper consistently edited my recruitment articles, adding the words “tour guides” in parentheses after each reference to “docents.”

Through the intervening years, the lessons I learned while creating that first docent training manual translated well into larger venues with greater budgets. However, the best lesson for museums, historic sites, zoos, botanical gardens, and other such institutions is this—the quality of a docent manual is not a function of its cost. A good docent manual doesn’t have to be expensive.

**Content**

Good content is the core of a docent manual and costs only the time of the people preparing it. When the job is divided among various staff and volunteers, even that cost can become minimal.

The content of a docent manual might well be divided into information answering three basic questions:

✓ What is the docent’s function within the context of the institution?
✓ What is the museum’s collection policy?
✓ In what ways can the docents help visitors discover the collection?

In that first manual, I called these three sections “Getting Started,” “Finding Facts,” and “Telling the Story.”

The “Getting Started” section included general information about our museum and the docents’ role in the institution. The first page stated the museum’s mission and included the following paragraphs that placed the docents within that mission:

“In 1915, Benjamin Ives Gilman of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, first used the term ‘docent’ to identify the specially trained volunteers of their newly created education division. ‘A museum performs its complete office as it is at once gardant, monstrant, and docent,’ he wrote. He elaborated that as a museum preserves (gardant) and exhibits (monstrant), it must fulfill its duty of ‘sharpening the spiritual sight.’ It was this duty to which he gave the name docent.

“Docents for the … museum have volunteered to share their interest in history with our museum visitors, following the tradition of discovery learning by helping children make connections between the artifacts of the past and the reality they perceive today. We ‘sharpen their spiritual sight’ by allowing them to experience the past through physical contact with those objects that represent the past.’”

A list of the staff, both paid and volunteer, followed this introduction. It became more than just a list when, during training, the director, the president of the board, a curator, an exhibit technician, the manager of the gift shop, and the president of the Museum Guild all welcomed the new docents and spoke briefly to explain their individual responsibilities within the museum. Their presentations were not made in a classroom, but within their work areas, helping the new docents learn their way around the physical space of the museum, as well as the many activities that took place there.

The 8-week training schedule was also included in this first section of the manual and followed the manual’s format. Classes were divided into three sections, two in the morning and one in the afternoon.

A break between the second and third sessions for a brown-bag lunch was held in the staff lunchroom. Letting the docents and staff lunch together helped give the volunteers a sense of “belonging” and helped paid staff begin to consider the docents part of the team.

Had we been even more elaborate, this section of the manual might have included a list of museum terms; information regarding record keeping for tax purposes; the obligations, benefits, and rewards of volunteering in our program; and the evaluation process used by the supervisor of their program. A list of names, addresses, telephone numbers, and (these days) e-mail addresses for all members of the docent team is also an important addition to this section to facilitate communication and to assist docents in securing substitutes if they are unable to fulfill a day of responsibility. All of this is easily accomplished if the appropriate paid staff and volunteers are asked to contribute each of the various pages for the section.

The second section of the manual, “Finding Facts,” and the third section, “Telling the Story,” were often used together in training. “Finding Facts” included a brief history of the area our museum’s collection was drawn from and attempted to interpret. Other pages in this section gave background information about each of the exhibit areas of the museum and selected...
Useful Docent Manual

Artists from some of the exhibits. Curatorial staff, local historians, and hobbyists were asked to assist in creating the "Finding Facts" section, and classroom teachers and university professors were consulted in developing "Telling the Story." General information on each topic was made more specific by visits from guest experts, curatorial staff, and the docents' individual research projects. Brief information about questioning techniques, development of children, object analysis, and tour logistics in the third section was used in conjunction with the content information as docents were guided in developing their own tours.

For example, basic information about quilting came alive when local quilters shared their hobby, and docents were encouraged to take up needle and thread to "try their hand" at quilting. During a training session on questioning strategies, docents were encouraged to create questions from the manual's information and their own experiences that would help visitors discover aspects of our permanent exhibit of quilts they might not discover on their own.

One of our favorite questions asked children how a quilt was like a sandwich, and then followed up by asking them to offer reasons why quilts are made in three layers. (Unlike a sandwich, of course, a quilt's three layers serve to trap air and provide a warmer covering than a single-layer blanket.)

The content of a docent manual, as that of all museum publications, should represent the best standards of the institution. That means the text should be easy to access, written in a clear style that avoids jargon and complex sentence structure. It also implies that careful editing and proofreading by more than one person will be employed to ensure a good product.

**Format**

Although that first manual was created with very limited funds, most of the format was the same as those I used later, when creating more elaborate publications. Docent manuals should be enclosed in binders or notebooks, to which pages can be added or changed as needed. If guest speakers include handouts for their presentations, holes should be pre-punched so that the docents can easily add these pages to their individual manuals.

Each section of the manual should be divided or indexed in some way for ease of use. Different colors of paper may be used for pages, such as the schedule and directory, which will be referenced frequently. Pages in the first and third sections can be numbered, but the section on exhibit information may change too often for pagination to be practical.

Wide margins and/or extra pages are a good idea so that notes and ideas can be jotted down. The font chosen should be easy to read, and a one and one-half line space also increases the readability of manual text and makes space for brief notations.

**Publication**

My first manual was laboriously typed on an electric typewriter and reproduced with a copying machine whose idiosyncrasies were known only to the museum secretary. A couple of volunteers from the museum gift shop helped me to collate the books and fasten them into three-prong binders I'd bought at a back-to-school sale. We only had 10 docents, so it wasn't a monumental task. Nevertheless, a computer would have (and did later) make the job a whole lot easier.

If funds are less limited, a beautiful product could be professionally printed and place in individual ringed binders that bear the name and logo of the museum. If funds are somewhat more limited, an underwriter might be found to pay for the manual, or, as in some museums, docents can defray at least part of the cost by "purchasing" their binders or their entire manuals. Actually, however, an effective manual does not need to cost very much, and a beautiful product will not make up for poor or inaccessible contents.

I've created better-looking manuals than that first one, but none that were any more useful and well used. Small museums, science centers, zoos, historic sites, and other such institutions shouldn't let finances stand in the way of creating a book of information and enfranchisement for those people to whom they have given the responsibility of bringing their collections to life.

Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor
Planting Curiosity and Harvesting Interest

Capitalizing on Curiosity

In general, visitors go to museums to see what might be new and interesting. In other words, visitors are curious. Curiosity, according to psychologists, is an intrinsic motivator — that is, curiosity motivates people to seek and find something. What an opportunity for docents, who thrive on sharing information! The docent's job then, is to give the visitor a reason to be glad they came to their museum.

If docents present the entire stream of facts that they learned in training, however, it’s tantamount to giving a thirsty visitor a drink of water from a fire hose. Try thinking for a moment of your most memorable experience in a museum or on a tour. Was it memorable because it was a good experience or a bad experience? What made it so? A memorable experience at a museum might be memorable because it was good or because it was bad. Such an experience rests, not so much on facts shared, but on how information is presented.

Docent training, therefore, should have two components. One is learning the information, which, of course, is the basis of interpretation. The other is learning the skills of presentation — those techniques for sharing facts that satisfy visitors’ curiosity, take them a step further with some surprises, and make them glad they visited your museum.

Information

It goes without saying that the information must be adequate and accurate. In order for it to be assimilated, though, especially if the information is very unfamiliar, it needs to be clear and organized.

Categorizing information into blocks of related topics, or themes, helps people understand facts more easily. This is true whether the learner is in the classroom (including docent training), on a guided tour, or reading signs in a museum.

Presentation

Since visitors come to museums with a variety of ages, interests, backgrounds, knowledge, and learning styles, it is important that docents be aware of a variety of ways for visitors to obtain information. This helps assure that information is available in a manner that appeals to the widest variety of visitors. Not everyone wants to read signs or tour booklets; likewise, some people do not want the confinement or congestion of a guided tour.

At the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, Arizona, visitors can find information about deserts and desert plants on plant labels. They can also find information in written tour guides, on interpretive signs, on docent guided tours, at hands-on demonstration stations, and through floating “Ask Me” docents, who answer questions, show daily special blooming plants, or conduct individualized mini-presentations.

The following techniques are applicable to any of the interpretive vehicles mentioned and will help make a tour or presentation more meaningful and memorable.

They should be useful for training docents regardless of the content of your institution’s collection.

Categorizing

Every good presentation — tour, demonstration, or other — should be more than a series of isolated facts unrelated to each other. Facts, when related to a clear theme or woven into a story, have much more impact. Docents might outline the facts they learned and be challenged to find common themes or overriding ideas that will tell stories. For instance, docents at the Desert Botanical Garden have employed various themes focused on how plants (as well as animals) have physical strategies for thriving in the extremes of the desert climate. And, the plants along the trail are used to demonstrate examples of these strategies.

• Starting with Advance Organizers

Studies of visitors in museums have shown that exhibits are more meaningful and better understood if “advance organizers” precede them. In other words, by providing introductions. Setting the scene for what is to come gives visitors a context (or category) for relating to the information. Docents should be taught how to set the scene by introducing themes during their presentations or tours. They must learn how to briefly tell what main ideas their tour or demonstration will explore.

• Capitalizing on Curiosity

One method to capitalize on curiosity is to use the most interesting and meaningful objects along the way as examples of the facts. For example, the saguaro cactus is a very interesting plant that most visitors to the desert are curious about. It can be used to demonstrate the important strategy of succulence (plants storing water). Visitors are fascinated by these giant cacti and “thirst” for more information about how they survive in the desert. This curiosity opens the door for docents to share other meaningful facts. Help your docents discover or decide which specimens or objects can be most useful to reinforcing their themes.
\* Asking Questions

Asking visitors for their observations or thoughts helps them focus their attention on specifics. It gets them involved with the information, without the docent doing all the work, and at their own interest level. The facts then are more meaningful. Ask for observations. "What do you notice about this giant cactus?" is a very different question than asking for facts. "What type of cactus is this?" or "Which bird makes its home in the hole?" is the information visitors want to learn from you! It is not something they can divine from looking. Asking for facts as opposed to observations or comparisons makes questioning an uncomfortable guessing game. Teaching docents how to distinguish between these two forms of questioning, and how to employ those that are more "open-ended" and less knowledge-dependent is essential.

Asking for opinions, such as "what was your favorite object or favorite thing you learned today that you didn’t know before?" is a great way to discover what visitors are taking away with them. Docents should be trained to ask summarizing questions to learn what they are teaching. Asked in a friendly, non-threatening way, such questions encourage visitors to review the tour and remember more of the facts, in addition to allowing the docent to know if key points were understood.

\* Using the Senses

Sensory experiences are perfect opportunities for creating curiosity and then resolving it. Docents should learn how to stimulate learning beyond visual input. For example, a docent might ask, "How do you think that prickly-pear cactus fruit might taste?" and then offer the visitor a sample of candy made from the fruit. Real sensory opportunities such as smell, touch, taste, and hearing are best, but using imagination is a reasonable substitute. Imagination can be used very effectively with certain dramatic objects that can not be touched.

\* Employing analogies and comparisons

Relating the unfamiliar to the familiar makes facts more memorable. For example, rather than telling visitors that a cactus is 40 feet tall and 150 years old, one might say, "That cactus is taller than a three story house and is older than your great-grandpa." This is especially useful for younger children who have little concept of time. Practice using analogies and comparisons during training. It will help docents explain the "facts" about objects, and provide visitors with a memorable vision.

\* Telling Stories

Like using analogies, telling stories puts a personal face on information. People love relevant stories. They are almost always memorable and often lots of fun.

Building these techniques into docent training makes docents more effective teachers and makes sharing the facts more enjoyable for both visitors and docents. If the whole idea is too overwhelming, then start with one technique at a time until your docents are comfortable with it, and then try adding another. You will find capitalizing on curiosity very rewarding.

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Nancy Cutler has been the Interpretive Coordinator at the Desert Botanical Garden, in Phoenix, AZ, doing docent training and refining interpretive techniques for the past nine years.
Coaching, mentoring, and other cooperative teaching strategies encourage docents to work and share ideas with their peers. At the Morris Museum, docent trainees lead their first tours in pairs, choosing as their partner either a docent or a fellow trainee. Peers provide technical feedback to each other and, therefore, extend the learning experience.

The insights into docent training provided by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers's research into teacher training are instructive and invaluable. Their model for effective training offers a fresh perspective to the structure of docent training programs. By strengthening docent training, we can increase the skill and confidence of our docents who serve as our museums' primary interface with our visitors. The result is a richer experience for our volunteers and visitors alike.

Patricia Moore Shaffer has been Curator of Education at the Morris Museum of Art since 1996. Prior to this, she served as Head of Programs and Interpretation at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection (1994-1996), Public Programs Officer at the Art Gallery St. Thomas-Elgin (1989-1993), and Education Officer at the Chatham Cultural Centre (1988-1989).

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