Team Evaluations

Evaluating: The Key to Excellent Programs

Portfolios Offer a Better Perspective

Why, How, and When to Evaluate

Putting Evaluation First

Confessions of an Evaluator

Evaluate The Docent Educator
Why, How, and When to Evaluate

There are no two ways about it, every educator should be evaluated. Regardless of whether the educator is a paid staff member or a volunteer, the importance of an educator's responsibilities, and the amount of contact an educator has with students and the general public, require that he or she be evaluated on a regular and frequent basis.

Unfortunately, when some people hear that they are to be evaluated, they panic. They presume that the purpose for evaluating their performance is to highlight their vulnerabilities and shortcomings. Staff members can grow nervous and sullen, and volunteers often rebel and even threaten to quit. This is both regrettable and very problematic as no one charged with the responsibility of teaching and interacting with the public should perform such duties without the benefit of review and assessment.

Indeed, evaluations should be considered a “benefit” to the person evaluated. When conducted properly and positively, evaluations help fine tune an educator's performance. By revealing how the “actual” relates to the “ideal,” evaluations show us how to go from where things are to where they are supposed to be. In other words, evaluations help to make us better at what we enjoy doing.

Instituting a system of evaluation requires an element of trust on the part of all participants. The evaluator must understand that the purpose of evaluating should never be denigration. He must use the evaluation to provide direction and positive assistance. And, those who are evaluated must understand that such supervision is both the right and responsibility of every institution conducting public programs. No one, whether staff or volunteer, should be allowed to have a totally free hand when it comes to representing an institution or teaching its visitors.

Unfortunately, evaluations are so controversial that few museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, or gardens employ this valuable tool with their docent programs. In fact, evaluations are so controversial that several of the staff members and volunteers who were approached to write about evaluations for this issue were unwilling to do so. They did not want to rekindle the tumult that took place within their institutions when the idea of evaluating docents was put forward.

What is an Evaluation?

An evaluation is a constructive method of assessment. It is not a test, but a systematic way of measuring performance and effectiveness against a consistent standard.

Evaluating offers a uniform way of assessing whether an institution's goals and objectives are being achieved efficiently and effectively. The purpose of evaluating, therefore, is three fold: to clarify institutional expectations; to hone skills and performance in a manner consistent with institutional expectations; and to increase job effectiveness.

Evaluating is most decidedly a two-sided proposition. To make sense, an evaluation must have clearly defined standards to measure against. In this way, it places pressure upon an institution to succinctly summarize and express its expectations. In addition, by requiring an institution to make its goals and objectives explicit, evaluating should prompt an institution to consider whether its training programs and resources for professional development provide educators with the opportunities needed for meeting and exceeding those standards.

Self-evaluation

The simplest type of evaluation should also be the one that occurs most frequently — that is, self-evaluation. Self-evaluation can be accomplished in many ways, from personal reflection through the use of checklists and forms. Regardless of how it is accomplished, self-evaluation should become an habitual part of one's touring responsibilities and time should be allocated for completing it.

*Ask a summarizing question of your visitors. Toward the conclusion of your tour, ask visitors a question that requires them to summarize what they have learned. For instance, you might ask, "What are you most likely to remember about your visit, today?" Listen carefully to your visitors' responses. They tell a great deal about what you've taught.

Hopefully, their answers will reflect the theme (or "big idea") of your tour. For instance, if you were teaching third graders about different forms of transportation, you might be delighted by answers such as, “Travel long ago was much slower and more difficult than it is today.” - or - "When cars were invented, everything changed." If, on the other hand, these same students focused on small details, like the date that your Conestoga wagon was built or the name of the first automobile built in Los Angeles, you may wish to rethink the amount of time and energy you devote to such incidental information.
• **Personal reflection.** After touring, take a few moments to consider how you felt the tour went. What actually happened? What did you learn that you might apply to future touring situations?

How did you perceive your overall performance? Did you have enough information about the objects exhibited to feel competent and comfortable while teaching?

What was your tour theme?

How did your introduction inform visitors about the theme of the tour?

How was the theme reflected in the way you examined objects at each stop along the tour?

Do you know how to teach at the grade or experience level of the audience? Did the audience remain attentive throughout the tour or did their attention begin to wane at certain times? Did you get active involvement from the audience?

How was the pace of the tour? Did anything happen during the tour to throw you off kilter? What did your visitors seem to enjoy most? What worked well enough that you might want to repeat it with other groups? What didn’t work and should be revised or re-examined before being used again?

How might you improve your teaching performance? What other information or resources might make your teaching more successful?

• **Individual checklists or forms.** The supervising staff member or governing docent council might develop a personal evaluation checklist or form to help guide and formalize the self-evaluation process. These forms could be filled out at the conclusion of each tour or touring day.

The personal evaluation checklist or form would accomplish the same thing as personal reflection, only using a structured format to formalize and guide the docent through the self-evaluation process. For many people, having a structure ensures that the self-evaluation process will take place on a consistent basis.

**Peer Observation**

“Peer evaluation” can be very dicey. Just the idea of one docent evaluating another can become distinctly personal. Many docents do not want to receive critical feedback from their fellow volunteers and comrades. And, most docents find it difficult to critique their neighbors, team mates, or social friends.

Peer observation, on the other hand, is a process by which one docent observes another docent. The observing docent listens and looks for some specific event. Often times that event reflects an area of concern to the teaching docent, such as asking open-ended questions or listening to visitors rather than speaking over them.

So, in the examples mentioned above, an observing docent might record the number of open-ended questions asked by the teaching docent at each stop along a tour. Or, the observing docent might make a record of every time the teaching docent cuts a visitor off while the visitor is talking.

**Group evaluation**

Docents who tour as a team on the same day might undertake evaluations as a group. Following their tours, the group might sit down together and compare their experiences. During group evaluations, they would discuss both their...
minds in motion

Why, How, and When to Evaluate

Continued from previous page.

triumphs and their tribulations aloud. They would learn if other docents had similar touring experiences, and they might share ways to teach more productively and handle situations effectively.

Discussing their perceptions about the mood and behavior of a throng of school kids can help docents with their self-evaluation process as well. Did the other docents feel that these students were distracted, or was it just me? Did the rest of the docents find the students to be ill prepared, or was it just me? Did my fellow docents get terrific participation, or was it just me?

Group evaluations help docents validate their experiences and, when need be, re-evaluate their perceptions. They can also be a route toward practical solutions to common problems, by encouraging docents to network among themselves for teaching techniques, activities, and ideas.

Supervisory evaluation

Evaluations conducted by the staff member in charge of, and responsible for, the docent program can take place at any time, but usually take place at regularly prescribed intervals. Such supervisory evaluations offer docents an opportunity to receive the kind of personalized attention they deserve. It is a time when docents can learn how supervisors view their knowledge of content, teaching techniques, understanding of audiences, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and so forth.

Supervisors who conduct evaluations should use a standard set of measures with all similar types of docents, and these measures should be shared with docents prior to the time of evaluation. For instance, all first-year docents would be told at the beginning of their training program that they will be evaluated before they will be allowed to tour. Also, the supervisor would share with docents the criteria used to assess competence and readiness for touring.

Supervisory evaluations can range in type and formality. The supervisor might occasionally follow tours unannounced, and give informal feedback to the docent who conducted the lesson. More formal evaluations should take place with advance notice to the docent, and with time scheduled for an in-depth, follow-up conversation when the supervisor can discuss his or her observations and the docent can respond and ask questions.

Docent evaluation of the program

It is only right that docents be given an opportunity to evaluate the docent program. At least once a year, docents should be permitted to evaluate the supervision, content, and character of the docent program, and to request the support they believe is needed to make them more successful.

As mentioned earlier, the process of evaluation ought to be a two-way proposition. Docents should be given a chance to express their feelings about the conduct of the docent program, the quality of the training sessions and their content,
the appropriateness of the touring techniques taught, personal attitudes, available resource materials, and other facets of the program that either contribute to, or hinder, their individual success as an educator.

Docent evaluation of their institution's program can be accomplished in an anonymous fashion, using checklists, forms, or other such devices, or can be done in open, roundtable-like discussions. It seems preferable to do both, however, as anonymous evaluations allow docents to share thoughts they might be reluctant to share in a group situation, and the group dynamic might stimulate comments that individuals would not think to bring up.

In conclusion

Docents should be told when they are recruited that evaluations will occur and how often they will take place. Active docents in existing programs should be informed of the evaluation process at the beginning of their training and/or touring season.

Docents who have served for years without the benefit of evaluation should be asked for their assistance in instituting a process of evaluation. They should have input into the criteria used for evaluation so that they are unfranchised, and do not feel that this is being used to "weed them out." (In fact, evaluations should not be used for "weeding," but rather for "feeding" docents.) If docents become alarmed at the prospect, conversations about their fears must take place, but with the knowledge that the issue being discussed is how to evaluate, not whether to evaluate.

Presumably, the supervisor of the docent program is evaluated by the museum hierarchy, and that staff member's evaluation will, in some measure, be based upon the performance of each and every docent who serves in the program. It is only right and proper, therefore, that the staff member have an opportunity to give input into each and every docent and to discuss performance.

Evaluations will lose their "fear factor" if they take place frequently and become a normal part of the program. Perhaps it is best to conclude by saying, as far as evaluations are concerned—the sooner the better and the more the merrier.

Alan Gartenhaus
Publishing Editor

minds in motion workshops
Participatory workshops for docents and staff held, on-site, at your institution!

- **Interactive Teaching** - a general introduction to inquiry learning and participatory teaching techniques. Alan Gartenhaus, instructor.

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For further information write The Docent Educator, or call us at (808) 885-7728.
Putting Evaluation First

How do you know you’ve given a successful tour? Do you wait to take stock until the class has rolled away in a cloud of diesel? No one bumped into the Henry Moore and sent it crashing into pieces? Little fingers didn’t stray and leave prints on the family portraits? The leopards didn’t make mad, passionate (and very noisy) love in front of the kindergarten class? While these are all indicators of success to some degree, there are other keys to tour success in museums, historic sites, zoos, and science centers that start at the beginning.

If a tour is to be more than entertainment, if knowledge is to be transferred, docents might do well to take a page from a classroom teacher’s lesson plan book. Behavioral objectives, sometimes called performance objectives, are key components of a teacher’s lesson plan. Combined with Benjamin Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, a tour plan that starts with objectives has a better chance of reaching a successful conclusion.

By definition, a behavioral objective has three parts: student (or visitor) behavior, conditions of performance, and performance criteria. In other words, a behavioral objective is a clear description of your expectations for the student. It identifies the skill or knowledge to be gained from the lesson, the action the student is able to perform to indicate that he or she has gained the skill or knowledge, under what circumstances, and how well it is to be done.

For example, a historic log house tour might include this behavioral objective: While viewing the main room of the log house, the student will locate and identify fuels used by the original occupants for heat, light, and cooking.

Bloom’s Taxonomy

- The ability to recall information, as demonstrated in the sample objective, is termed the Knowledge level. Knowledge is the most basic of the thinking skills identified in Bloom’s Taxonomy. Also at this level, in addition to locating and identifying, students might be asked to remember, memorize, or recognize data. At this level, the instructor might ask a student to describe something he/she has seen. Questions at this beginning level usually begin with who, what, when, where, or how.

- The next level of thinking, which Bloom describes as the Comprehension level, asks students to interpret data, to translate it from one medium to another, or to organize and select facts and ideas. The instructor might ask a student to describe something “in your own words” or to retell a story or event. A behavioral objective that evaluates a student’s comprehension in a zoo tour could be: In an oral discussion, the student will compare and contrast the characteristics of domestic house cats and the lions in the zoo’s African Plains exhibit.

- At the Application level, students solve problems or apply information, facts, rules, and principles to produce some result. A question at this level might begin: “How is ... related to ...?” or “Why is ... important?” At a nature center, a behavioral objective that allows the student to “complete a scavenger hunt during which time he/she will classify at least 5 plants as gymnosperms or
Students working at the **Analysis** level are able to separate a whole into its component parts, to show how something is put together, and to identify motives. An instructor could ask students to describe the parts of something, to outline or diagram, or to compare and/or contrast objects. In an art museum, an analysis level behavioral objective could require: “After examining irregular shapes in a painting, the student will explain what he/she thinks the shapes represent.”

At the **Synthesis** level, students do just the opposite of analysis — they combine ideas or objects to create something new or predict outcomes. Students may be asked “What would happen if you combined ... ?” or “What do you think would happen next if ... ?” A history museum behavioral objective at the synthesis level could say: “The student will work with a team of his/her classmates to rearrange the museum exhibits in chronological order on a blank floor plan of the museum.”

At Bloom’s highest level of thought, **Evaluation**, students make decisions, form opinions, and make judgments. They can resolve controversies or differences of opinion. At this level, they are asked “What do you think about ... ?” and “What criteria did you use to form your opinion?” In any museum, a behavioral objective that requires the student to select the object or exhibit he/she likes best and defend the choice has reached the evaluation level.

Once behavioral objectives are written, developing tours becomes a simple matter. Each objective guides you in selecting artifacts, exhibits, and activities that allow the visitor to achieve the objective. And, evaluation is just as simple, because with behavioral objectives to guide you, you can easily see if your visitors accomplished what you set out to teach.

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Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor
Evaluating

The Key to Excellent Programs

Right from the start, evaluation played a key role in developing Discovering Local History, a collaborative project of the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum and the public schools of Wethersfield, Connecticut. Classroom teachers, local journalists and historians, and museum staff worked in an on-going partnership to shape a successful local history program for the community's elementary, middle, and high school students.

By the time of the American Revolution, Wethersfield was a thriving commercial center, home to wealthy merchants and a citizenry strongly supportive of the revolutionary cause. Generations of Wethersfield citizens embraced the community's history and, beginning in 1914, sought to preserve the historic nature of the village. Today, Old Wethersfield constitutes the largest historic district in Connecticut with 200 buildings dating before 1850. Located at the heart of the district is the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum.

Discovering Local History was designed to introduce Wethersfield social studies teachers to the use of primary source materials and to the wealth of local historical and archival resources; to develop instructional materials and corresponding teacher manuals for use in conjunction with classroom instruction and visits to local historical sites; and to become an integral part of both social studies and art curricula in grades three, five, and eight, and the American history and Wethersfield Studies courses in grades ten, eleven, and twelve.

Evaluation and Program Development

Throughout the project, evaluation helped shape and refine Discovering Local History. Classroom teachers were involved in writing the curriculum. They selected and evaluated the materials and activities that would be incorporated into their classrooms. The museum staff acted as a resource, proving background materials for teachers and students as the curriculum evolved. They answered questions, conducted tours of the houses for teachers, provided methods for studying artifacts, and provided appropriate primary documents. The result was that the teachers felt ownership of the curriculum and were very enthusiastic about it, the key to successful translation to students.

In addition, the resources of the community were used as much as possible. The local press was invited to participate in the field trips and word soon spread that Wethersfield students were exploring their history. This hit a responsive chord in a community proud of its history. Members of the community came forward to donate books and pictures, speak to the students, and share personal experiences, and to help the students begin an archive of oral history projects.

Today, as the project continues to develop, teachers evaluate each aspect of the program. After each field trip, teachers are provided with an evaluation form to respond to specific aspects of the program. It is crucial to the successful evolution of the program for museum staff to respond constantly to evaluation in order to ensure growth and vitality and to instill confidence, respect, and cooperation between participating institutions. Also, the museum director and director of education attend school staff meetings, provide material of interest to the classroom teachers, organize a parent/student open house at the museum where student art projects are displayed, and offer opportunities for continued professional development for the teachers.

A bi-annual newsletter from the museum to the Discovering Local History teachers also serves as an evaluative instrument. It offers opportunities for teachers from the various schools to share successes and serves as an incubator for new ideas for the project.

Elementary Level Activities

In its current form Discovering Local History begins in the third grade with programs about colonial decorative arts, architecture, foodways, and textiles. Third grade teachers have developed the Wethersfield history component of the social studies curriculum. The teachers and museum educators have produced thirty lessons on local history that include the natural environment, native people, early European settlers, and daily life in the colonial era. The lessons are presented in the school classroom, the art room, and on location at the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum and other sites in Old Wethersfield.

The third grade component contains hands-on activities such as carding, spinning, and weaving wool in the textile lesson; sculpting a clay
model of the ball and claw foot of a Chippendale chair in the decorative arts lessons; and constructing cardboard models of gable and gambrel-roofed houses in the architecture lessons. The primary document in the third grade is a probate inventory, modified for third graders and used to classify and research items associated with tasks of daily life.

For the fifth grade, the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum created a tour of the Buttolph-Williams House to emphasize the historical setting of the Elizabeth George Speare novel The Witch of Blackbird Pond. Also, tours of the Webb House, the Wethersfield meeting house, and the Ancient Burying Ground were developed to highlight certain themes of the James Collier novel My Brother Sam is Dead. Fifth grade teachers created a series of lessons to use with the two novels as part of a literature-based social studies curriculum spanning the colonial and revolutionary periods. The fifth grade programs use both objects and documents, including portraits, political cartoons, tavern signs, gravestones, and newspapers, as well as historic buildings and landscapes. Especially important is the use of personal letters that engage students’ attention and emotions as they study people and events of their town.

For the art curriculum, elementary art instructors created several projects to complement and reinforce classroom social studies activities. For example, student art projects include dyeing, painting tavern signs, creating and decorating menus from the taverns, and drawing colonial architecture. Art instruction and the resulting student projects provide a critical dimension to students’ understanding of Wethersfield history.

Secondary Level Activities

Plans are underway for the middle school component, and an elective option is available for grades ten, eleven, and twelve. At the secondary level, Discovering Local History materials developed jointly by high school and museum staff are used in the Wethersfield Studies course, a popular high school elective. This is an interdisciplinary course based on literature and integrated components of social studies, English, and art. On-location classes include architectural walking tours, house tours, thematic burying ground programs, and hands-on activities such as weaving.

With the program well underway, the museum’s and the Wethersfield Public Schools’ strong commitment to Discovering Local History continues to be a factor in its success. Well-established lines of communication based on formal and informal evaluation provide the basis for the ongoing development of the program. The project is a source of pride for the museum, the schools, and the community.

Gail Potter is Director and Phyllis Greenberg is Director of Education at the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum in Wethersfield, Connecticut. Both have had teaching experience in public schools prior to their careers at the museum. This article is based on their presentation at the Annual Conference of the American Association for State and Local History in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1996.
Evaluating Intelligence

Many educational researchers and authorities are seeking to re-evaluate what it means to be smart. They are warning that childhood reading and IQ tests measure only a small aspect of the intellect and don't predict success in later life. Among the apostles of this new approach are Robert Sternberg, a Yale psychology professor who takes such things as creativity and practical intelligence into account, and psychologist Daniel Goleman, author of the 1995 best seller

*Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (Bantam). Their newer definitions of intelligence are not summed up by test scores, be they from an IQ or scholastic aptitude test.

The trend to redefine intelligence came to public attention a decade ago, when Harvard University professor Howard Gardner wrote *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Gardner's 10th anniversary edition (Basic) reviews his "multitude" of intelligences: linguistic, used in reading and writing; logical-mathematical, used in logical reasoning; spatial, used in reading a map or in architectural design; musical, used in singing or playing an instrument; bodily-kinesthetic, used in dancing and sports; interpersonal, used in relating to others; intrapersonal, used in understanding ourselves; and a new one — naturalist intelligence, the ability to draw on features of the natural world to solve problems, used by cooks, farmers, and florists among others.

Re-evaluating Credentials

Sister Wendy Beckett is an English nun who has emerged as Britain's most popular art critic. And, with her appearance on U.S. public television stations, Sister Wendy is gaining a following in the United States.

Beginning on Sunday, September 7, 1997, PBS will premiere *Sister Wendy's Story of Painting* in the Mobil Masterpiece Theatre time slot. Not too shabby for someone who is self-taught in the realm of art!

Sister Wendy's great talent seems to lie in her ability to bring to life the paintings she analyzes. Though some mainstream critics deride her academic shortcomings, calling her comments simplistic, few dispute her command of analogy and metaphor. In addition, Sister Wendy has a wonderful, indeed essential, ability to keep her religious bias distinct from her criticism.

Art historian Robin Simon, editor of Britain's distinguished art review *Apollo*, is quoted as saying, "The nice thing about her is that she doesn't proselytize for the church. She proselytizes for art."

David Barrie, head of the National Art Collections Fund, Britain's leading visual arts charity, says of Sister Wendy, "She's one of the most intelligent and penetrating critics we've got, and is not playing academic games. She wants to reach a much wider audience that she believes, I think quite correctly, is hungry for someone to guide them through (art's) complexities."

"So many people seem to me to be shut up, through no fault of their own..." Sister Wendy states. "They have anxieties about money, relationships, jobs. They feel like they are in prison. I want to say to them, 'It's an open prison. You can look out at beauty.' The woman in the supermarket with her anxieties feels, 'Art is not part of my life.' And I want to show her that it is!"
The idea of peer review began after the chair of our education council attended the National Docent Symposium in 1995 and realized that the evaluation of volunteers is happening in many museums. After digging through files from past years, we found that about 10 years ago a task force of docents met a number of times to explore the subject of peer evaluation. After much work and many meetings, this task force abandoned the idea for reasons that are unclear. With the full support from the education staff, the idea for peer review was recently resurrected. Notes from the previous task force were reworked and updated to fit the current docent programs. They seemed to be full of wonderful approaches to the concept. They were then presented to the education council to try for one year on a voluntary basis. Many docents felt it was a good idea; however, many volunteers were strongly negative. In fact, it seemed to be so hot and divisive that the idea was again abandoned. For that reason, please do not print our names, the name of the museum, or its location used if you publish this note.

More than “Politically Correct”

The appropriate use of language to address or describe people with disabilities is more than just politically correct, it is both sensitive and respectful. In a new text, entitled Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design, Janice Majewski reminds us to evaluate our references.

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<th>YES</th>
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<td>People with disabilities</td>
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<td>People who are deaf or hard of hearing</td>
<td>The hearing impaired, deaf-mute</td>
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<td>People who are blind or have low vision</td>
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<td>Wheelchair users</td>
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<td>People with mobility impairments</td>
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<td>People with cognitive disabilities</td>
<td>The retarded, the mentally deficient</td>
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<td>People with mental illness</td>
<td>Schizophrenic (as a generic), the insane</td>
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<tr>
<td>People with learning disabilities</td>
<td>Dyslexic (as a generic), the retarded</td>
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Should your institution be re-evaluating its educational programming for people with disabilities, consider securing a copy of Part of Your General Public is Disabled, the 93-page manual and 23-minute videotape developed by Janice Majewski, offering practical suggestions on how to effectively assist visitors with disabilities in museums, historic sites, zoo, parks, and gardens. This training package is available for sale through the Smithsonian Institution only. The entire package may be purchased for $80. To order, contact: The Office of the Assistant Secretary for the Arts and Humanities, Arts and Industries Building, Room 1410, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20650, or call (202) 786-2492 (voice) (202) 786-2414 (TDD).
Portfolios Offer a Better Perspective

Individuals respond differently to evaluations. Some of us use a positive judgment as license to maintain the status quo: the if-I'm-already-good-why-try-to-improve mentality. On the other hand, while some of us may regard a “negative” evaluation as a unique opportunity to learn and to grow, more of us probably react with self-doubt and lowered self-esteem or even hostility and defensiveness. We might even quit!

Fortunately, those of us who evaluate can shape a number of factors that will result in a positive outcome for the individual, the program, and the institution. But, in order to do so, we need to change how we think about evaluations.

Instead of thinking of “an evaluation” as a single entity, we should explore tools or methods as components in a continual process of learning and program revision. No single benchmark of achievement in this ongoing process should be viewed as “the final word.” Instead, the evaluator should use a variety of assessment methods to help him or her discern patterns of strength and weakness, so that training can be designed to address individual needs and broad trends.

The docent should be made to understand that his or her success and worth does not rest with the isolated tour evaluation survey instrument.

How to Evaluate

In the field of education, there is a movement toward “Portfolio” assessment. Historically used in visual arts contexts, this method is finding broad application in other disciplines. Traditionally, the portfolio emphasized an end product in that it was an accumulation of finished pieces, ideally showing a progression from earlier to later work. The newer definition of a portfolio has been expanded, encouraging the inclusion of samples of all that informs the educational process. A docent’s “portfolio” or file might include preparatory work such as outlines or notecards, a record of attendance at training sessions, anecdotal observations by the docent coordinator, notes from meetings with the docent, the docent’s “docent journal,” self-evaluations, peer-evaluations, tests (in some programs), videos of the docent “in action,” written evaluations from tour groups, thank-you notes from visitors, and more.

This assessment model emphasizes learning as a non-linear process with many interconnected kinds of achievements. By using a portfolio assessment, evaluators are better able to discern and respond to nuances of strengths and weaknesses over time.

Another trend in general education assessment is toward “authentic” assessment. Authentic assessments require an individual to demonstrate an actual competency rather than the ability to answer questions about the competency.

Docent programs have been using authentic assessment for a long time.

Joan Maccari is a docent at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. She, and other educators, deserve evaluations that are comprehensive, and that take a variety of variables into account.

by Betsy Gough-DiJulio
variety of important issues should be included as
only one component of the docent’s “portfolio” or file.

What to Evaluate

What to evaluate is very closely linked with how to evaluate when employing the portfolio assessment model. Keep in mind that the point is not to “pass” or “fail” the docent, but to track his or her development in order to better provide the most relevant training experiences.

Analyzing the docent’s outline or notecards for a tour — especially when compared with those from other tours — provides important understanding about how the docent prepares: how he or she processes, condenses, and structures content. Anecdotal observations recorded by the docent coordinator may provide insight into the docent’s preferences in terms of age of visitor, tour format, and types of objects/exhibitions.

For instance, based purely on anecdotal observation, I recently gained important understanding about a docent: she learns best when the content and format is modeled for her, and she resists tour formats which require that she adhere closely to structured time allotments for a variety of guided-looking tasks. These insights provided me with important keys concerning how best to work with her in docent training.

Notes from meetings or conferences with a docent provide opportunities for both the docent and coordinator to discuss issues that might never be addressed through written assessment instruments. Reading docent journal entries and self-evaluations may reveal much about the docent’s “comfort zones” and perceived strengths and weaknesses in relation to different types of groups, activities, and subject matter.

Written tests most often assess factual knowledge and understanding, though they may be designed in such a way as to assess skills and attitudes. A video of a docent conducting tours is a relatively objective demonstration of competencies and skills such as discipline, crowd and voice control, and facility with the inquiry method of teaching. Written evaluations from tour groups offer an indication of whether a given tour met the group’s needs in the opinion of the person(s) completing the survey. However, this individual may have had unrealistically high — or low — expectations and may or may not be constructive with his or her criticism. Thank you notes or cards from grateful visitors are an indication of what was memorable to the participants about a tour, often especially in the realm of affective learning.

Putting the Evaluations to Work

This wealth of information can only provide valuable feedback if the docent coordinator takes the time to analyze the data, shares the results with the docent, and uses the information for continual improvement. When handled as an on-going educational process, evaluation becomes a way of sustaining long and productive docent-coordinator relationships.

However, from time-to-time, the process may also make evident the need to terminate the relationship. “Total Quality Management” philosophy tells us that generally when organizations have problems, the culprit is a system rather than an individual. So, conflict resolution should begin with an examination of the “system.”

If trouble-shooting at the system level does not bring about a satisfactory outcome, the problem may, indeed, lie with the individual. Some grievances can be successfully corrected. Others, due to personality, temperament, attitude, biases, or other factors over which the docent coordinator has little control, may prove that an individual is not a satisfactory “match” for being an docent in your institution. If that is the case, then the docent coordinator must be prepared to take appropriate measures. A portfolio description of the individual’s education progress makes even this unpleasant task more objective and, consequently, less emotional and easier for all concerned.

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Confessions of an Evaluator

by Jane Anne Young

Years ago the idea of evaluation brought fear and trepidation into the hearts of most docents in the Bayly Art Museum education program. Docents trembled and shook when informed that the chairman of education was going to “watch” their tours. These experiences helped me as director of education to develop a more “humane” approach to the process of evaluating. Evaluation should be fun even though it may at times involve some painful truths.

All tours are different and have different circumstances. Tours at the Bayly have no set formula or facts to impart. Often, a visitor’s response will lead the entire tour into a totally new area. Many docents say that they never got to this question or that painting because so much was going on with one work of art. However, I would rather see a meaningful dialogue between our visitors and one work of art than racing through six objects without a getting a genuine response.

Once, after what appeared to me to be a great tour, an experienced docent complained, “But I never told them anything.”

I replied, “That is, of course, the point. They figured it out for themselves.”

On another occasion a docent stood in the midst of a group of adults who were earnestly arguing the merits of contemporary realism with each other. She merely smiled and interjected a word here and there. This is what I look and listen for.

Evaluation is the glue that helps to bond and secure a successful education program. Frequent evaluation of docents on tour contributes to the professionalism of a docent staff. Docents know that in order to best serve our visitors, to enable them to learn and enjoy, we must consistently work on all aspects of our tours. It is important to not only recognize the strengths and weaknesses of each docent but also to be aware of the challenges of tour themes and group types.

Often, evaluation is a subjective exercise dependent on criteria that cannot be written down or explained, but which may be purely intuitive. I have developed what may appear to be an informal evaluation system but, in my opinion, is one that complements our technique of “inquiry” tours, which are individually designed to reflect each group’s needs. The Bayly docents are now so comfortable with this system that they have given me a brass cowbell to alert them to my presence in the galleries. They are also used to seeing a pair of red boots sticking out from a gallery entrance as I unsuccessfully try to be inconspicuous.

All docents complete a course in museum education, which I teach each semester. Docent education continues in monthly sessions and in special workshops as needed. In order to work with a docent who demonstrates potential, but who doesn’t seem to completely understand touring, I ask the person to develop one segment of a tour. This allows for the docent to concentrate on the preparation of a smaller and more precise area. In addition, this allows me to place up to three docents in one tour, where I can observe them all.

Upon completion of the museum education course, all new docents give a segment of a sample tour before their peers, which is evaluated by me and the whole group for positive feedback. Experienced docents also demonstrate segments of tours and tour methodology to the new docent class. This exposes new docents to the process of evaluation, as we discuss the segments together, and gives them the benefit of the “older” docents’ valuable experiences.

New docents-in-training are required to observe one tour per week. They report on good questions and good responses. This has proven to be one of the single most effective ways of teaching new docents effective touring.

As director of education, I evaluate segments of all tours and, in particular, all new docent tours. I am listening or looking for the following:

1. Visitor voices vs. docent voices - who’s talking?

2. Good leading questions and responses

3. Follow-ups to visitor responses; incorporating responses in further looking

4. Praise and appropriate acknowledgements for responses

5. Bridges or transitions from art work to art work and from gallery to gallery

6. Connections to previously discussed art
7. Introduction - critical to establish rapport and let visitors know how and what will happen on tour

8. Evaluative and premise questions

9. Tone of voice and flexibility - smiles and ability to “roll with the punches”

10. Sense of comfort with group and the ideas of the tour

11. Appropriate language for age - (A wonderful docent once said “hot dog!” as praise to a group of middle schoolers; they thought she was prehistoric.)

12. Level and language of questions (My least favorite start with “what about … ?” and generally lead nowhere. My favorites are “why?” and “compare and contrast” because they connect the visitor in so many ways.)

13. Modeling questions

14. Windups, conclusions, summaries.

A Few “Nots”

I am not looking for recitation of information, statements, dates, or explanations. I am not listening for docent voice. I am not looking for certain information to be covered. I am not looking for anecdotes or pontifical performances, which may be entertaining but are not transferable learning experiences.

When possible I evaluate out of the sight of the docent and group, as I believe it can change the visitors’ response as well as the docent’s reactions if someone outside the group is obviously listening. Sometimes, I will evaluate the same station (area of a tour) as presented by three different docents, each of whom has come from a different station, given a different introduction, and created a different bridge based on the art she has previously used. Differences may also be the result of the makeup of the group or the presence of parents or teachers.

After the tour, the docent and I meet to review the tour. I ask the docent to tell me what he or she thought were the best and the worst aspects of the tour and why. We discuss how the next tour could be made more successful, what questions were really good this time, and why Prase and appreciation are important to docents. Every tour has something that goes well.

I try to remember that it is not necessarily easy to provide inquiry tours. It is much easier to tell visitors everything you know and what they should think. When tours are truly a disaster, and they are on rare occasions, we need to consider how the docent can be assisted and praised for trying without giving her the impression that it was a satisfactory performance. I have made the mistake of being too honest with new docents that I believed were tough...
Effective teachers constantly self-evaluate and are, therefore, more aware of what works. Docent Judi Simpson has learned that her teaching is more effective with youngsters when she plants herself on the floor, along with them, and animates ideas about the art with her body. Photo: the Bayly Art Museum, University of Virginia

enough to take it and lost them. Evaluation needs to be a combination of tact and humor.

Generally, good docents know when they succeed and when they don't. They are often harder on themselves than I am on them. We (I still do provide tours regularly) all have bad tours and there is nothing worse, just as there is no elation like a good tour.

Evaluation can also come from other docents who observe the tour, in addition to forms completed by teachers and visitors. We perform yearly self-evaluation, and I have found that self-evaluation is almost always a telling factor in the development of strong docents. Good docents are aware of what works and what doesn't.

Criteria is difficult to establish and requires flexibility. A docent who is rolling on the floor with preschoolers cannot necessarily succeed with adults, perhaps because his or her voice and language don't work. The docent who is fabulous with seniors may have a hard time sitting on the floor or leading an Indian war dance up the staircase.

Evaluation is used to help and improve the museum experience for visitors and the docent. Evaluation of Bayly tours, in particular, is not a science with specific guidelines, rules and expectations or information. Each docent is expected to have, and use, his or her different style and knowledge of people. What I look for, and continually push docents to work toward, is enabling the visitor to participate, to give the visitor a sense of involvement and ease when looking at art, to demystify and decode art, and to encourage problem solving and thinking. The joy for me is seeing and hearing docents and visitors thoroughly enjoying themselves and the art.

Jane Anne Young holds a B.A. from the University of Delaware and a Masters degree from Harvard Graduate School of Education. Mrs. Young began her work at the Bayly Art Museum at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, as a volunteer docent in 1977. She became the museum's director of education in 1982 and was appointed as a member of the University of Virginia faculty in 1987. As a founding member of the National Docent Council, she represented the Southeast region and university museum education. Mrs. Young is the author of many publications relating to interdisciplinary uses of the art museum and to the methods of museum education.
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Team Evaluations

Even Your Best Friend WILL Tell You

Try this little test:
1. If your slip were showing, would you want someone to tell you?
2. If you had a run in your hose, would you thank the person who pointed it out?
3. If you had spinach between your teeth, would you die if a friend suggested a visit to a mirror?

If your answers were “yes,” “yes,” and “no” continue reading. This article is for you. You’re the type of person who can “take it” when someone points out your lack of perfection. You’re the type of person who wants to be your best and appreciates it when others help you in your quest. You’re the type of docent who can benefit from team evaluation.

Team evaluation is simply an arrangement where docents who share tour chores also share the evaluation of each other and of the tours. It’s an easy arrangement to plan, and its benefits to both the docents and the tour are immediately apparent.

Although many institutions assign docents as individuals, docent teams are used by some museums, zoos, historic sites, and nature centers quite successfully. In one model, as soon as they complete a training program new docents are made a part of existing “day” teams. A typical team might consist of from three to ten docents, depending on the tour participant numbers usually booked by the institution. The team would be responsible for all tours scheduled on their day. A corps of substitute docents is available to replace a team member who must be absent during any given week.

Members of the docent team take turns with the various parts of a successful tour. One docent contacts the teacher to exchange specifics about expectations of both the teacher and the museum. Another docent is responsible for greeting the touring class or group, handling the beginning logistics for entering the museum. A third docent, already in place in an orientation spot, welcomes the class and introduces museum rules, tour goals, the theme of the tour, and the other docents. The class is divided among the docent team members for smaller group touring and, following the individual tours, returns to a central location where a team member conducts closure procedures. Immediately after the tour group leaves, the docent team meets for team evaluation. It is during this time that individual team members help themselves and their co-workers improve the tour.

The evaluation meeting can be as formal or informal as the team desires, but predesigned structure ensures that the experience is a positive one and that specific areas are included. Some docent teams use a check list as the basis for their evaluation, assigning a different docent each week (or for each tour) to lead the discussion. The discussion should be held in a quiet place where the team will not be disturbed. Coffee, tea, or a soft drink (and maybe cookies?) make the evaluation time a pleasant conversation with friends rather than a chore to be avoided.

Beginning the evaluation with quantifiable measurements helps the group ease into the process and provides for a transition from the role of teacher to that of learner. This beginning section might include the following items:

1. School and teacher name, grade, number of students
   - Was the teacher notified by phone?
   - Did the teacher receive a pre-visit packet of materials?
   - Did the students appear prepared for the visit?

2. Number of docents touring, group size
   - Was the group size appropriate?
   - Did the teacher or the docents assign groups?
   - Did the students wear nametags?

Following a look at the group dynamics indicated by some of the above questions, and the obvious discussion of what was positive and negative about that part of the tour, docent teams can examine tour specifics with these questions:

3. What was the tour goal?
   - Was the goal met?
   - If so, what helped make the goal attainable?
   - If not, what could have helped?
4. What were the specific objectives of the tour?

- Did the students achieve these objectives?
- If so, what did we do to help the students achieve?
- If not, what could we have done differently?

After considering the broad goals and objectives of the tour, team members can move more easily into a discussion of their individual performances with questions such as these:

5. Did I attempt to include every student through the careful use of eye contact, body language, and open-ended questions?

6. Did I avoid mannerisms and vocalizations that distract from my message?

7. Did I select objects and exhibits that were appropriate for the tour theme and the age of my audience?

8. Did I allow students to contribute to the tour, or did I do all the talking?

The success of evaluation such as this depends on the honesty of the individuals involved. Teams that are serious about improving their performance, and about providing every student an optimum tour experience, will see this “after the tour” dialogue as an essential part of the tour. They will allow the necessary time for exploration and discussion. They will avoid becoming “proprietary” about tour components or techniques so all aspects of the tour are open for consideration. If individuals on the team are uncomfortable about some aspect of their performance, they will ask other team members to observe and offer suggestions.

These are not easy things to do. Human nature doesn’t leave us much room for self-criticism, and even less for criticism from others. However, working as a member of a team makes it easier to accept and offer constructive help. With practice, many docents become quite comfortable with “letting their best friends tell them.”

Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor
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