Building Relationships with Schools

"Bud has a great way with kids, but they don't know it."

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Y
ears ago, I introduced one of my sisters to a colleague from work. I thought that the two of them would really hit it off. Like my sister, this fellow was interesting, well educated, and engaging. Yet, after only a few dates, my sister ended the relationship.

When I asked about their abrupt break-up, my sister said that the guy was too self-consuming. Apparently, when they were together, he only talked about himself. He never asked for her thoughts or opinions. He only wanted to discuss his own ideas, activities, and interests.

In some ways, developing successful relationships with schools is similar to developing successful relationships when dating. A healthy dose of mutual respect and dialogue is required. An institution cannot simply focus on its own programming ideas and exhibitions, while neglecting to factor in the schools’ priorities and needs.

Museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens are self-referential environments. The danger when creating programming in such settings is becoming too self-involved. After all, the institutional collection is authentic and intriguing. The objects, artifacts, or living things present in concrete what blackboards and textbooks can only offer in the abstract. In other words, we’ve got “the good stuff!”

So, why do many teachers choose not to visit your institution during the school year? You might assume you know the answer to this question, but when was the last time you actually asked teachers and administrators, and really listened to their answers?

Where the Focus Belongs
Just because your collection is educationally significant does not mean that you are “too good to pass up.” Taking field trips is an arduous task that requires obtaining administrative approval, parental permission, chaperones, transportation, funding, and integration with classroom lessons. And, even if hoards of school children already march through your exhibits, that doesn’t mean that schools receive the services they most need or want.

To construct significant and enduring relationships with schools, museum educators must develop relevant programs that are educationally sound and enriching. And, those who deliver these programs (docents, guides, or interpreters) must be competent and well-prepared for the act of teaching the ages and varieties of students they receive.

Developing School Programs
While it is essential to understand the significance of your collection, and right to take pride in your institution’s exhibitions, these are not the best vantage points from which to develop school programming. To use an analogy, when they dance together, it is schools that must “lead” and museums that must “follow.” This choreography is not meant to denigrate the educational role or responsibility of museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens. It simply acknowledges the fact that such facilities are auxiliary educational institutions and that schools have the primary responsibility for educating their students.

Begin creating or reviewing programs for schools by seeking guidance and input from school administrators. Make appointments to speak with the various curricular supervisors of the subject areas most relevant to your collection. Tell these administrators of your desire to create relevant programs, and ask to borrow copies of the “curricular competencies.” Such curricular competencies spell out, in great detail, what is required in each subject area, by grade level, throughout the school year.

The units or themes that shape classroom lessons are wonderful points-of-departure for constructing relevant tours. Though it may take a little more imagination to develop programming using the school’s curriculum as the reference point, rather than the collection as presented by the curatorial staff, it becomes easier with practice. Looking at the collection from the school’s viewpoint is useful, appropriate, and stimulating to idea production.

Target your programming, tour themes, special classes, etc. to particular grades and note their relevance to specific areas of the curriculum. Send out information describing these connections to school principals and to teachers. If costs become prohibitive, ask the school system for assistance by placing this information in the school’s in-house publications or by distributing your own brochures using the school’s mail system.
Make an appointment to see the School Superintendent after doing your programmatic homework. Tell that official how you have worked to make programming more consistent and supportive of school curriculum, and ask him or her to support the use of your facility and its collection. Make presentations to the School Board, at teacher in-service events, and to local parent organizations. Describe your institution, discuss the range of its school programming, and stress how these offerings reinforce what is taught in the classroom.

Prime teachers for using your facility. Send teachers free passes to visit your institution during the summers or during the first month or so of school. Hold teacher workshops or in-service events at your institution. Discuss the collection and demonstrate how programming reinforces curriculum by providing teachers with tours and sample lessons in the exhibit areas.

Send teachers pre-visit materials that they can use with their students to prepare them for working with your collection. Remember, teachers are already hard-pressed and overworked, so make the materials easy to use.

Don't forget to redo this process every few years. The curriculum is not a static document. It, and other factors, will change. Reviewing your programs, as well as school needs, will prevent your relationship with schools from becoming stale or static.

Conducting School Programs

The docents, guides, or interpreters who conduct school programs have just as formidable a set of responsibilities as those who develop the programs. Beyond knowing the subject matter, docents must understand the techniques and dynamics of teaching. This can only begin when docents realize that teaching and knowledge are not, necessarily, synonymous.

In addition to knowing the subject matter, docents must have an understanding of age-appropriate teaching methods, individual learning styles, and effective communication techniques. They must also develop the self-confidence to be relaxed with students and teachers.

Once relaxed and self-confident, docents must cultivate the attribute of flexibility. They must know how to shift gears from their planned program in order to respond to a child’s question, a class’ diverted attention, or a teacher’s interjection. Docents must know how to be in charge without being autocratic, and should be aware that the integrity of the students’ relationship to their classroom teacher must always be preserved (even if it is to the detriment of the museum lesson).

Communication between docents and classroom teachers is vital. Whenever possible, docents and teachers should speak prior to the students’ visit. Docents should know, and discuss, the teacher’s expectations. They should also be aware of students who have special needs or who may present special challenges. How have the students been prepared for their visit? Are there any particular reasons for the timing of this visit that might affect the docent’s teaching? These issues and more should be part of the pre-visit dialogue.

Of Concern to Docents and Staff, Alike

Museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens are special places that provide important opportunities for learning. But, to be worthwhile to schools, these institutions must not mimic what can already take place in the classroom. There is no need to bring a class to the museum if all that...
Continued from previous page.

will take place could happen with a script and slides in the classroom.

Lectures, speeches, and "show-and-tell" programming need not be conducted in front of genuine objects, artifacts, or living things. Institutional programming for schools, and its execution, should distinguish itself from classroom activities by its conduct, activities, and methods for engaging with the collection. Participatory teaching and active learning are a must!

Investigating and understanding authentic objects should be easily distinguished from traditional classroom lessons. Learning in schools usually requires deductive reasoning — moving in thought from significant, big ideas down to particular examples. For instance, students might learn of the devastation of a nation at war with itself by discussing the reasons for civil war. Then, they might read about the major battles, as they begin to narrow their investigation toward particular examples.

A museum experience, however, usually calls upon inductive reasoning — moving in thought from particular examples to significant, big ideas. Therefore, a study of civil war might begin by reading one soldier’s letter. From that single piece of evidence, students’ might make conjectures, as they work toward understanding the larger concepts. Another distinguishing characteristic between classroom and museum teaching is that when one teaches with collections, questions are asked to provoke curiosity and investigation, not to determine factual retention or to test comprehension.

In all facets of developing and conducting school programming, excellence and effort are essential. Remember, school-aged visitors are among an institution’s most important constituency. This is not simply altruism, for the school children of today are the adult contributors, supporters, staff members, volunteers, and taxpayers of tomorrow.

Alan Gartenhaus
Publishing Editor

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For further information write *The Docent Educator*, or call us at (808) 885-7728.
A Funny Thing Happened …

As a former high school teacher and as a docent now at the Terra Museum of American Art, I should not be surprised by the fact that what you give children is not necessarily what they take away.

For instance, it is always encouraging to find that what you have been discussing for 30 minutes has struck a spark. So I was delighted at the end of an Art Smart tour emphasizing types of paintings — portraits, landscapes, still life, and genre — when a fourth grade girl confided to me, “My mother has a landscape. It’s got palm trees and animals in it.”

“How nice,” I replied and asked, “Where does she hang it?”

“Oh, it’s on her shoulder. There’s a tiger, too!” she said.

I made a note to add tattoo to the next Art Smart tour which would be on media, and to use this example of a portable Peaceable Kingdom.

On another occasion, a very attentive group of third graders were completing what seemed a very successful introductory tour. We had played a game, learned about colors, lines, and shapes, and had some fun making up stories about paintings. One boy, who had looked a bit disappointed for the last half of the tour, finally raised his hand. His question: “Why do you call it the Terra Museum? You don’t have any scary pictures here.”

Martin McGowan, docent
Terra Museum of American Art
Chicago, IL

Teen Angels?

When our small, staid historical museum began offering a tour designed for eighth graders, the docents spent a year preparing, but nonetheless we were all wary of these new visitors. As is so often the case with teaching, we are learning a lot from our students.

The following are some of the lessons I have learned from thirteen year olds:

1) You don’t always show what you know. Young teenagers are often reticent with adults, especially in an unfamiliar setting such as a museum. Although our tour encourages them to make choices and to develop opinions on issues, we realize that those opinions may not be expressed during the museum visit. Follow-up classroom activities often provide a more comfortable opportunity for discussion.

Likewise, docents shouldn’t feel obligated to explain everything in an exhibit when focusing on selected concepts better allows for student input. Nor should a docent hasten to provide ready answers to questions intended to provoke student exploration and contemplation.

2) Admit it, we’re human. When we docents set ourselves up as experts, we risk teetering off the edge of that narrow pedestal. And, with some teenagers, that stance invites tipping the pedestal! We need, instead, to build on what we share in common with our fellow learners whom we encourage to join us in an exploration to which everyone can contribute.

3) We are in this together. Eighth graders can be so tall, so heavy, and so numerous that even the most experienced docent has second thoughts about trying to lead them, let alone teach them in a fragile museum environment. All the more reason to enlist them as our colleagues in a mutual endeavor. To do so successfully, we need to know their developmental level, interests, and instructional experience, as well as to engage a variety of learning styles typical of any group.

4) Keep it moving. Though they can feign collapse at the second flight of stairs and seem unable to sit without slouching, thirteen year olds need a well paced tour that never misses a beat. Keeping them interested requires skillful transitions from one area or concept to another so that they experience a variety of positions and movements as well as types of thinking and responding.

5) Relax, this may be fun. The playful attitude that young people this age still have toward something new can motivate docents to enjoy working with them and to try something new ourselves. As we all know, no two tours or groups are quite the same, and this can be a source of renewal for our own enjoyment, which brought us to touring in the first place.

Susan Miner, education director
Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum
Wichita, Kansas
A Picture Perfect Partnership

by Susan Plumb

An innovative community partnership developed by the education department of the James A. Michener Art Museum came about through the discovery, during a 1994 summer meeting, that many of the museum's docents were also active in an conjunction with visits to the museum. The goal was to reinforce the students' museum experience, as well as familiarize them with the visual heritage of their community. Many local school children visit the museum through field trips, but their interaction with the art is brief. Depending on teachers' schedules to schools. The Michener Art Museum had (and still has) a dedicated and knowledgeable corps of docents who were giving many hours leading tours at the museum, but who were unable to commit additional time to an outreach project.

At the 1994 docent meeting, we discovered that many of the organization called Art Goes to School (AGTS).

With limited resources and staff, the museum has been searching for ways to achieve a school outreach program that would incorporate a classroom visit by an art interpreter in and curricula, the experience cannot always be expanded on their return to the classroom.

The main challenge to the accomplishment of the program was the lack of available museum education staff or volunteers to travel docsents were former or current members of the local chapter of AGTS. This highly regarded art appreciation program reaches over 280,000 children in the Delaware Valley Region, has a portfolio of 1,500 art reproductions and over 700

photo: Ann G. Krisher

Visiting classrooms generates excitement while preparing students to attend your institution. The Michener Art Museum has created a partnership with an organization called Art Goes to School that allows the museum to reach greater numbers of school children and extend their limited volunteer resources.
volunteers. The program began 35 years ago under the auspices of the Junior League of Philadelphia. AGTS is welcomed by school districts as an adjunct to classroom learning.

According to the Evelyn Cavanaugh, co-chairperson of the Central Bucks Chapter of AGTS of the Delaware Valley, Inc., individual chapters exchange their portfolios each year for a new set of 20 reproductions ranging from cave paintings to Abstract Expressionism. By the beginning of the school year, the AGTS volunteer members have researched and discussed the 20 works they will take into the classrooms. AGTS volunteers use many of the same age-appropriate interactive teaching techniques employed by museum docents. They, however, are able to give an in-depth presentation in the 30-45 minutes spent with a class. Teaching tools depend on the age group. For example, first graders are presented with grab bags containing hands-on objects that refer to objects in the paintings; second and third graders receive handmade puzzle piece shapes with matching color and design to a segment on the art work. Higher grades investigate books with other works by the artist or a picture of the artist used for art history discussions.

Molli Conti, one of the docents doing double duty as a museum interpreter and an AGTS volunteer, points out the positive aspects of this "picture perfect" partnership. Many of the reproductions in the AGTS portfolio are of works in distant museums. With reproductions from a local institution, such as the Michener, a museum visit can easily be undertaken so that children can see the original work of art after the AGTS presentation. What excitement when they recognize the piece, amazed at the scale and the texture.

The classroom interaction with the art object enhances the museum visit. Moreover, using a museum focusing on works by regional artists as a source, the outreach program fosters an awareness of the community's artistic heritage and vitality.

AGTS chapters, of which there are now five, are delighted to be part of the outreach program. Along with the reproduction, the museum offers biographical information on the artist and commentary on the painting, allowing the group to have an additional piece without having to do extra research.

At the Michener, Assistant Curator of Education Phyllis Schwartz administers the Museum/AGTS partnership logistics, including telephone and mail contact with AGTS representatives, and orders reproductions that are conveniently sized to fit the AGTS portfolio. Each chapter that joins the outreach program gets the same reproduction in the first year. All groups get the same second year piece and so on.

Teachers consistently give high marks to the docent program at the Michener, and yet, the docents repeatedly comment that groups who have experienced an AGTS presentation and recognize the art piece are more verbal, readily sharing what they have learned and asking more questions. The James A. Michener Art Museum highly recommends investigating a partnership with community arts organizations willing to go into the schools. Such a "picture perfect" partnership extends a museum's reach into the schools, allows children to see works of art, and encourages a follow-up visit to your institution. As an added benefit to the museum, arts organization volunteers often register to become museum docents in addition to their other work.

Susan Plumb is the curator of education for the James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown, PA. To find out more about Art Goes To School chapters in your area, or to start an AGTS program, call Mrs. Janice Miller at (215) 248-5626.

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Developing School Programs

This past November, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, in Ridgefield, CT, held a three-day seminar on developing school programs in art museums. The aptly titled seminar, Innovations in Museum Education, attracted 32 museum educators, consultants, and students from as far away as Los Angeles.

The impetus for hosting this seminar was the overwhelming response the Museum’s Student Docent program has received in recent years. The Student Docent program is a collaboration between The Aldrich Museum and local schools. Students from fifth grade, middle school, and high school come to the Museum to learn about our changing exhibitions of contemporary art from a museum educator. Following five after-school training sessions, the student docents guide their entire class in groups of 6 to 10 through the Museum, while engaging them in discussions about the exhibition. We have received over 200 inquiries from other institutions on how to set up a similar program. This response inspired us to develop a forum during which museum educators could learn from one another’s experiences in building relationships with schools.

Innovations was designed for a small group of museum educators to foster discussions about the value of on-going relationships between students and museums. Long recognized by educators, museum-school collaborations are increasingly being recognized by museum boards and administrators as valid extensions of their missions. Those who registered for Innovations were seeking inspiration, new ideas, and details on implementing programs. The small size of the group allowed us to build a dialogue over the three days of the seminar.

Our first speaker was Harry Philbrick, director of The Aldrich Museum and creator of the Student Docent program. He reminded participants of the unique opportunity museums have to provide object-based learning experiences at a time when many of our experiences are second-hand. When designing school programs, it is important not to sacrifice that experience for the convenience of visiting a school with slides, and Mr. Philbrick encouraged participants to focus their programs on a direct engagement with objects in their institutions.

When building relationships with schools, it is important to involve the teachers in your planning. Mr. Philbrick cited research that concluded that a classroom teacher with little or no expertise in art had more success in teaching a simple “method for looking” than when a better informed, practicing museum educator presented the same information. This is because the teacher can relate the art to other relevant topics from the students’ curriculum. Philbrick took this logical discovery one step further along the learning pyramid: Why not let the student teach another student?

During the seminar, a selection of Student Docents demonstrated their skills. Ten students from fifth grade, eighth grade, and high school led a tour of our current exhibition of installation art. After the tour, some Student Docents participated in a panel discussion with the museum educators who trained them and classroom teachers from participating schools. The discussion enabled the educators to relay details of how the program works.

The final speaker on the first day was Roger Dell from the Fitchburg Art Museum, in Fitchburg, MA. Mr. Dell presented a museum-school collaboration where an arts magnet school is housed inside the museum. The Fitchburg Museum actually collects objects with a school’s curriculum in mind. The artwork in the museum is the textbook for classes that take place in the galleries of the museum.

The second day of activities commenced with an open-forum information exchange between many of the museum educators in attendance. During this exchange, educators presented their own school programs. A popular concept presented by several museums involving writing about art, among these the Neuberger Museum of Art’s Writing Through the Arts program; the Weatherspoon Art Gallery’s Art Smart: Portraits writing program, and the Art Institute of Chicago’s Art and Creative Writing program. Other innovative programs included the Hecksher Museum of Art’s Junior Docent Program and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art’s High School Internship program, which trains high school students not only to lead tours for their peers, but to assist with family programs and teach younger children. The open forum proved to be one of the most informative aspects of the seminar. The opportunity to share ideas is something we would all like to engage in on a more regular basis.

The keynote speaker on the second day was Jessica Davis, the founding director of Harvard University’s Art in Education program. Ms. Davis’ research with Harvard’s Project MUSE (Museums
Unite with Schools in Education) led to development of a series of questions that can be used in any gallery setting. Davis stressed the importance of focusing on the process rather than the product of learning when designing school programs. Project MUSE questions, known as the Generic Game and The Entry Point Quests, take the viewer through the processes of inquiry, access, and reflection to discover meaning in a work of art.

Peggy Cole helped us to put our knowledge into a developmental perspective. She reminded us that knowledge and theory building are based on experience. The group discussed traits characteristic of different age groups, and then split into smaller groups to focus on primary, middle, or adolescent years. Groups of 5 to 6 educators worked on designing a series of museum visits including pre- and post-visit materials. One group designed a series of visits for middle school students in which letters are written back and forth between the class and the museum educator. The first letter would discuss the classes expectations of the museum visit. The educator will have received the letter before the class arrives. After the series of visits is over, students write a report to the museum educator on the same subject as the initial letter: What is a museum? What happens inside a museum? Hopefully, their perceptions will have changed. The educator would respond to the class a final time with a letter. Another group suggested using journal entries during the school’s series of visits to the museum to write wall text for both the museum and the school.

The focus on writing carried to our next and final day of the seminar. Carol Diehl, a writer, artist, and teacher, has the perfect credentials for teaching a class on writing about art and has been the lead presenter for The Aldrich’s writing program Art Advocates since 1986. Diehl presented several approaches for teaching how to write about art. She pointed out that these experiences make the viewer stop, but importantly, look. Telling students not to be afraid to hear their own voices will help them feel comfortable with their opinions. Diehl advised having students read work aloud to one another to encourage a fresh perspective.

The final speaker was Sonnet Takahisa, co-director of the New York City Museum School, where she is in the process of developing evaluation methods for museum learning. Sonnet addressed the museum educators’ responsibility to account for why learning in museums is valuable. She outlined six steps or phases of learning in museums: extended observation, questioning, research, synthesis and analysis, presentation, and reflection—all of which take place in any museum on a daily basis. Takahisa cautions educators to continually ask themselves: How do we know we’re being effective? Is our instruction evident in student work? How is it evident? This constant evaluation helps develop and maintain standards suitable to one’s own institution.

Perhaps most rewarding about Innovations in Museum Education was having the opportunity to meet and share ideas with so many other creative minds. Responses culled from evaluation forms about the seminar were consistently favorable—citing in particular a preference for working in a small group with a focused agenda. Out of a concern that these qualities can not be found in a larger conference, The Aldrich has been inspired to consider offering a museum education seminar as a biennial event.

Nina Carlson is curator of education at The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, CT.
Packing Trunks with Learning

Please don’t touch the artwork!” is the cardinal rule of art museums everywhere. But, at the Fayetteville Museum of Art we break that rule every day — and in many ways. Using our custom-made art trunks, the Museum’s education department has created nine art education programs that integrate hands-on experiences into the learning process. Each of these programs uses an art trunk to focus on an age-appropriate theme that dovetails with students’ abilities and interests. The hands-on learning process includes discussion of the theme, visual and tactile exploration of artwork and artifacts related to the theme, and individual creation of a project related to the theme.

By using the art trunks as an educational resource, the Fayetteville Museum of Art has been able to bring the world of art to a broader segment of its community. In just the last year, these hands-on art experiences have reached 24,600 people. Each year our art trunk programs grow, with two new programs added last year and three more new programs this past fall. All of these programs are available free of charge to the public and are supported by grants from community agencies.

A major factor contributing to this growth has been persistence in “getting the word out” to the community about the programs and the educational benefits of exposure to art.

What Is an Art Trunk?

An art trunk is exactly what it sounds like — a trunk with art in it. The art, however, is not placed randomly in a trunk. Items are placed in a specific trunk because they correspond with the trunk’s theme. A trunk can be built around any theme.

At the Fayetteville Museum of Art, we have created two sets of art trunks. The first set is designed for pre-schoolers. The pre-school trunk themes include: “Folk Music,” “Folk Art,” and “Textiles and Masks.” Each of these trunks contains theme-related books, prints, artwork, and artifacts. Some of the items in our “Textiles and Masks” trunk are: masks from Guatemala, Africa, and Japan; a Mexican sombrero and Native American youth bonnet; an Indian batik silk scarf; a Mexican poncho; cotton, wool, and denim fibers; five books, including *Aunt Flossie’s Hats* and *Abuelas Weave*; and prints by Catlin, Holbein, and Corot.

Each trunk also comes with a teacher’s manual. This resource booklet introduces the trunk theme, describes each item in the trunk, gives ideas for hands-on projects related to the trunk’s contents, and discusses the importance of using art as a teaching resource.

The other trunks we’ve designed are for use in K-12 classes. These art trunk themes include: “Art that Tells a Story,” “I’m a Good Looker: Abstract Art,” “Cultural Connections,” “North Carolina Arts,” “African Art,” “Classical Art,” “Medieval & Renaissance Art,” “Americana,” and “World Cultures.” These trunks have a similar assortment of books, prints, artworks, and artifacts related to the theme.

Using Art Trunks at the Museum

One way to use an art trunk is in museum programs designed to educate children about art. Trunks can provide young museum visitors with hands-on experiences of the museum’s exhibitions. Artwork that is usually only viewed and talked about in a museum tour can now be touched and manipulated. During a recent portrait exhibition, educators at the Fayetteville Museum of Art used the “Art that Tells a Story” trunk to present the portraits in an age-appropriate manner. By first using the trunk items to introduce the concept of artwork telling a story, educators had a natural lead into talking about the portraits in terms of the story each one had to tell.

After learning about these stories, students drew self-portraits that told stories about themselves.

Museums can also use trunks to build an entire cultural unit that integrates various community resources into the art education process. Using our “African Art” trunk, our museum coordinated an African Cultural Celebration that taught all segments of the community about African art, culture, history, and people. During this celebration, everything the museum did focused on African culture.

Our exhibition featured “African Artifacts from the Permanent Collection,” which meant that the gallery walls and pedestals were filled with African masks, instruments, clothing, sculptures, and utilitarian objects. After visitors viewed these artifacts, they were able to try on the masks and play the various drums contained in the “African Art” trunk. Pre-school through high-school age students were then able to create their own African masks, bringing the hands-on experience full circle.

For students who could not travel to the museum, we were able to take the African Art trunk to their schools and present an educational program about African art. Because the trunks are portable, museums can...
provide their communities with off-site programs. Using art trunks for such outreach programs ensures that a greater number of people are exposed to works of art, and this exposure generates an appreciation for the arts that in turn enhances community support for the museum and its programs.

Using Art Trunks in the Community

By using art trunks as a resource in creating outreach programs, museums are able to instill an appreciation for art in even the youngest community members. The Fayetteville Museum of Art uses its art trunks in six programs designed to expose young children to artwork and the artistic process. Our “Teen Mom” program brings the world of art to teenage mothers and their babies. Moms and their children, from newborn to three years, explore trunk items and create hands-on art projects together. This program provides a positive environment for moms and their children to spend meaningful time together. The program emphasizes the benefits of doing art with your child and models how parents can provide an educational environment using art at home. Moms practice playing with their children using items in the “Folk Toys” trunk and then work together to create their own toys out of everyday household items. Our “Mommy and Me” program provides a similar art experience for parents and their three-to-five-year-old children.

Art trunks can also be used in partnership programs with other community agencies to enhance the education of children in pre-school settings. Our “Music Box” program is a partnership between the museum and the music department of a local college. During the school year, the college provides a musical lesson to children of six pre-school classes, and the museum provides an art lesson to complement the music lesson. For example, when students learn about rhythm with the music teacher, a museum educator will take the “Folk Music” trunk to the pre-school setting and let students play the four different drums in the art trunk. While students practice tapping out rhythms, they also discuss the different drum shapes and colors and textures, what materials the drums are made of, and why they sound different from one another. Students then use a salt container, markers, crayons, textured fabrics, and glue to create their own drum.

The “Music Box” program is so successful that the museum has formed a partnership with the county library to provide pre-school classes with a “Read to Me” program. Beginning this year, the program will use a similar format to enhance the reading and art education curricula in day care facilities throughout the county.

Museums do not need to limit art trunk educational programs to a classroom setting. The trunks can be used as a creative resource during art camps, as well. Each summer, the Fayetteville Museum of Art conducts two art camp programs at various sites around the city. The summer camp programs provide a fun learning experience for children in need of structured activities when school is not in session.

When museum educators take the art trunks out into the community, they not only educate students about art but also educate teachers.

Whether your institution packs trunks with art, or history, or science, providing young audiences with opportunities to touch and explore is a wonderful idea. Trunks can be used at your facility or sent as outreach to area schools and community organizations.

photo: Fayetteville Museum of Art

Continued on the next page.

The Docent Educator Spring 1999
Packing Art Trunks with Learning

and parents about the importance and fun of integrating art into the learning process. Pre-school teachers are excited to discover that they can teach their students how to interact with one another by using the dolls in the “Folk Art” trunk for role-playing activities. The teachers also discover that while the children are using the trunk’s dolls to learn necessary social skills, they can also learn about different cultures as they explore how dolls from North Carolina, Chile, Japan, and Africa are the same or different. Outreach programs are a wonderful way to increase a museum’s visible presence in the community it serves. Such off-site programs also generate interest about the art trunks with a community’s teachers and parents, and this exposure often jumpstarts a museum’s efforts to train others to use the trunks in their educational settings.

Training Others to Use Art Trunks
There is perhaps nothing more disheartening to an educator than to have wonderful educational resources available that nobody uses. The way to avoid this experience with art trunk resources is to train as many educators as possible to use the trunks on their own.

A successful art trunk program depends on the widespread use of the trunks throughout the community. The Fayetteville Museum of Art offers “Trunk Training” to educators in the area. This free training familiarizes teachers and parents with each trunk, shows how the trunks can be used in conjunction with educational programs, and demonstrates hands-on activities. Last year, 659 parents and 524 teachers learned how to use the art trunks with preschoolers in their homes and classrooms. Pre-school teachers who attend “Trunk Training” receive contact hours from the state. These training sessions also familiarize trunk users with responsibilities involved in using the trunks. We have several of each preschool trunk available, and teachers or parents can check out trunks for a two-week period free of charge. To ensure accountability, both the museum and the user follow a consistent inventory control process and complete a contract outlining the terms of use.

Art Trunks in the Future
As a community’s demand for art trunk use increases, the museum’s supply of quality, innovative art education programs must also increase. This has been our museum’s key to success. What began five years ago as a small program with vaguely defined needs assessments and goals has developed into a network of well-defined, user-friendly programs that integrate hands-on experiences into the process of art education.

Just this fall, we have begun three additional art trunk programs. Already mentioned was the new “Read to Me” partnership with the county library. Another new partnership has been formed with the city’s technical college. This “Pre-Trunk Training” program will introduce students in the college’s day care provider classes to the art trunk/art education concepts. Our new art trunk venture is a “Senior Art-Literature” program that brings hands-on experience of art trunks into nursing homes and retirement centers. Our art trunk programs continue to expand because the museum consistently informs the community of how the art trunks can be used as educational resources.

When a community knows that the art trunks are available, and understands how to use the trunks as a creative educational resource, the possibilities for successful hands-on art education programs are unlimited.

So, we encourage you to go ahead and break the cardinal rule of art museums everywhere. Create your own art trunks and tell everyone in your community to “Please, touch the artwork!”

Elizabeth J. Moww is an education coordinator at the Fayetteville Museum of Art in Fayetteville, North Carolina. She teaches the museum’s “Teen Mom,” “Mommy & Me,” “Read to Me,” and “Senior Art-Literature” programs.
As a former Head Start teacher, I realize the importance of making learning interesting with hands-on activities. Working at the Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site in conjunction with Head Start allowed me to try some new teaching skills for all levels.

Our first project was a Children's Day Event. Barb Kiergaard (LSA staff member) and I took a Hunter-Gatherer game from another site and adapted it to our site. Since then, we have developed hands-on activities and projects that we use not only on Children's Day, but with schools and other groups that visit our site. We use handouts to help children explore our exhibit on a scavenger hunt, finding specific items to answer questions about the history of the site. We use an archaeological dig box to show children how archaeologists work. We have a variety of early Native American and settler toys. Our visitors enjoy discovering (or rediscovering) non-electronic toys.

We have added a settler's kitchen garden and a Dakota garden to our site that helps us show children how people at the Agency gardened, saved seeds, and preserved foods in the mid 1800's. Sometimes we offer a variety of food tasting and seeds to take home to be planted in the children's own gardens. We also have a few period tools on site, both early Native American and American settlers. The students discover what it is like to use these tools and appreciate the advancements that have been made in similar tools today.

We are always happy to learn that a family came to our site because their child/children had visited on a school field trip and wanted to return.

Judi Waterfield
Morton, Minnesota

The Central Park Wildlife Center (New York City) recently graduated a class of new docents. The training is long and rigorous and those who graduate can be very proud of their accomplishment. They know they can face the visiting public armed with a head full of information and the interpretive skills to share it with others.

The trainers and mentors presented the graduates with a congratulatory card penned by our very own poet-in-residence, Randi Winter, who is an instructor here at the Wildlife Center. I'd like to share it with you.

To the Wildlife Guides

My, how much you all have grown
Your fledging is almost through.
Now it's time to send you off
And release you to the zoo.

We've built you up and trained you.
Gave you much food for thought.
(And even we are quite amazed
with all the things we've taught.)

From animal facts to zoo nuts and bolts,
tours and stories to read
We send you off with much knowledge,
knowing a smile and theme are all you need.

Your training stops here with a toast and a cheer,
We've enjoyed your fresh outlook and view.
We wish you the best, you're up to the test
(we should know, we were the ones who prepared you!)

But wait, one last thing before you go
As it should, this card has a THEME.
After reading it, we want you to know...
CONGRATULATIONS,
AND WELCOME TO THE TEAM!

And, with a lot of cheering and high-fiving, we sent them off to join our corps of knowledgeable, creative, and dedicated docents.

Gloria Geucher, Coordinator of Volunteers
Wildlife Conservation Society
New York, New York

Back issues of
The Docent Educator are available!

Previous issues of our publication may be purchased for $9.00 each ($11 USD if mailed outside the U.S.).

For a complete list of our previous issues, or to order copies, write us, call us, or e-mail us. Our addresses and phone numbers are in the masthead on page #3.
When children come into our art gallery, there is an immediate sense of comfort and familiarity. They see Danny the Dinosaur and it is like seeing a friend.”

This comment from Dr. Jerry Mallett, the Director of the Mazza Collection Galleria, describes the special appeal of this particular art gallery. Mazza, housed on the University of Findlay campus in northwest Ohio, is the world’s first and largest teaching gallery specializing in original artwork from children’s picture books. Over 1,200 original works of art from children’s books are housed in the collection’s five thematic galleries. The collection encompasses old favorites such as Peter Rabbit and Raggedy Ann, as well as many works by contemporary Caldecott Award-winning children’s book illustrators.

The familiarity and approachability of these illustrations stem from language arts. The schools’ familiarity with picture books, combined with Mazza’s educational focus, led the gallery to work with teachers and administrators on a daily basis.

Mazza collaborates with schools, first, through free guided tours that introduce school classes to the artistic techniques used in picture book illustrations. Mazza has also grown to offer programs for schools and school systems, some programs directly oriented towards students and others for teachers. According to Terry Olthouse, Mazza’s education coordinator, one common trend is apparent in all of Mazza’s varied collaborative efforts, “While Mazza provides resources and staff expertise, it is the administrators, teachers, and especially students who provide the enthusiasm and imagination that complete the process.”

Mazza’s most recent project, aimed at benefitting local schools, illustrates the multidisciplinary nature of picture books. In many Hancock County classrooms, students study a local history unit from A History of Frontier Findlay. This 1962 text was written by Mabel Vance, a Findlay elementary principal, and illustrated by Alex Baluch, a former school supervisor of art. Mr. Baluch’s full color illustrations of pioneer life were first
reproduced in a two-tone black and green that is still familiar to students who study from a few old copies of the book. When Mr. Baluch's original artwork was rediscovered and donated to the Mazza Collection, Mazza searched for funding to aid in the re-publication of the original book, and found it in the generosity of a local individual. Copies of A History of Frontier Findlay's second edition, which is larger, clearer, and has full color illustrations, will be distributed to each third grade classroom in the county. As part of this project, the education and docent coordinators compiled an eighty-page teacher's guide to be distributed at a teacher in-service. In addition to the in-service, Mazza will conduct a docent enrichment session to introduce docents to the special exhibit of Mr. Baluch's artwork and present ways to integrate historic information and artifacts into their gallery tours.

While Mazza works closely with local schools, it also arranges for resources to be available on-site at schools that do not have easy access to the gallery. When artists travel to Mazza to make public presentations, Mazza's director notifies school administrators and arranges for the artists to visit interested schools. Mazza also offers a traveling exhibit of artwork that tours school systems throughout Ohio. Included in the cost of the exhibit are a loan of 30 pieces of original artwork from the book SPEAK! Children's Book Authors and Illustrators Brag About Their Dogs, a video explanation of how to hang the art in thematic units, and a teacher's activity guide.

In the spring and summer, Mazza hosts programs that address the specific needs of students and teachers. Mazza's annual Young Authors Conference brings approximately two hundred local children, chosen by their schools, to the University of Findlay. The conference includes an author or artist presentation, book signings, a gallery tour, a time for the children to share their handmade picture books, and refreshments. The Young Authors Conference is educational for both the children involved and for the University of Findlay graduate students who organize the event as part of their class work. During the summer months, Mazza offers a week-long institute, which may be taken for pleasure or for credit through the University of Findlay. Though the institute is open to the public, most of its participants are elementary school teachers, who often receive funding from their local school systems toward continuing education units. The institute offers over twelve internationally recognized children's book authors and illustrators, gallery tours, and pull-out sessions covering thematic units and methodology.

Mazza's School Extension program is, perhaps, the Galleria's most extensive form of school involvement. Each year, Mazza chooses four schools from among those that apply to participate. These "Mazza Schools" invest their time into the study of picture book artists, and raise $1,000 to sponsor a piece of art at the Galleria. Mazza's deputy director opens the program at a school-wide assembly. He presents information about the Mazza Galleria, focusing on the original artwork of three illustrators. During the following six week period, students read several books done by each of the three illustrators. During the following six week period, students vote on their favorite artist and the winning piece of art is exhibited at Mazza with an accompanying plaque that bears the school's name. The closing assembly provides an opportunity for the students to exhibit what they've learned. Through songs, skits, and artwork, the children often reveal a comprehensive knowledge of fields such as book publishing, artistic styles, and media. The flexibility, imagination, and inquisitiveness that the schools exhibit in projects such as the Mazza School Extension program are an invaluable contribution to the life of the museum.

Jill Olthouse is enrolled in the Bachelor of Secondary Education program at Bowling Green State University. Her mother, Terry Olthouse, is the education coordinator for Mazza Galleria, in Findlay, OH.
The Way to a Teacher's Heart ...

As most teachers why they chose their profession and they won’t mention the palatial work environment or the exorbitant salary. They won’t even talk about the long, languid summer vacation. Most teachers teach because they love children … and that’s no joke. So, if you want to connect effectively with the teachers who bring their classes to your institution, connect with their kids. Docent training in many museums, zoos, historic sites, nature centers, and gardens now includes sessions on the developmental stages and learning styles of youngsters. These are valuable courses that help docents know what’s “normal” for a particular age group that they may tour.

Volunteers for the Camp Tyler Foundation in Tyler, Texas, provide a two and one-half hour nature program for area third and fourth graders. During a significant portion of the program, the children explore trails through an east Texas pine forest and along the shores of Lake Tyler. As part of their training, the volunteers learn that the children on a nature hike may be “experts” on the frogs, snakes, birds, or mushrooms they may encounter. Once they feel confident about their reading skills, children in the primary grades often read everything they can find about a topic that interests them. Elementary age children frequently have collections of flora and fauna (and lots of rocks) that they have studied independently. A wise docent allows knowledgeable children of these age groups to share their expertise without letting them “take over” the conversation.

Where staff is not available to offer training in educational psychology, local classroom teachers can be enlisted to share their knowledge about and experience with particular age groups. Local colleges and universities with departments of education are usually willing to provide teachers who can instruct docents in techniques for working with youngsters during specific developmental stages.

There are other less traditional, but nonetheless, effective sources of information about children at different stages. Visiting and observing in classrooms and on playgrounds allows docents to see children interacting with their teachers and with each other. Of course, permission for such visits must be obtained from the school principal and, depending on the situation, she may not be receptive to visits from “outsiders.” Informal visits usually are easy to arrange if they can be made for a school attended by the docent’s children or grandchildren. More formal arrangements can be made by your institution for several docents to observe at one time. Again, local university education departments can be helpful in planning such visits.

Television is also a surprisingly accurate source of information about the different ages and stages of childhood. Watching programs aimed at a specific age child can reveal much about the interests and abilities of that age. A morning with the PBS channel’s Barney and his friends, Mister Rogers, or the Teletubbies may not raise your level of intelligence, but it will provide some insight into what interests preschoolers. Nickelodeon’s Rugrats and other early morning shows for preschoolers give way in the afternoon to programming for older children. And, of course, if you want to immerse yourself in teen lore, try a day of MTV or some of WB’s designed-with-teens-in-mind programming. (USA Today reports that half of all teen-girl viewers on Wednesday nights are watching WB’s Dawson’s Creek.)

Learning what’s appropriate and effective in teaching different ages isn’t all you need to do to endear yourself to the teacher who stands on your institutional doorstep with her class in a tidy row behind her. It’s important, too, to understand something about the normal, and not-so-normal, fears of childhood. Many children are wary of the unknown and of change, and your institution may represent both. It’s important, therefore, to very quickly “break the ice” by introducing yourself and giving your visitors a brief run-down of the plans for the tour. They need to know at once what to expect, where the restrooms are located, where the bus will pick them up, and that you or other docents whom you introduce will be with them for the entire tour.

Most of today’s children have been warned repeatedly to avoid strangers. And, there you stand. A stranger! Some, too, bring with them a fear of adults or of people of different racial or ethnic background. Again, a quick introduction is important. A few moments to establish that you are known by the classroom teacher and to point out that you are wearing a uniform, of
is Through Her Kids

sorts, or an official name badge may help to blunt some of the fear many younger children may bring with them. With small children, docents often make themselves less intimidating by sitting on the floor or crouching down when talking to the group. A pleasant, friendly smile and manner are still the best ways to help children lose their fear of you.

Children may be afraid of some of the exhibits you plan to show them, and your tour may be a wonderful opportunity to help them conquer their fears.

Many of the children (and teachers) participating in the Camp Tyler program begin to lose their fear of snakes when, before the nature trail hike, they have an "up-close and personal" encounter with a harmless corn snake. They should not, however, lose their healthy respect for exhibits that might harm them. So, in addition to learning that our corn snake is the only snake any of us touch, one of the first observation lessons helps children distinguish between poison ivy and the equally prevalent, but harmless, Virginia creeper.

Many of the exhibits that children are afraid of are not inherently dangerous. Children from southern Louisiana, with its high water table where even graves are built above ground, often have their first encounter with a basement at the New Orleans Museum of Art. Some are reluctant to go "down in that hole" where art activities await them. Historic sites that include cemetery activities also encounter superstitious fear of the dead from some children. Art and anthropology museums with collections of masks and other tribal regalia may engender fear among their touring children. A zoo's animals may be frightening to some youngsters. In all such cases, part of the responsibility of the docent is to recognize that such fears exist. It is not helpful to tell a frightened child, "There's nothing to be afraid of" or "Don't be silly!" It is much more productive to acknowledge that many people are afraid of the object or situation and offer explanations and activities that help the child overcome the fear. No child (or teacher) is ever forced to touch Camp Tyler's corn snake, but those who conquer their fear long enough to touch receive a quiet compliment.

On rare occasions when the fear is too great, the docent must be prepared to offer less frightening alternatives or ask the classroom teacher to escort the child to another area. This latter choice, of course, must be done without ridiculing or embarrassing the child in front of his classmates.

The teacher who brings her class to your institution also welcomes some empathy from the docent who will work with her children. Sensitivity to the challenges some children encounter on a daily basis can make a docent a more effective teacher. Empathy can help docents avoid rushing to judgment about the cultural, economic, and educational background of different children who bring to the museum experience.

Some of the children who visit the Camp Tyler nature program are not physically conditioned for a one-hour hike. We take a break halfway through the program, and teachers are asked to provide a nutritious snack (such as fruit or Graham crackers) for their class. Having one snack for everyone solves several potential problems. Every child has something to eat, and we have the opportunity for a lesson on waste reduction, an important part of the conservation goal of the program.

Teachers bring their classes to your institution for the programs you offer. They will come again and again if you demonstrate that you share a willingness to make the needs of their children a priority.

Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor

Stopping mid-way for a Graham cracker snack helps 4th graders on the Camp Tyler nature trail maintain interest and energy. Photo: Bill Kelldorf, Camp Tyler Foundation

The Docent Educator Spring 1999

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Be Our Guest

by Elizabeth J. Nosek

Museum visitors come in all shapes and sizes. One of the best defined groups of visitors in the museum field is school groups. This audience provides museums with a large number of visitors on an annual basis for a wide variety of tours and programs.

Making sure school groups continue as an active audience is vital to museums. Not only do school children provide many museums with a major funding base, but if nurtured, these visitors will also provide museums with future audiences.

In pursuit of this idea, I attended Disney University, in 1995. My course looked specifically at customer service and how the Disney theme parks succeed in keeping their visitors happy and returning. Here is what I learned:

* The main reason for repeat business is Disney’s quality of service. Disney believes if you control the quality of service, you can also control your degree of success.
* To control the quality of service you deliver to your audience, you must have a strong concept of what you are doing, use the best people to do the job, and exceed your guests’ expectations.

Most museums have a strong concept of what they are doing. They call it a mission statement. The mission statement guides all facets of museum operations and activities. A commitment to quality of service takes the museum mission statement one step further, to the creation of service standards. While the mission statement gives a museum purpose, standards of service provide an expectation of how the mission statement will be translated to the museum’s various audiences.

Writing successful service standards requires involvement from all segments of the museum — board members, staff, volunteers, and visitors. Often brief and to the point, service standards put such principles as safety, courtesy, and efficiency into writing.

School groups are guests who usually have well defined expectations. At Lakewood’s Heritage Center, we work closely to communicate with schools, teachers, and our volunteers to ensure that their expectations are met. In fact, we have found a direct correlation between the time spent communicating with these guests and the quality of their experience at our site.

Lakewood’s Heritage Center began working on its quality of service by sending out surveys to area schools in order to pinpoint their specific needs and topic interests. With this information, we consciously rewrote our tours and developed programs to include subjects of interest to schools. Evaluation forms, sent following each tour, were used to further fine-tune our programming.

Next, a brochure specifically for school groups was developed. Now, it is sent along with every tour confirmation slip so that teachers can be aware of the range of programs offered at our museum. If a teacher has a special interest or project not covered by these established programs, his or her request is forwarded to the education curator, who either develops a program that will address these needs or refers the teacher to another museum or agency that can provide assistance.

Docent and staff needs are also considered when working with school groups. Since she is often the first person teachers come in contact with, the reservationist is an especially important part of creating a successful climate for school groups at our museum. This staff person meets bi-weekly with the education curator so that she has a comprehensive view of the museum’s programs and activities. The museum’s docents also meet regularly with staff to get updates on exhibit changes and programming. Docents provide staff with their thoughts and experiences when implementing the museum’s programs, and evaluate each tour they give, helping the education curator make any necessary adjustments.

One result of the increased communication among the museum staff and volunteers has been the inclusion of a letter defining the museum’s expectations of school groups with each confirmation packet. This very simple step has gone a long way in addressing a number of frustrating experiences. The letter discusses the need for chaperones, establishes expectations of appropriate behavior, and requests respect for the artifacts.

Through our experiences, we have found that the secret of good customer service is really simple. We can exceed both our visitors’ and our own expectations by developing a strong vision or mission statement, setting service standards, giving attention to detail and to visitor needs, and by maintaining a commitment to communication.
Elizabeth J. Nosek is the curator of education at Lakewood's Heritage Center ... a Twentieth-Century Museum, in Lakewood, Colorado.

Creating customer satisfaction requires that services meet the audience's needs and exceed their expectations. When developing programs for schools, educators should construct "service standards" that reflect both the teachers' and the students' desires. For instance, younger students learn best by experience, so students at Lakewood's Heritage Center have participatory opportunities, such as learning how to churn butter.

photo: Lakewood's Heritage Center
“Come One, Come All”

**Marketing to Schools**

“If you build it, they will come” may work with baseball diamonds in the middle of Iowa cornfields, but it takes more than great programs to get schools into your institution. A good marketing strategy, including well-designed publications, may be the key to connecting your outstanding program with the area classes that can benefit most from participating.

When developing publications to market your programs, consider these questions:

- **What type of publication will reach the audience?**
  - Letter: 1 program, limited time, teachers only
  - Flyer: 1 program, limited time, teachers, students, general public
  - Calendar: multiple programs, one year in advance, teachers only
  - Newsletter: multiple programs, seasonal or more, multiple audiences
  - Brochure: multiple programs, multiple years, multiple audiences

- **What kind of presentation will have the most effective impact?**
  - Clear writing
  - Easy-to-read, uncluttered format
  - “Tear offs” — membership form, free visit “ticket”

- **Scheduling information — phone, fax, written (confirmation always in writing)**

  - **How can I pay for production of my publication?**
    - Budget
    - Grant
    - School system cooperation: duplication and distribution, inclusion in school system publication, individual school newspapers
    - Donation

- **How can I distribute my publication to make certain it reaches the target audience?**
  - Ideal: each teacher by name or all teachers (call school and ask secretary who is lead teacher; get directory from school administration)
  - Select teachers by grade or subject area (best with names)
  - To secretary, resource teacher, media specialist, or principal for distribution within a building (better than nothing, but scattered at best)

- **How can I evaluate my publication?**
  - Inclusion in tour evaluation for participants
  - Follow-up letter to non-participants asking, “Why didn’t you come?”

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**Next issue:**  *Teaching and Technology*

**First Class Mail**

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