Terminologies and Techniques

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Pedagogical Techniques for Being

There are people who believe that teaching is simple — just learn the subject matter and then tell others about it. But, they are mistaken. The gap is wide between telling what you’ve learned and helping others to learn. Think about it — if effective teaching is really as easy as telling, why aren’t there more great teachers?

The truth is, effective teaching only begins with content knowledge. Beyond that, there is little that is easy about teaching. It is a skill that demands constant effort, requires total involvement, and deserves continual reassessment. Teaching is a challenge, and anyone who attempts to strip it of its complexities denigrates the process and underestimates the tasks involved.

Inspiration

While the ingredients that make for effective teaching are elusive, the list might begin with an affection for the subject matter. Demonstrate your enthusiasm when you approach each new group. Communicate wonderment in your voice and intonation. Keep energy levels high, while pacing your lesson to be consistent with visitors’ interests.

Don’t simply tell others that you love the subject matter; display your enjoyment for it in your eagerness to explore the topic. Encourage visitors to explore with you. Delight in the different things that they may find. Rejoice in their individualized interpretations. And, respect their disparate views.

The second major ingredient for good teaching may be an affection for people. Take pleasure from your audiences — youngsters, families, or adults. Work to recognize and appreciate the individual qualities of those you teach. Respect their thoughts and opinions, even if those thoughts and opinions are difficult to place into the context of your own. Know that most everyone who participates in your lesson is trying to make a positive contribution.

Give your “students” the gift of confidence. Make visitors feel good about themselves and their ability to perceive and comprehend. Strive to find something productive in every idea or thought they offer. Thank them for participating. Honor their willingness to take part. Show visitors that their contributions are always welcome and appreciated by remaining open and receptive.

Perspiration

Teaching is hard work. It takes planning, organizing, and evaluating. Begin by constructing a lesson plan. Know what you are attempting to teach and your methodology. Develop a lesson plan that will guide implementation of your teaching objectives. Then, factor in the need to remain flexible and accommodating of shifts that take place in your audience’s interests or in your institution’s exhibition halls.

Plan your lesson by deciding what your visitors should learn and work from that vantage point. How will you know if they are learning what you want to teach? What should visitors be able to do? Perhaps they should be able to verbalize their interpretations of works of art by creating descriptive titles of their own making. Or, maybe they will construct reasoned hypotheses about animals by looking at their skeletal structures. Or, they may “read” historic buildings by both comparing and contrasting them to contemporary ones.

Teaching by requesting actions such as interpreting, hypothesizing, and comparing is very effective and allows for maximum audience participation. Most importantly, teaching in this manner empowers learners. In his landmark text The Process of Education, Jerome Bruner states that “the first object of learning, over and above the pleasure it may give, is that it should serve us in the future. Learning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow us later to go further more easily.”

Employing a thinking skills approach to teaching encourages student growth and continued learning, whereas the transference of factual information remains fairly static and has limited application. Teaching to skill acquisition isn’t easy, however. A “thinking skills” lesson emphasizes process and challenges visitors to make their own discoveries, rather than simply to listen to a description of the discoveries that others have made. Such lessons must be involving and participatory, with opportunities to observe, compare, classify, summarize, interpret, hypothesize, imagine, and/or decide.

Perspective

Retaining your sense of humor while teaching is essential. If you are relaxed and having fun, others are more likely to feel that way, too. Remember, your institution is an auxiliary educational facility. You are not teaching in a classroom; you are teaching in a gallery, garden, or park. The pressures of testing and grading...
a More Effective Teacher

are off you and your visitors. You don't have to gain your visitors' attention by stressing the seriousness of the subject matter. Never forget that the lessons you are teaching aren't serious ... they're interesting!

Attempt to reach all your visitors, but be willing to reach just one. Know what your visitors are able to absorb. Understand the implications of their age, experience, and exposure, but don't underestimate their ability to reach for new ideas. Challenge them without intimidating them. Keep as many of your visitors interested as possible and look for those who reflect the light of genuine enthusiasm.

Use your vocabulary to facilitate communication. Never use it to demonstrate your knowledge or authority. Words should be understood by those who are listening. If you want to teach visitors a new word, first tell them the thought in words they will comprehend and then offer them the new word, so that they will understand the new word's meaning and its application.

**Perseverance**

Push yourself to excel at teaching. Each time you plan a lesson, strive to make it more participatory, more engaging, and more interesting. Learn to teach skills as well as facts. And, be aware of this fact ... there are two types of teachers — ones who teach for ten years and ones who teach the same year ten times. Make each season a new start; don't rest on your laurels. Don't be satisfied. Put forth effort. Grow!

Improve your best lessons and techniques, and re-work those that were less successful. Don't be timid. Try new approaches, make changes, and try again. Don't get discouraged. Ask for assistance. Talk to other docents, staff members, and classroom teachers. Experiment and refine.

**Reflection**

Examine all aspects of your teaching. Be introspective. How could you strengthen your introductions? Are you teaching with themes? Do you ask open-ended questions and allow adequate time for responses? How are your transitions as you move from one place or object to another? Do you ask summary questions at the conclusion of your tours? Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate. Don't think of evaluation as an intrusion; think of it as attention. Ask someone whose knowledge of teaching you respect to follow your tours and give you critical feedback. Don't ask for compliments; ask for criticisms. While it is important to know what we do well, we learn most about our teaching when examining how we might improve.

Teaching is a endeavor that requires constant improvement. We mustn't assume that we are doing a good job, but focus on how we might be doing a better one. Whether we volunteer or are paid, we made a choice to teach in our particular institutional settings. We want to be the best teachers we can be and make as great a contribution to visitors as possible.

Alan Gartenhaus
Publishing Editor
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Systematic Instruction

Teaching is an endeavor that has both artistic and technical components. While it may be difficult to transmit much about the artistic aspects of teaching because they emphasize such subjective attributes as performance, attitude, style, and nuance, the technical aspects of teaching can be more easily delineated.

Successful teaching should not simply be formulaic, but a method does exist that can assist in structuring one’s teaching responsibilities. This method, which is known as “systematic instruction,” offers a useful construct for organizing and providing instruction.

The first step in instructional decision-making is to determine what goals to achieve. Unfortunately, most educators talk about their instructional goals in terms that are far too ambiguous to be helpful. Wanting visitors to gain an appreciation for abstract art or teaching visitors to have a greater awareness of mammals leaves little (or, perhaps, far too much) to build upon when creating a lesson.

Instructional goals should be stated in terms of observable “student” behaviors, such as “visitors will discover three qualities of abstract art that are non-narrative,” or “visitors will determine three attributes that make an animal a mammal.” With these specifics in mind, a docent knows precisely what visitors must accomplish and, in turn, what he or she must do to get visitors to demonstrate that learning has occurred.

A second step in planning systematic instruction is to pre-assess the visitors’ status with respect to the intended objectives. What do visitors know and how prepared are they to absorb new information? (One wouldn’t want to teach over visitors’ heads or insult their intelligence.)

This is why an introduction to touring is so useful and important. During an introduction, visitors can be queried about what they know of the topic, if they have seen your institution and its collections before, and what they were told about their tour and its subject matter prior to arriving. Once these things have been ascertained, a docent can move forward, or quickly re-assess, the teaching objectives and routes for their implementation.

The third step in planning systematic instruction is selecting the tour theme and activities. At this stage, many educators incorrectly focus on the question, “What shall I do?” rather than on the more relevant question of “What shall visitors do?” By focusing on the latter question, the educator usually increases the probability of selecting instructional situations that will help learners achieve the desired objectives.

There are certain learning principles, drawn largely from psychology, that have been shown to increase the probability that visitors will attain the learning objectives. For instance, one rather generally accepted learning principle is that the learner should be given opportunities to practice the behavior called for in the instructional objective. This is one of several reasons that interactive teaching, which calls on visitors to participate in responding to questions and accomplishing activities, should be employed.

“Successful teaching should not simply be formulaic, but a method does exist that can assist in structuring one’s teaching responsibilities.”

The fourth and final step in a systematic instructional model is evaluation. In this case, it is not directly evaluating the teacher that is being suggested, but evaluating the visitors. Docents should examine the post-instructional behaviors of students to see whether the learning activities selected produced the hoped-for-results. This can be accomplished during the tour’s conclusion. Asking visitors such summarizing questions as: “What do you remember most from the tour we took together?” or “How will you approach the next abstract art work you come across?” or “So, what questions might you ask yourself if you are trying to determine if an animal is a mammal?” can show docents whether their instructional activities were effective or require further modification.

Alan Gartenhaus
Publishing Editor

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Tricks of the Trade

Classroom Discipline Techniques

The first grade teacher stands in a classroom filled with busy children. It is time for them to stop their individual activities and rejoin her for a group story. She claps her hands three times as she sings, “One, two, three. Look at me.” The children immediately look in her direction. “It’s time to put your work away and come sit in front of me,” she says as she takes a seat beside an oversized book on an easel. The children put their work away and come to sit on carpet pieces at their teacher’s feet.

The school auditorium is filled with elementary children and their noise. The principal waits until all the children are seated and then says, rather quietly, “As soon as you can hear my voice, raise your hand.” She continues to repeat her request at five-second intervals, making eye contact and smiling at those who stop talking and raise their hands. Within a few moments, the auditorium is quiet. She thanks the children for coming to attention so quickly.

A fifth grader in the back row begins tossing the blocks he will need for a math assignment as his teacher distributes materials to the rest of the class. She returns to his desk and retrieves the blocks without saying anything to the youngster. After giving directions to the rest of the class, she returns to his desk and, quietly, says, “I want you to participate in this activity, but I cannot allow you to play with the materials. Are you ready to use them properly?” The boy nods and the teacher returns the blocks, giving him the instructions he may have missed.

These are not fantasy situations prepared for the imaginary class-rooms of a college education course. They are real examples of some of the techniques teachers have developed for maintaining control in their classrooms. These, and other discipline tricks, also can work in the more informal educational setting of a museum, gallery, aquarium, zoo, science center, historic site, park, or garden. Without a stable foundation, however, they are just “tricks” and, like most magic, are only illusions.

Building a Firm Foundation

A teacher or docent’s enthusiasm for her subject matter and for the children in her charge helps keep her audience interested and less likely to misbehave. Vitality in a tour program, as well as a classroom lesson, is a direct result of self-confidence. Self-confidence comes from being prepared, and preparation means knowing the content of tour or lesson, using appropriate presentation techniques, and understanding the developmental stages and learning styles of those in the audience. Kids know when their teacher or docent is “faking it” and are quick to take advantage of a leader who displays little interest in her lesson, teaches by rote, or talks down to them (or over their heads).

An interactive program is also one less likely to develop discipline problems. When children are truly engaged, they don’t have time to find alternate (and usually inappropriate) things to do. Hands-on activities, of course, are an excellent way to involve children, but well-structured questions can work as well. Children will accept an amazing amount of exposition if it is deliciously sand-wiched between questions that really allow them to become involved in observation, analysis, and evaluation of the things they are seeing.

A varied program also helps prevent misbehavior. Asking children to sit (or worse, stand) and listen for extended periods of time is asking for trouble. A tour that incorporates role-playing, movement, inquiry, and hands-on activities (and doesn’t stay with one exhibit, painting, or artifact too long) has a better success rate, discipline-wise.

Once the basic foundation — an interesting program enthusiastically presented — is laid, certain discipline techniques almost always work.

Some children and some classes will arrive at your museum in no condition to participate in a tour program. An hour in traffic on a hot school bus, a fight at school just before they left for their field trip, an unhappy event at home — most classes need a calming-down period before they begin their tour. Docents are often tempted to leave this time while children are going to the bathroom, getting drinks of water, and finding a place for their jackets to the classroom teacher. A better technique is to take charge immediately, giving total attention to the children as soon as they enter your facility. An informal period of questions about their school, what they are studying, whether or not they have been to your institution before allows children to become comfortable with the docent and ease into the tour situation. As children return from the bathroom, water fountain, or check room, they are quietly included in the conversation until the entire class is ready to begin the formal tour program.
that Work!

Setting the Rules

It’s important for children to know what is expected of them, both in the classroom and in the museum. In many classrooms, teachers and students work together to create a set of rules that make the classroom community easy to “live” in. Docents don’t have time to create a new set of rules with every class, but they can build on the rules that most children know. One way to do this is by saying, “I know that you have rules at school, just as we have rules here at the museum. Would you tell me some of your school rules that are probably the same as ours?” As rules are suggested by the students, the docent “accepts” them as rules for the museum, altering some as necessary. This technique helps children see that they are expected to behave as well at the museum as they do at school, that it is not a “strange” place with different expectations.

Another technique for establishing rules of conduct starts with the docent saying, “We have only two rules here. I’m going to tell you each rule, and you tell me why you think it is a good one.” The rules, in this case, are specific to the institution. In a historic house, for example, one of the rules might be to touch only those things that the docent gives you to touch. In a garden or on a nature trail, one of the rules might be to always stay on the trail or path. Asking children to tell why these are good rules gives them some “ownership” of the rules.

Another way to establish the rules you wish children to follow is to “catch them being good.” In other words, instead of taking up valuable tour time with a recitation of rules, the docent identifies and thanks those children who are following the “universal” rules of good behavior. The first time a child raises his hand rather than blurting out an answer, the docent says, “Thank you for raising your hand. It makes it so much easier for me to hear all your answers.” Children who come into a gallery and sit quietly are told, “I can see you’re going to learn a lot today since you’re such good listeners.” When an individual walks, rather than runs, the docent thanks him for doing so.

In all cases, rules should be stated as briefly as possible. They should be presented as “do’s,” not “don’t’s.” And, rules that are obvious to everyone probably don’t need to be mentioned at all.

Giving Visual and Vocal Cues

When the rules are stated at the beginning of a tour program, docents can also find out if the class already has a visual signal, such as a raised hand or finger to the lips, that means “listen.” If the class already has such a signal in place, it’s best not to substitute another. However, some institutions ask for attention with clever visual cues that capitalize on the institution’s theme. In a zoo, for example, when a monkey-shaped hand-puppet appears, children learn that they will soon hear some interesting information. A transportation museum uses cardboard traffic lights in strategic parts of the exhibit to call children to “stop, look, and listen.”

Vocal cues that employ the institution’s theme are also much

Continued on page 20
A Museum-School Partnership

A Venture Into “Community Service”

This fall marks the third collaborative partnership of the Temple City Huntington High School and the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, California. The “Dovetail Docents Program” empowers young adults, through service learning, to become student teachers who expertly share their knowledge of the current exhibits with elementary students using the inquiry method of teaching. The program clearly actualizes the intent of the National and Community Service Trust Act signed in 1993 by President Bill Clinton.

Begun as a dream, this collaboration established a partnership with the Huntington Library. Naively, we requested a meeting with the Huntington Library education staff. We asked if they would consider having a group of our students serve as docents at the Library. The timing was right; they were expanding their educational outreach and for the first time they were interested in this type of partnership. After presenting the idea to our students, our principal, and superintendent, all of whom were encouraging, our partnership with the Huntington Library and our venture into service learning through docent education, began.

As the selection and training components of the program emerged, we realized what a huge undertaking we had begun. In countless arenas, there was a need for constant vigilance including the coordination of people, dates, and transportation. Anticipating emergencies and remaining flexible was a must. We quickly discovered that having emergency phone numbers, documenting the students’ service hours for accountability, and coordinating school schedules was an absolute necessity. We also needed to educate our student docents in the proper etiquette for such a venerable institution.

The student docents’ preparation for each exhibit entailed a rigorous selection and training process over many months, which included: attending lectures by experts in the field and curators of the exhibits; studying voluminous research materials; learning and practicing inquiry pedagogy as well as other teaching and touring techniques; collaborating with senior docents; and participating in tour simulations. The Huntington staff proved to be invaluable in training and guidance, particularly by always treating the student docents with dignity.

The reasons that students joined the Dovetail Docent Program were many and varied. Some had an interest in history and art. Others were interested in teaching and working with youth. And still others anticipated the benefits that participation in this program would have on their resumes and college applications. Whatever their reason, students received a new appreciation for the subject matter of the exhibits and for the hard work of volunteers who docent at institutions throughout the world.

Our student docents have toured such exhibitions as The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America; The Great Experiment: George Washington and the American Republic; and The Land of the Golden Dreams: California and the Gold Rush Decade. As a result, many of the Dovetail docents are now interested in pursuing careers in museum work: docenting, research, history, and teaching.

During our partnership with the Huntington, their staff has always been gracious and consistent with their support. Additionally, they have continually provided focused leadership and inspiration. They helped resolve a liability issue by providing bus transportation for the Dovetail docents for the Wednesday morning tours because our school district, like many others, cannot allow students to drive to school sponsored events.

Key to the basic design of the Dovetail project are the elements necessary for effective service learning that includes the conscious integration with the curriculum and the following components: collaboration, student voice, integrated learning, civic responsibility, high quality service, reflection, and evaluation.

As General Colin Powell said, “Young people tell me that helping others makes them feel good about themselves. Often, they tell me that it does much more than that — it boosts their self-confidence; it offers them the chance to pick up useful skills; and it lets them exercise real responsibility and leadership at an early age. Young people have actually found their life’s work through a give-back experience.”

The audience for the Dovetail tours continues to be diverse. Home schoolers, English Language Learners (LEP) students, economically and culturally disadvantaged students, gifted students, private school and academy students have all been served. Such groups of student
visitors are also accompanied by their teachers, parents, grandparents, and scout leaders. These chaperones, too, gained something of value from the tours they received from our student docents.

Susan Lafferty, manager of education and volunteer services for the Huntington Library, Art Gallery, and Botanical Gardens, states, “The Dovetails have proved to be among some of our very best docents. Their teaching techniques in the exhibit halls are lively, fun, informative, and relevant to our fifth grade visitors. They hold the children in the palms of their hands, and make them laugh, exclaim in wonder, but most importantly, to think in new ways about George Washington. The Dovetails are a vital component to the Huntington’s education program.

The benefits for the student docents participating in the Dovetail program are many. They include: learning time management, acquiring leadership skills, developing speaking skills, and increasing self-confidence. They also learn to synthesize a lot of information into a focused oral presentation.

Student docents internalize the value of developing a service ethic and begin to understand how they can impact their own community. They experience the unique opportunity of cross-age peering as they share thoughts, ideas, and techniques with senior docents, as well as with young visitors. They learn that along with the privilege of working in a setting such as a museum, garden, or library comes adult responsibilities.

As the Dovetail docents, themselves, have said:

“The most gratifying part of being a docent was knowing that I was the link connecting George Washington and the students we taught.”
- Cynthia Tsai, 10th grade.

“Of all the service learning activities that I have been involved in, I would have to say this was the most morally and educationally rewarding. I have improved my speaking skills and ability to be interesting and eloquent at the same time.”
- Jennifer Kwan, 12th grade.

“To me, the most important part is understanding who I am as an American and passing on this precious knowledge to the children I tour.”
- Jenny Hung, 11th grade.

The partnership between the Huntington and Temple City High School has been an amazing adventure in personal growth and pride. The dovetailing between so many elements has been seamless because of what this collaboration offers young people. We remain in awe and are moved every time we work with our students at the Huntington, and know that we are a small part in the perpetuation of the vision of great minds.

Shirley Rosenkranz is an English teacher at Temple City High School. She received her B.S. in English and history from the University of Wisconsin and an M.A. in Literature from California State University at Los Angeles. She served as the California State Teacher of the Year in 1987. Ms. Rosenkranz has been an advocate for student docenting and service learning at the Huntington Library since 1992.

June Thurber is an English teacher at Temple City High School. She received her B.A. in English and American studies and her M.A. in literature from California State University at Los Angeles. Ms. Thurber has been an advocate of service learning and student docenting at the Huntington Library since 1992. She is also an educational consultant and a grant writer.
Culture: A Theme that Bridges Differences

More and more, our schools are gathering places of students with differing cultural backgrounds. Stepping from his Spanish-influenced household, a younger may head off to his English-speaking school where the teacher introduces the customs of the Chinese New Year. Similarly, museum docents welcome busloads of diverse children and explore with them the lifeways of yet other cultures. Educators are frequently challenged to honor these specific lifeways while teaching the fundamental commonalities, such as tolerance and respect, that make our schools work.

The situation is not lost to our culture, both within and without our diverse school populations. In fact, some would view art education as a necessity. Re-emphasis on the arts, previously reduced in the school curriculum, is a welcome change to those who recognize its potential benefits.

All well and good, but doesn't this lofty request — to use the arts to bridge cultural differences — put an added burden on the docents or teachers? And aren't educators, by teaching about the arts of specific cultures, already engaging the curiosity of students, broadening their thinking and attitudes about differences? Indeed, docents play an important role by presenting ethnic art forms, including much material culture that may not initially have been intended as art, to young visitors. But, there is room for improvement in this task of building bridges of understanding among multi-ethnic students.

What is Culture

Perhaps what is needed to bring about a change in students' attitudes about their differences is a perceptive shift in our thinking about the concept of culture. Most of us are comfortable teaching about the customs, ideas, and materials of a specific culture. However, we need also to think of culture as a broad, general term — culture with a capital "C", so to speak. Culture becomes a conceptual tool that helps us learn about people and how they develop the specific patterns that we recognize. It means, within a given time and place, looking at forces operating in individual lives that influence how different lifeways take form, endure, and change. To do this, anthropologists and archaeologists usually make three assumptions about culture: namely, that it is learned, that it is shared, and that it is adaptive over time.

We need some specific examples that show how focusing on these three broad assumptions about culture reveals important insight to culture as a process. Focus on process points up commonalities that children of all cultures can apply to their everyday world.

Culture is Learned

Each of us grew up in a culture that influences what and how we learn. For humans, the accumulated knowledge of a culture is mostly passed down by use of symbolic communication, i.e., language. A good place to observe behavior that leads to the assumption that culture is learned is at a craft workshop of origami (Japanese paper-folding) at Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, California.

Thirty sixth graders take their place at tables neatly laid out with colored paper for each child. Alice Stewart, the instructor, welcomes her young guests and shares a brief history of the craft they are about to try. (Importantly, Japanese island dwellers who developed a highly structured society, took an earlier Chinese craft and gave it its unique expression.) Stewart then sets the tone for learning a Japanese craft: each child will need to listen carefully, stay with the teacher, complete each step before starting the next, and make precise paper folds with the edges lined up. Stewart proceeds in measured steps with pauses in-between while docent helpers keep the students on track. Toward the end of the first project, students move from blind faith about what they are doing to some happy discoveries, "Hey! This looks like a frog!"

Children, the ultimate pragmatists, are quick to assess whether something works or not. By actually doing the hands-on workshop, students get immediate feedback. If the Japanese way of doing crafts gets results, children may compare it favorably to their own way of doing things. They can see that less than precise is less than a frog.

The students will tuck the finished product — the frog — into their backpacks, but more lasting perhaps is their encounter with how it was made. The frog is a performance in time that grew out of a particular culture and context. The docent's job...
is to illuminate the details that help children imagine themselves as part of another culture. The structured experience of learning origami may contrast with the child's more freestyle way of doing things. By helping students experience the process of learning, a common ground for all students, docents provide the conditions for them to gain insight into their own behavior and that of their classmates.

**Culture is Shared Ideas**

We can't see ideas, but they usually show up in some kind of patterned behavior. Generally, it is shared ideas that inform and allow us to recognize a society's arts and material culture. For an example of our second assumption, that culture is shared ideas, we turn to a recent exhibition at Pacific Asia Museum that was popular with the school-aged crowd. "The Creative Voices of Reason: Philippine Painters, Poets, and Craftsmen" was an exhibition that featured the material culture of the Manila/Acapulco Galleon Trade, 300 years of commerce between Asia and the Americas. Years of subjection to colonial influence had suppressive effects on the Philippine people. Still, their determination to maintain their identity surfaced in their crafts, paintings, and poetry.

The "soul" of the Philippines was reflected in the collected works of artist Fernando Amorsolo (1892-1972). His work provides a rich example of culture as shared ideas. He painted vibrant landscapes bathed in tropical light, and contented peasants in colorful native dress amid abundant harvests. By briefly telling the circumstances of when the paintings were made and posing some key questions, the docent can help the students reach for the emotions that the artist was expressing. For instance, one could ask, "What kinds of subjects did the artist select to paint?" "What feelings do you get from viewing the paintings?" "How do the people seem?"

By guided observations, students see the paintings through the optimism of the artist.

More broadly, docents can help children see that art is a visual language that communicates, and through it artists share their emotions and their perception of reality. Amorsolo used his artistic skill to show pride for his country. He created images to which his people could relate. He chose to leave out negative possibilities such as poverty or hardship, which clashed with his optimism. The docent might ask, "What other emotions might an artist want to share?" "Do you share emotions with your own art?" "How?"

By asking a series of questions, docents can move students from the particulars of a Philippine artist to the commonality that art can express feelings. Ideally, children may form an emotional connection to the art, which makes their museum visit a more memorable experience. They can relate to the idea that an artist paints to share feelings and his perception of reality. This is an idea that transcends all cultures. By focusing on the general concept of shared experience, docents further reflect qualities in students that promote cultural understanding.

**Culture is Adaptive**

Generally people adapt their culture in ways that improve their chances for survival in a particular
environment. Beyond their physical needs for survival, such as shelter, humans have social needs, such as status and recognition. All sorts of material objects can represent these social needs.

We can best understand the final assumption about culture, that it is adaptive, by talking about a category of Chinese objects from the permanent collection of Pacific Asia Museum. Scholars have referred to them as "objects of the Emperor's study." From very early times, the Chinese people have had great respect for literacy and writing. Their material culture reflected this interest with a profusion of inkstones, brush holders, writing instruments, and desk accessories. The production of these exquisite objects, crafted in jade, ivory, and ceramic, reached a culmination in the late Ming (1550-1644).

In that time, the spread of literacy, a chance at civil examinations, and increase in commerce and trade allowed more people to afford such fine accessories. The situation created a demand for further production of purely decorative desk items. Ownership of such luxury items meant more people could consider themselves as part of a lifestyle that was formerly available only to the elite. The material items became emblems of social recognition and upward mobility.

Docents can help students understand that culture is adaptive by using the circumstances of a different time and place (here we use the popularity of desk accessories in Ming China) as analogy to a current and familiar situation. Despite the gap in contexts, students may begin to see that material culture continues to reflect and shape people's needs today. Consider the growth in sports equipment. By selecting, for instance, a certain brand of athletic shoe, a student gets closer to perceived capabilities and good life projected by our sports elite. The same is true of the growth of computer equipment. Material culture is ever changing and develops according to whether it has meaning and advantage to individuals in a culture.

Docents can make effective use of the short time students are with them by having a clear idea of what they want to teach and asking relevant questions. For the Ming brushpot, one might start by having students closely observe the item—describing its materials and the designs appearing on it. As they conclude that it is a luxury item, interject how it was that more people at the time of the Ming dynasty were able to afford such a piece and why they might have wanted it. From there, ask the students for an example of a luxury item they might buy. Ask them why that item is important to them.

Learning why the Chinese applied so much energy to making desk accessories in Ming China helps students understand some of the forces that influence material culture in their own lives. Whether brushpots or athletic shoes, the objects reflect universal human needs that take on the specific character of the time that they were made or acquired. Understanding something about the adaptive quality of material culture may help students take a more objective look at their own behaviors.

On Building Bridges

Starting with the details of the specific cultures represented in our museums (whatever the time or place) can allow docents to make connections to visitors, while connecting visitors to our collections. Testing out a Japanese paper craft gives insight to the fact that all people learn, but each has a different style. A Philippine artist reminds us that art is a medium through which people share emotions and outlooks. A close look at a brushpot leads the way to discovering similarities we may have in common with these people who lived long ago and far away.

In each case, we step outside our familiar world and see that people do things in different settings but with common themes. With hands-on learning and guided questioning, docents set the stage for imaginative comparisons. Students look at their own ways of doing things with new eyes. Importantly, this awareness exposes and subjects their familiar thinking and behaviors to scrutiny.

So, yes, docents who continue to learn about and make use of "culture," both its specific and general aspects, can support our schools by aiding to ease some of the tensions within our multi-ethnic classrooms. Tour by tour, docents can build bridges of understanding.

Mary Elizabeth Crary holds a Master of Arts in cultural anthropology from California State University, Los Angeles. She serves as chairman of the docent training committee at Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, California. Ms. Crary published an article in The Docent Educator previously, which was entitled "The Why Question: Meeting the Challenge" (Spring 1998).
It Works for Me ...

"On Being a Docent"

We first greet the students. Their tour has begun.  
"Keep hands at your side, no chewing, don't run."
I must keep them together — don't let them stray.
Give each one a chance to have his or her say.
I have to be sure that I look in their faces
while taking their minds to wonderful places.
I must stay controlled as they giggle and jest
when confronted by Gasont Lachaise's big breasts.
Speak in moderate tones. Don't whisper nor yell.
So much to remember. So much to tell.
How much of what I know should I share?
Can I put it succinctly? Can I make it clear?
What shall I tell them of this piece of art?
What's most important? Where shall I start?
"Is this painting balanced or is it askew?"
What do you see? Is it speaking to you?
If this piece of sculpture were a music box
Would the music be quiet or would it be rock?
Take a deep breath. What do you smell?
It's going to rain. How can you tell?
Does that tree seem happy or does it look sad?"
Do my questions to them make me seem mad?
So much of importance I need to recall.
I'm remembering nothing — nothing at all.
But wait!
Most of these kids are perceptive and smart.
What I need to do is give them a start.
On them I'll depend to help me to see
How much of a teacher or student to be.
They, after all, have a whole lot to teach.
I'll let them show me — no need to preach.
They, after all, have a whole lot to say.
I'll act as their guide while they show me the way.
Now, what shall I tell them of this piece of art?
What's most important?" Where shall I start?

Geri Smith, docent
Harn Museum of Art
Gainesville, FL

On Being a Docent ...

Last summer, my visiting five-year-old grandson said to me, "Granny, I think you're too old to work at the Gallery." When I asked what gave him that idea, he said, "Well, sometimes when you're hanging one of those big pictures you might slip and hurt yourself."

At first I was simply amused that my grandson thought I was hanging pictures in the Gallery. But then I began to wonder, "Is this a message? Is that idea of slipping on a ladder a metaphor for other ways I could be slipping up as a docent?"

For instance, was I giving the same old tours month after month, always promising myself that I would work up something new, but never doing it? Did every tour have a theme, and did I make sure that everything covered fit into that theme? Did I announce the theme at the beginning of the tour and review it at the end? (Now I found myself on somewhat shaky ground.)

During public tours, did I make a point of finding out how knowledgeable my group was and did I manage to talk in a manner that was not above the heads of the inexperienced members, while not talking down to the more experienced? (Help! Now my introspection was getting impossible.) Did I involve the group in the discussion by asking them open-ended questions? Did I even know what an open-ended question was? Did I manage to cover all the main rooms and to finish in the modern or contemporary galleries? (In an hour? Give me a break!)

I'll tell you one thing right now. If that kid comes to visit me next summer, I'm going to be very careful about where I take him. There's no telling what he'll say, and I don't want to have to deal with any more metaphors!

Submitted anonymously by a docent serving at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.
Interpreting the Historic House Museum

by Jamie Credle

Anyone who has taken "the tour" at more than two historic house museums knows the variety and quality of site experiences is striking and telling. The American house museum culture offers everything from the structured sophistication of a Winterthur tour to the folksy and often improvised guided adventure delivered at "Every Home Historic House USA." Yet, the docents at both institutions are in the same business. One has had the good fortune of training, coordination, and resources while the other relies on passion, instinct, and the history learned through life experiences. Though a uniform manner of tour presentation would lessen the vibrancy of the history that museums teach, it would be beneficial for house museums to pay as much attention to their tours and the docent programs that produce them, as they do to other areas of museum operations.

From the museum education perspective, sometimes there is an imbalance of priorities. Asked what she needs from her museum, a docent recently answered, "I wish they [someone in charge] would tell us where to go." Meaning, there is no one at her site to coordinate the arrival of bus groups and tell docents what route to take in order to prevent groups from running into each other. When asked, "Anything else?" the same docent replied, "It would be nice if someone made sure the lights were on and the trash has been picked up before the tours begin." This docent works at one of the more important house museums in her state, well-known for its architecture, history, and decorative arts. Why would a museum go to the trouble of amassing a collection and spending large sums on structural restoration and leave docents who present the site to the public to interpret by default?

As a Colonial Williamsburg interpreter put it, "Objects do not speak volumes." The museum field needs skilled interpreters who can use collections to illuminate the past. It is up to house museum managers to ensure that their staffs — volunteer and/or paid — have the training and structure required to make a meaningful visit for those who seek them out. At the McFaddin-Ward House the all-volunteer docent corps must complete a thirteen week training program that includes three book reports, a written test, and an evaluation tour before being "turned loose" on the touring public. Along with this, docents have a coordinator who manages tours, schedules, and volunteer recognition. Although such a program may not be possible or appropriate for all historic house museums, the following are suggestions for empowering the docent at any house museum.

The Job

Docents need to know their job — what is required and what is expected. If making the house ready for tours is the docents' responsibility, they need to know it. A written job description detailing the nature of the work is appropriate for good management and should be given to all docents. If you do not already have written job descriptions, an interesting exercise is to have docents write descriptions of their jobs as they see them and compare their thoughts with site management's expectations. The McFaddin-Ward house has a volunteer manual detailing all aspects of docent service including job responsibilities and tour logistics.

Hierarchy and Rewards

Beyond written job descriptions, the docents should understand where they fit in the museum's hierarchy. Docents should know who makes the decisions that affect their job, who is their supervisor, who supervises their supervisor, who schedules docents, who provides new interpretation, and who evaluates the docents. Docents must also understand their value to the institution as the link between the museum and the visitor. Most historic house museums may be experienced only through a guided tour, which makes docents the human manifestation of the museum's interpretation.

Docents should be rewarded for their service. For most, service is reward enough. Beyond that, however, recognition and site-wide awareness of docent commitment is important to morale and continued enthusiasm. A "You're doing a great job" sticky note or recognition at a community gathering can have the same effect as a steak dinner.

Training and the 4Cs

Training should come at a variety of levels. Let's call them the 4Cs — content, communication, customer service, and continuing education.

✓ Content — Docents should understand the rationale for the house being a museum, i.e. "Why is it historically important?" They need to be aware of the documentary basis for the site's interpretation — i.e. "How do we know what we know?" And, they need to be aware of up-to-date
research about the site. The savvy visitor can spot a phony, and a docent thrown out to interpret something she knows little about is an historical interpretation phony. At the McFaddin-Ward House along with classes that emphasize local history, family history, architecture, domestic service, decorative arts, and museum philosophy, each docent receives a manual, which is updated annually, delineating all aspects of the site's interpretation. Tour development revolves around grasping the central theme and sub-themes (each room has a theme) that define the site experience.

Communication — Most house museum docents have an affinity for history. They seek out knowledge about the subject. However, communicating history to a visiting audience is something different all together. Theme development and presentation are central to good tour communication. As Professor Sam Ham, author of Environmental Interpretation: A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small Budgets, preaches, "People don't remember facts. They remember themes." Along with theme development, topics such as vocal quality, gestures, eye contact, and questioning techniques should be part of training. These areas do not necessarily require outside experts. Thankfully, retired teachers, who make up a good percentage of the docent world, should already be familiar with these concepts and may be willing to help in training. Feedback from buddy tours and supervisory evaluations can help the docent develop an engaging style.

Communication training should also include ways to adapt interpretation to fit the audience — how to adjust tours for children, people with special needs or disabilities, connoisseurs, and people who speak languages other than English. Teachers, advocates for the disabled, and local experts may assist in these training areas.

Customer Service — When someone suggested customer service training, a volunteer coordinator was heard to say, "Our volunteers will not appreciate being told they need to improve their manners." Good customer services involve more than manners. It should permeate all aspects of the docent's job — from providing a conscientiously delivered tour in a timely manner, to an awareness of visitors' needs, to an ability to provide information on the best way to experience the community which surrounds the museum. The docent should be familiar with highway names and numbers, the location of neighboring sites, lodging and restaurants, hints on timing and best routes to get to a visitor's next stop. Local convention and visitors bureau personnel are always pleased to help out with this type of information.

Continuing Education — Because of the changing nature of history and the discovery of new information, the idea "once trained, always trained" does not work at house museums. Keeping presentations fresh and vital requires ongoing maintenance. Many house museums offer interpretation-related lectures, programs and workshops that docents should be strongly encouraged, if not required, to attend. The publication of new research in volunteer newsletters and having interpretation discussion opportunities can enliven and rejuvenate a tired presentation and encourage docent retention.

Finally, evaluation at all levels of your docent program should be routine. The docent organization, training, and tours should all be evaluated to ensure they are working effectively. There should be opportunities for all stakeholders, from the board to the visitor, to change, adapt, and/or celebrate the program. Staff/docent tour evaluation is a time consuming, labor-intensive, and often anxiety-ridden process. Alternatives, which are often discussed in this publication, are extremely helpful, such as self-evaluation — i.e. asking visitors at the end of a tour "What are you going to remember from this tour?" — and buddy tour feedback.

With introspection and determination, docent programs can change the perception of house museums from musty relics into old friends worthy of consideration and preservation. The docent holds the key.

Jamie Creble is the education coordinator at the McFaddin-Ward House in Beaumont, Texas. Ms. Creble received a B.A. in history and English from Salem College, and an M.A. in American history from U.N.C. at Greensboro. Among the other articles Ms. Creble has contributed to The Docent Educator, her most recent was "10 Red Flags for Historic House Museums," which appeared in the Spring 1997 issue (Vol. 6, No. 3).
“Hands-On, Hands-Off”

by
Margaret Hast
&
Leisa Brown

After two and a half years of anticipation our “house museum” was ready to open. It was with enthusiasm that I joined my fellow docents on an orientation tour. We were all excited — our training was about to begin! As we entered the large entrance hall, many exclamations of wonder were heard; quickly followed by those of surprise. “There are no ropes, how can we control group behavior?” “People will touch!” It was a baffle of disbelief.

Touring this museum was sure to be a challenge … letting the public get so close to artifacts and reproductions! Needless to say we all had our misgivings, but we managed to delay our many questions about our role as docents while we enjoyed our first glimpse of the restoration magic that had been performed on this 1897 home. It was so beautiful. To those of us who had seen this house before the work began, this transformation was nothing short of a miracle.

As we reassembled in the meeting room, however, my feelings of delight were replaced by questions of doubt … "If we take the group into the rooms, how can we keep visitors from touching?" "I don’t always want to be saying, ‘Please don't touch’ as I guide my groups.” “What if someone sits on the furniture?” I think we were all feeling fearful. I know I was.

House museums I had visited before were all the same in one feature. Each had ropes strewn across doorways. A fleeting memory of narrow plastic runners also pops up. You almost had to walk toe-to-heel to keep on that little plastic path.

If we went into the rooms, I, as a docent, would be in the midst of the group; not in front as I am supposed to be. Maybe I would end up at the rear of the group as once happened to a friend on a house tour she was leading. I definitely did not want that to happen to me.

Now, my enthusiasm began to wane. This task looked too daunting. I took a deep breath, stopped my negative thoughts, and began to listen to the brainstorming going on around me. My trainers and my fellow trainees offered great ideas.

It took a while to formulate all of our techniques but the house has been open for almost a year now and by trial and more trial, we developed some very comfortable and workable techniques. One technique used to keep visitors from sitting on chairs is a fairly common one, used in many house museums — ribbons. A ribbon placed across a chair provides a subliminal message to visitors not to sit on artifacts. The ribbons often bring questions from our guests, which provide the docent with an opportunity to explain why we discourage sitting on chairs.

Another solution if ribbons are not appealing is to slide chairs under tables. However, to give the house that "lived in" appearance, we leave chairs situated in ways that look as if someone just got up from sitting in them.

Docents and interpreters will often wear white cotton gloves such as those worn by curators. Without repeatedly saying, “Please do not touch,” the glove becomes a tool to educate the visitor on why not to touch artifacts. Visitors are naturally curious and feel compelled to open a drawer or cabinet. Wearing white gloves allows the docent to open it carefully and to satisfy the visitors’ curiosity. “The use of the gloves reminds people that everything in the house is over a hundred years old,” says one docent, "and tells children they can touch with their eyes but not their hands."

How do you make a house museum interactive? Use reproductions! Is there a house museum in the country that does not have a stereoscope in the parlor or sitting room? How much is it mentioned on tour? How often is it compared with today’s viewmaster? Allowing visitors to use a reproduction stereoscope enables the visitor to “interact” with the past while preserving it. This "interaction" opens a dialogue about how people entertained themselves or friends, what the pictures show, travels of the time, and much more.

We have provided many reproductions in the museum. Imagine a child’s surprise when he or she is handed a paper doll of the Victorian period to play with for a few minutes. Think how special someone will feel if they are given a penny to put into a metal action bank. Other reproductions include toothbrushes, a rug beater, a telescope, and a popcorn popper. All in some way can be used or at least touched by visitors.

Nothing says “living history” like a working, historic kitchen. All people can relate to kitchens. They are an essential part of daily life. At the 1897 Poe House, we cook on a refurbished 1902 wood stove. What better interpretive technique exists than the smell of food cooking? From cooking in a fireplace, to a wood stove, to our modern countertop ranges, all visitors relate to what goes on in the kitchen, the work it takes, and inventions to save time.
and energy. The kitchen allows visitors to use all their senses. These are just a few of the techniques docents and exhibit designers can use to involve visitors without risk to an institution's collection. At the same time, these techniques help us achieve our teaching objectives, and our goal of making visitors feel welcome.

Margaret Hast is a retired elementary teacher. She has been a docent at the Museum of the Cape Fear for four years. Leading tours gives her a chance to teach children again but in smaller doses. Margaret calls it her “kid fix.”

Leisa Brown has been curator of education at the museum in Fayetteville, North Carolina for eight years. Prior to that, she was site manager at Somerset Place, assistant site manager at the Elizabeth II, and historic interpreter at Bennett Place — all state historic sites in North Carolina.

Fifth graders try looking through a stereoscope, which provides an opportunity to touch, while contrasting how people in the past entertained themselves and their friends with the ways we do so today.

A docent at the Poe House wears white gloves quietly indicating the need to keep bare hands off the artifacts. Notice, also, that the doors to the wardrobe are open so that visitors may look in without touching the furniture.

photo: courtesy of the Museum of the Cape Fear
Improving Your Public Speaking Skills

Screaming and Whispering

by Laura Silver

People remember a mere 7% of what they hear. Huh? Yes, you read correctly. A mere seven percent of the substance of what you say will be retained by an audience. What then is remembered? In The Magic of Rapport: How You Can Gain Personal Power in Any Situation, Jerry Richardson insists that a presenter’s tone of voice accounts for 38% of what is retained by the audience; facial expression is responsible for 55% of how people absorb and remember a message.

As presentation professionals, we know information can dazzle and delight. It’s our job to put our best foot, or shall we say, face forward to make sure our speeches are suited to the messages we aim to convey. We make mental checklists and review our outline sheets. We cater to our visitors’ intellectual needs and continually brush-up our knowledge.

Even so, crowded galleries or unforeseen factors can challenge even the most experienced docent’s presentation. In Central Park, docents vie for audiences’ attention against a backdrop of ever-changing distractions: horses and carriages, skateboarders, roller bladers, the occasional Park vehicles, musicians, the whirl of the carousel. The Conservancy’s expert volunteer guides think on their feet and use their voices and gestures to command diverse audiences from most alluring attractions.

The following exercise encouraged Central Park Conservancy docents to explore and utilize the range of their voices. It was a valuable way to hone both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Screaming is unpleasant and rarely a feasible way to appeal to visitors. Whispering teeters on the inaudible. This exercise gives presenters a chance to experiment with both extremes.

Preparation for Screaming and Whispering

1. Choose a five or six sentence text that is related to your subject matter. (I used excerpts from Henry David Thoreau’s journals at Walden Pond as a way to reconnect Central Park Conservancy guides with nature and the changing seasons.) Surprise participants. Select a text people will want to read again and again. Give each participant a copy of a text to take home as a souvenir of the exercise. Wherever possible, give each person a different text. The more varied the texts, the greater the cacophony, the more each person stands to learn. If you plan to ask people to read their texts to a small group at the end of the exercise, ask people to form groups at the beginning of the exercise. Make certain each member of the same group has a unique text. Participants will need to use texts in the second part of the exercise.

2. Situate yourself in a place with room to move around. Space is of the essence. You will need room for people to move, breathe and gesticulate, if they so choose.

Part One: Screaming and Whispering

(With Your Eyes)

Direct participants’ movements. Keep the pace upbeat. Notice what is happening within the group. Here is a sample set of directions. Use these commands as written, add to them, or invent your own. Most importantly, have fun.

• Walk around the room.
• Walk faster.
• Slow down your pace.
• Stop.
• Continue walking.
• Speed up the pace.
• Stop.
• Make eye contact with someone near you for 60 seconds.
• Keep walking.
• Walk faster.
• Change your direction.
• Stop.
• Make eye contact with someone near you.

Ask one person in each pair to raise his hand. Ask that person to send a message to his partner with his eyes. Invite all the partners to respond to the message with their eyes. Ask the group to keep walking. Invite participants to make eye contact with as many people as possible.

Whew! Take a break. Let people close their eyes for a moment. Then, solicit feedback from the group. Find out what people learned, what was comfortable, what was not comfortable. Discuss the applications for your specific tour situations.

Part Two: Screaming and Whispering Out Loud

Distribute a 5-6 sentence text to all participants. Ask participants to read the texts continuously in a normal voice for a minute or so. Then, invite them to vary their reading styles by incorporating some of the ideas below. Add your own variations to the list. Call out
instructions based on the group’s pace. Keep the exercise lively and interactive.

- Read the text in the softest voice possible.
- Read the text in the loudest voice possible.
- Go from your softest to your loudest voice.
- Read the text in a “stage” whisper.
- Read the text to yourself and make a note of the most prominent words.
- Emphasize the prominent words as you read the text out loud.
- Read the text backwards starting with the last word.
- Intersperse the phrase, “I’ve got good news!” after each phrase in your written text.
- Intersperse “Welcome!” (a prime function of our job as tour leaders, after all).
- Read your text out loud with a smile.
- Read as quickly as possible.
- Enunciate each syllable as you read.
- Punctuate important points in your text by making eye contact.
- Read the text in your normal voice.
- Read the text in the upper range (7 out of 10) of your vocal scale.
- (This is usually the correct register for a verbal presentation.)

Before you leave, be sure to elicit feedback on how the exercise worked. Find out what people discovered, what they’ll take with them, how this verbal and ocular work-up will influence their presentations in the future. Lastly, thank everyone for their participation, with your smile, your eyes, your friendly tone of voice and your words, in that order.

Laura Silver likes to write poems and make eye contact on the New York City subway. She is the tour program manager at the Central Park Conservancy. Ms. Silver wishes to thank fellow educator Kristine O’Brien for introducing her to the fundamentals of Screaming and Whispering.
more effective than the more traditional "shhhhhhh." In a historic home, the docent might begin each activity in the formal, rather stuffy, tones of the home's butler, "Ladies and gentlemen, may I present ..."

An art museum docent might use different "accents" (for instance, French for the galleries displaying works by French artists) to command the attention of her group. A whisper is a dramatic and effective attention-getting device with most age groups, especially if the topic under discussion has some mystery associated with it.

Sound cues, in addition to those produced vocally, can signal children to listen. In large areas such as a playground, teachers often resort to whistles or bells to call children back to order. In the smaller space of a history museum or historic house, an historically appropriate school bell or dinner bell can serve the same purpose.

A zoo or garden might use specialty whistles that mimic the sounds of birds or animals.

The effectiveness of some visual and sound cues relies on their uniqueness. Children will respond to them principally because they are new. They become part of a game in which you and the children participate while on the tour. The best cue, however, is silence. Waiting quietly for children to stop their individual conversations, and smiling at those who have done so, is usually very effective. It never works to try to talk louder than they are talking — it simply can't be done!

In matters of discipline, the best defense is a good offense. A docent's thorough preparation and anticipation of good behavior are usually the best "tricks" to ensure an effective and smoothly-run tour for children of all ages.
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