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MUSEUM DOCENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF INTERPRETATION

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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore docents' perceptions of their interpretive role in art museums and determine how those perceptions shape docents' practice. The objective was to better understand how docents conceive of their role and what shapes the interpretation they give on tours to the public.

The conceptual frameworks that informed the study were hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism. Hermeneutical principles lend themselves well to understanding how docents act as messengers of meaning and translate concepts to tour-goers. Symbolic interactionism captured the symbiotic nature of the interpretive process carried out on tours, as docents' perceptions and role changes as a result of time, experience, and interactions with tour-goers. The study offers a view into the world of volunteer adult educators who work in the nonformal education setting of museums. Trained by the museum and responsible for educating museum visitors, tour-goers are entrusted with docents to learn about museums' collections on walking tours through the galleries.

Utilizing a basic interpretive research design, the study offers understanding into how educators teach in nonformal settings, explains about how tours vary by docent, helps docent trainers and museum administrators understand how docents perform interpretation, and offers two conceptual frameworks for future research in the field of interpretation. Data collection was completed through observation and semi-structured interviews. Fourteen participants came from four different art museums in northeastern United States.

The study contributes to the fields of adult education, museum education, and interpretation. First, participants delivered an individualized tour that demonstrated their

dedication to their role and to the institution. Second, docents threw light upon foreign objects or made them clear to tour-goers in a number of ways. Third, docents projected their horizon of meaning based on a number of tour-goer related factors in an effort to create a tailored educational interaction. Fourth, the outcomes docents hoped to achieve for themselves and tour-goers were described.

Findings speak to the purposefulness of these adult educators in interpreting art objects to tour-goers. The theoretical frameworks do not completely explain the intentional actions docents made to solicit reactions by and engagement with tour-goers. Participants demonstrated the theory of constructivism on tours, but some interpretive techniques from the transmission model of learning, such as storytelling, were practiced. The unbounded nature of the content may explain some of the constructivist tendencies. The current model of nonformal education could be expanded.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My parents, sister, uncles, aunts, and grandfather, whose love has always been felt, for instilling in me the importance of higher education, taking me to museums on four continents, supporting my educational endeavors, and encouraging me to achieve my personal best.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of a qualitative study that seeks to explore docents' perceptions of their interpretive role and determine how those perceptions shape docents' practice in museums. The background of the problem and an overview of the theoretical frameworks that inform the study are presented. Also included in this chapter are the study's purpose, significance to various fields, and design, as well as the assumptions and limitations of the study, and important definitions.

Background of the Study

American museums average approximately 2.3 million visits per day (Lake, Snell, & Perry, 1999), and many of those adult visitors partake in the museum's educational offerings. In the 1870s, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, opened. Since then museums have made education their primary purpose (Alexander & Alexander, 2007), which they reaffirmed in 1984 (American Association of Museums). Museums were founded on the ideals of the Enlightenment, to promote rational instruction, civic responsibility, and cultural nationalism (Orosz, 1986). Tasked with the production and dissemination of knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a), museums emphasized their ability to improve the character of attendees, raise the level of culture, and foster good taste (Zeller, 1989).

In the early twentieth century, growth was seen in number, distribution, and participation in museums. At this time, American museums, which could not compete with their European counterparts on quality and extensiveness of collections, distinguished

themselves with their public educational programs (Schwarzer, 2006). This was a niche in which American museums could excel (Silver, 1989; Zeller, 1989). The 1826 will of James Smithson is an early example of an educational mission; he stipulated that his estate should go to the United States of America to found an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge (Smithsonian, 2002). Also, upon his death in 1919, Henry Clay Frick bequeathed his New York residence and many art works to establish a public gallery to encourage and develop the study of the fine arts (Bailey, 2006).

Today, nearly a century later, in many museums, educating the public about the collection is as important a function as collecting and exhibiting objects (Buffington, 2007). A multitude of educational activities are offered to foster learning; programming typically includes some combination of: lectures, programs, interactive classes, guided tours in the galleries, artistic performances, film series, field trips to other institutions, cooking demonstrations, and exotic travel tours. These programs are organized by those in the museum's education department, which has developed into its own professional field, museum education.

Aware of their field's increasing significance in society and in part fueled by a J. Paul Getty study that found that museum educators lacked a unified role, recognition from their peers, and vision needed for growth of the profession (Eisner & Dobbs, 1986), museum educators responded to the criticism. They have methodically performed more research, writing the majority of the research related to museums as educational sites and publishing it in museum journals (Castle, 2000; Cooper, 2007; Deblasio & Deblasio, 1983; Gurian, 1999; Hirsch & Silverman, 2000; Munley & Roberts, 2006).

Demonstrating their collegiality, in 2008, scholars in museum education sought insight from adult educators for the special issue of the *Journal of Museum Education* titled ‘Adult Learning in Museums.’ Edited by a professor of adult learning with contributions by adult educators, this is a rare example of a joint effort between museum educators and adult educators. The perspective of the adult education researcher has much to offer this topic with the potential to reconnect the fields of museum education and adult education, which share similar goals, serve like populations, and whose missions are both education.

Given the variety of learning activities and the scale of the museum audience, one might expect the field of adult education to more be closely aligned with museums. In the 1960s, the field of adult education moved away from museums as sites of practice from which they perform research, evident in the paucity of museum-related articles in adult education journals. Currently, there is a dearth in research by adult educators about museums as sites of adult learning and docents as educators. It was not always this way. Initially, the field of adult education recognized museums as research and educational institutions as early as the 1930s handbooks (Coleman, 1934). There was a multi-decade chasm and only a single aspect of museums was recognized by Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007) in their most recent foundational book about adult learning, that is, the nonformal educational (NFE) opportunities existing in them. This unique setting, the “original drop-in learning center” (Silver, 1978, p. 209) can be better understood from an educational perspective as an example of a NFE setting.

Nonformal Setting

The term 'nonformal' involves the intentional, purposeful, and structured learning opportunities occurring outside of a formal education system (Coombs, 1985). NFE activities are usually short term (Merriam, et al., 2007), specific, context-based, reliant on participants' existing knowledge, meet the needs and convenience of participants, and involve participation by choice (Heimlich, 1993; Taylor, 2006). Based on their programming, structure, and relationship with patrons, museums have been recognized as nonformal settings (Taylor, 2006; Taylor & Neill, 2008).

As the name suggests, NFE falls in between formal and informal education. Formal education is the hierarchical, ordered education system, such as degree programs (Merriam, et al., 2007) and informal education is the unintentional knowledge acquired incidentally through everyday life experiences (Campbell & Curtin, 1999). Emerging in the 1960s in response to cultural, social, and political crises worldwide, NFE programs were initiated in disadvantaged communities around the world (Ewert, 1989), expanding the capitalistic ideal of teaching individuals a useful trade.

Three important parts of NFE, which form the international model, are system, setting, and process (Brennan, 1997). System refers to how much control there is for managing an organization that needs to be agile in order to respond to educational needs. Setting is about the critical nature of education occurring outside of the formal system at locales such as churches, libraries, the workplace, and museums (Merriam, et al., 2007). Process is curricular-related, emphasizing how the teaching strategies need to be matched to the learner (Brennan, 1997).

As a form of NFE, docent-led tours at museums demonstrate system, setting, and process. System-wise, museum educators give tours on topics they believe will draw interest from the diverse public while being compatible with the museum's collection. Remaining relevant (Ham & Krumpe, 1996), timely, and adaptable to what is of interest to patrons, demonstrates a museum's agility, responsiveness, and the ultimate value of offerings to their public. Setting refers to the museum as a place where people come at their leisure to see a collection or to learn on a tour in a comfortable environment. Process refers to the tour's structure: being of appropriate length, balancing facts with engaging stories, etc. These are the responsibilities of a well-trained guide who is ready to meet the diverse needs and interests of tour-goers. Docents, who tend to museum patrons on tours, are important NFE educators (Taylor & Neill, 2008), have not been studied in as much depth as interpreters. Educators who practice NFE lack the unification that comes with being associated with a group, such as the groups inherent in higher education and in professional development.

The majority of research about NFE programs has been about those in developing nations that were established with help from the West to assist with economic development in international locales, such as Mongolia and Pakistan. Two aspects that are central to these NFE programs do not exist for many that are United States-based: lack of competition and failure of the education system. Further research is needed on how educating in a NFE environment is different without these factors.

First, in developing nations, programs are not competing with other sources of similar activities or opportunities for learners' attention, as they would be in the United States. Learners in American museums partake in NFE but what they learn is not critical for their prosperity and community vitalization, rather, it is personal interest, so the focus and

approach taken by the educator must be different. Research about NFE in America has not sufficiently addressed how the “power of feet” (Taylor, 2006, p. 305) of museum audiences affects the educator and the educator’s interpretation, unlike counterparts in developing nations where educational programming does not abound. Additionally, Brennan’s model makes no mention of the individual educator and the educator’s ability to evaluate learner needs, craft messages, and be adept at offering an interpretation that is useful and helpful to learners. Today, NFE in museums is delivered by thousands of adult educators whose experience is not well understood by adult and museum educators.

Second, NFE in developing nations reacts “to the limitations or failures of formal education” (Brennan, 1997, p. 187) which is an overstatement concerning museum education. It is not based on the premise that learners were failed by formal education. Learners on a museum tour are not making up for inadequacies in other educational environs; rather, they are typically fulfilling a personal interest, knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Docents, the liberal arts educators whose work is viewed as enlightening and developing intellectual capacities—while not economically advantageous to learners—are the backbone of NFE in museums. Examining this iteration of NFE and expanding Brennan’s capitalistic international model to include other arenas such as museums, could inform the work of similar kinds of educators delivering NFE.

Docents

Docents are the adult educators who voluntarily lead small groups of adults through museum galleries or historical sites on educational and informative often hour-long tours. In the 1980s, docents proved invaluable, as their tours were the most widely used educational

service offered by museums (Grinder & McCoy, 1985). Typically a middle-aged upper class female (Schwarzer, 2006), a docent is often the only person in the museum with whom patrons interact. Docents undergo training by the institution so that they are well versed in the museum's key messages, institutional practices, the collection, and touring techniques. Thus, the power this individual has on the visitor's experience, learning, and overall impression of the museum is exceptional.

With the public, docents take on the role of teacher, sharing the fundamental intent of the curatorial staff, and quickly evaluating visitors' experience, interest, stamina, and the likelihood of engagement (Abu-Shumays & Leinhardt, 2002). The tour itself is unsupervised allowing the guide some degree of freedom. With freedom comes variation as needed, and docents rarely give the same exact tour with precisely the same objects, stories, and descriptions on every single tour. Rather, docents read or assess their audiences (Taylor & Neill, 2008) as they strive to make tours relevant to each unique audience (Abu-Shumays & Leinhardt, 2002). Audiences include those with diverse educational levels, various areas of interest, differing motivation for attendance, etc. This is not a simple task, as the patrons are strangers to the docent.

Therefore, docents interpret objects as they 'see' them, meaning docents tell patrons about objects based on a number of factors: what the docent knows about the object; what the docent thinks the patrons already knows about the object (Taylor & Neill, 2008), and what the docent thinks patrons are seeking to know about the object at this visit. Beyond the learner and educator, external factors could also influence the tour, for example, the tour manager, relevant current events, or the historical significance of the day, etc.

Typically docents are free to choose how they present information to patrons. Museums often lean toward a ‘story-line’ approach (Knudson, Cable, & Beck, 1995) because stories are engaging (Rossiter & Clark, 2007), connect people to the subject of the story, and the unraveling and unfolding of details makes for the telling of a good narrative. Whichever methods are used, docents are “an integral part of the museum’s interpretive function” (Booth, Krockover, & Woods, 1982, p.15), as they are often the negotiator of meaning between objects and visitors. Creating understanding and telling an object’s story are all aspects of interpretation.

Interpretation

A pioneer in the field of interpretation, Freeman Tilden (1977) wrote that interpretation “aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects...rather than simply to communicate factual information” (p. 8). Seeking to forge connections between the interests of the audience and meanings (National Association for Interpretation, 2008) in objects, interpreters convey meaning (Thompson & Harper, 2000) to those who otherwise would not understand or appreciate what they are viewing.

When docents tell historical and interesting information on tours, visitors receive what is called personal interpretation, that is, one person interpreting to another person or persons (Hems, 2006). Personal interpretation allows the interpreter to continually adapt to the audience, connecting with them based on what the docent knows about them (i.e. tourist v. local, first time v. frequent visitor). When telling information, docents seek to meet the educational goal of museums, that is, make information about the past understandable in relation to the present (Vanderway, 1977). More could be understood about how docents

perceive their interpretive role in making objects understandable and relatable to their audience.

Ultimately, docents are the museum educators selected for further investigation because of their commitment to using personal interpretation techniques, their importance in carrying out the educational mission of museums, and the researcher's self-interest in having been one personally—her first experience as an adult educator. Prior experience participating in a study about docents as nonformal educators (Taylor & Neill, 2008) illuminated a number of potential research questions involving this population including: What do docents think about their interpretive role? How does the audience influence how docents construct their tours and what information gets presented? How are stories used on tours and with which audiences? What aspects other than setting shape docents' practice?

Exploring these questions could assist museums in carrying out their mission of education by better understanding how the educator makes meaning of his or her role as an interpreter. This topic—how docents perceive their interpretive role—based on the published literature, is not well known either to museum educators and adult educators. In fact, the “scholarly literature and research about docents is scanty” (Sweeney, 2007, p. 80). Most research is about docents' preparation (Grenier & Sheckley, 2008) in museum training programs, and others are primarily anecdotal and based on personal impressions (Scott-Foss, 1994). Most studies in which docents served as participants are about docents' versatility, expertise, proficiency, and motivation, and are primarily published in museum education, history, and social science journals. Little research has been performed about how docents facilitate learning and furthermore, it is hardly ever linked to theory (Falk & Dierking, 2000). Participants in studies typically include museum education staffers, tour-goers, and docents.

Rarely are all participants in a study solely docents, and if so, they are seldom interviewed about the nuances in their touring strategies when faced with different audiences and how they perceive their interpretive role and responsibility.

Compounded by an absence of research on interpretation (Ward, 2006) especially in NFE settings (Beck & Cable, 2002), most of what is written about interpretation is about its use in natural settings (Ham & Krumpe, 1996) such as state parks. Researchers have not studied: interpreters' selection of information on a tour; the various kinds of interpretation performed on museum tours; or how the interpretive environment (Hammit, 1984) fosters and supports learning via various interpretation methods. Additionally, there has been a call to examine the use of various interpretive techniques, such as storytelling, as a learning method on adult tours (Peyton, 1999).

Given these points, adult educators can appreciate the great deal of responsibility placed on museum educators to communicate messages the museum wants delivered. Docents interpret the collection to a variety of learners in a limited amount of time. However, little is known about docents' beliefs, behaviors, approaches, and assumptions, which if known, could improve the manner in which the role of the docent could be performed.

Problem Statement

Performing the essential responsibility of educating museum attendees, docents are essential to the museum's function (Gartenhaus, 1998). Understanding the experience of docents has not been a priority. There is very limited existing research (Grenier & Sheckley, 2008) on those who interpret museum collections to a variety of learners who "are

anonymous strangers” (Vallance, 2003, p. 10). Interpreting the messages museums and curators produce about information about objects (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b) in addition to answering tour-goers’ questions is done unsupervised by docents. In their interpretive role, docents provide meaning and foster understanding with tour-goers. However, no published literature seeks to understand the nature of the construct of interpretation, as given on museum tours, solely through the eyes of those performing it. Poorly understood by museum and adult educators, how docents perceive their interpretative role has not been examined. The majority of literature written about docents’ motivation (Holmes, 2007), training (Cunningham, 2004), and similar topics is insufficient. First, researchers neglect to include the docent’s voice, best heard through interviews. The few studies in which docents were interviewed have been about recruitment and retention (Stamer, et al., 2008), instructional methods (Horn, 1984), and comfort level when presenting controversial art (Corrin, 1994).

Second, typically, docents do not make up the entire pool of study participants, which often include tour-goers and museum staff. Looking at just the dedicated volunteers was needed. A similar study came close. Davidson and Black’s (2007) work to define guidelines leading to an effective nature tour was done with professional cave guides. They, along with their managers, participated in a workshop. Emergent themes were sent to the guides and also “other practitioners in the field for review and refinement” (p. 31). This doctoral study was different, docents were not interviewed with the individual to whom they report as that could have changed the dynamics and level of openness, data collected was not reviewed by ‘others’ in the field, and participants were all volunteers.

Third, research about docents is rarely linked to or informed by theory, thus, we could better understand the experience of docents seen through the lens of established theoretical

frameworks. Therefore, a study was needed that examined the nature of the interpretation performed, made the voice of the docent central, consisted solely of docents, was based on theory, and sought to understand how docents perceive their interpretive role on tours.

Purpose of the Research

Recognizing that docents perform the invaluable service of delivering adult education in museums across America and that their experience is not well understood, the purpose of this research was to explore docents' perceptions of their interpretive role and determine how those perceptions shape docents' practice.

Guiding Research Questions

In order to explore docents' perceptions of their interpretive role and determine how those perceptions shape their practice in museums, this study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do docent training, the audience, the nonformal setting, and museum content influence how docents perceive their interpretive role?
2. What and how are interpretive techniques used to educate tour-goers?
3. How do docents' beliefs about the role of a museum as education center impact their practice of interpretation?

Conceptual Frameworks

The two conceptual frameworks for this study are hermeneutics and symbolic interactionist theory. Hermeneutics offers insight into the concept of interpretation as it gets

at the role the docent plays as medium or interpreter, and symbolic interactionism focuses on how docents' perceptions, meaning, and role changes with time, experience, and interaction with patrons.

How a message communicator, such as a docent, decides what to say and how to say it, is understood to some degree from hermeneutics, which is “the art of clarifying and mediating by our own effort of interpretation” (Gadamer, 1976, p. 98). Hermeneutics, the theory and practice of interpretation, was developed by Frederick Schleiermacher (1768-1834) to provide rigorous methods of interpreting religious texts but hermeneutical principles can be applied to museum artifacts (Brodie, 1997). In the twentieth century, German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) wrote extensively on the theory, believing that “understanding is expressed in language, in questions and answers, in the unending process of finding words to communicate what we see” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2007, p. 153). In the communication process, one seeks to make an idea clear to another person, so that understanding is fostered. This involves considering the message receiver's perspective, background, and education. Hermeneutics involves appreciating the cultural and social forces that may influence one's outlook (Gadamer, 1975). It seeks to “let what seems to be far and alienated speak again” (Atkins, 1988, p. 438), “not only in a new voice but in a clearer voice” (Gadamer in Risser, 1997, p. 14).

Originating from the Greek verb “hermeneuein” meaning “to interpret” (Palmer, 1969), hermeneutics is linked to Greek mythology through Hermes, the messenger god who mediated between the worlds of gods and humans. On tours, docents model the role of Hermes mediating between the world of objects and tour-goers, always with the listeners in mind. Hermeneutical theory asserts that the act of understanding is constituted in relation to

the learner, and the conditions under which the learner is able to hear the objects' voice (Risser, 1997).

Hermeneutics theory “explains that understanding is reached through the process of interpretation” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b, p. 116). For this study, hermeneutics captures the interpretive process docents perform on tours, as thinking about education occurring in museums leads us to hermeneutics (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2007) and the “interpretive process used in the encounter with objects can be explained using hermeneutics” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b, p. 116). The verbal interpretation docents give is based on their understanding of the object in order to express it and this understanding comes from interpreting the object. Specific words are selected in order to make something clear. Teaching in a museum and hermeneutics share “the core premise that dialogue and conversation are the foundation of understanding and interpretation” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2007, p. 153). How docents perceive their role as interpreters is directly related to their perspective of the interpretation of objects. The intermediary role Hermes plays speaks directly to the one docents play and the theory informs how the study's participants practice and seek to forge connections between object and tour-goer.

To provide insights into the study, symbolic interactionist theory speaks to how an individual forms and revises conceptions through social interaction, that is, a docent constantly interacts with patrons and receives both verbal and nonverbal feedback. Based on these exchanges, one's perceptions influence one's behavior.

Rooted in the philosophy of pragmatism and the writings of George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), the term ‘symbolic interactionism’ was coined in the 1930s by Mead's student, Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), who steadfastly championed Mead's work and wrote about the

theory. Blumer (1986) describes social interaction as symbolic: “human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another’s actions” (p. 79). Interpretations are influenced by a number of factors, including past interactions on the subject and preconceived notions.

Symbolic interactionism has three interdependent core principles: meaning, language, and thought (Miller, 2005). These principles lead to conclusions about the creation of one’s self. The first core principle of meaning states that humans act toward people and things based upon the meanings that humans have given to those people or things. Language gives humans a means by which to communicate, to negotiate meaning through symbols (Mead, 1965). By speaking with others, humans come to identify meaning, or naming, and develop discourse. One’s thoughts modify each person's interpretation of symbols. Thought, based-on language, is a mental conversation that requires role taking, or imagining different points of view (Blumer, 2004). For docents, this means considering the perspective and background of museum visitors, about whom little could be known. Choosing terms and phrases from the audience’s generation could aid in foster meaning and understanding. Any tailoring of the interpretation to the listeners demonstrates docents’ effort to consider what is appropriate for the learners.

For Blumer (1986), objects take on meaning through a process of interaction and Peterson (2007) tells us that “art is a good site for studying the workings of symbolic interaction because beauty, quality, and value are not inherent in works of art themselves... [but rather] ascribed in the judgments people make...based on social understandings...” (267). Meanings of objects are based on interpretations, so the same object can have various meanings for different people. Interaction with others can cause modifications or revisions to

this meaning and, over time, meanings of objects can change. Society, culture, and social norms shape the self and how one defines the situation, and these in turn, shape behavior (Stryker & Gottlieb, 1981).

Behavior is seen in the form of interacting with others via shared symbols. For example, consider the handshake of two people who have just agreed upon a deal. This physical union of one person's hands in the others offers tangibility and that contact and interaction is symbolic of the trust and reliance the two are exchanging with each other. Symbolic interactionists believe that we act toward others based on the meaning that those other people have for us, which, for docents, means being an interpreter who educates.

Consistent with the premise of symbolic interactionist theory, for this study, it is plausible to believe that docents' perceptions of the interpretation they perform have emerged from their past conceptions, experiences, and interactions gleaned from giving other tours. Understanding how docents perceive of their role, then, partially calls for reviewing past conceptions of the role that influence their current conceptions. Symbolic interaction is particularly useful here because of the theory's emphasis on the meaning people attribute to objects. It also points to how docents' interactions with diverse audiences using symbols and language can shape docents' perception of their role.

Perception, a concept this study seeks to understand, is strongly influenced by prior experience (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994a), an important concept to both hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism theory. Hermeneutics contributes a way to understand the interpretation that docents perform to make foreign objects understandable to the modern eye. Symbolic interactionism lends credence to the social interactive nature of tours and the

direct effect it has on the interpreter over time. Both of these theories illustrate the role of docent as negotiator, meaning maker, and interpreter.

Overview of the Research Design

Given the purpose of the study, which sought to uncover how docents perceive their role, a qualitative study was most appropriate to attempt to answer this question.

Qualitative studies seek to understand and offer clarity by giving voice to those whose life or work is being studied. This study implored a basic interpretive design. Merriam (2002) points to symbolic interactionism as informing basic interpretive qualitative research. The reciprocal nature of putting oneself in the shoes of the other, seeking to understand the other's perspective are aspects of symbolic interactionism that describe what the researcher sought to accomplish in this study. Information gleaned from this kind of study may be useful to museum administrators and those who have oversight of the education function of museums as, like in libraries, "results of studies based in symbolic interactionism can then be used to help facilitate better understanding of the goals of the organization" (Fidishun, 2002, p. 451).

Having been a docent and frequent tour-goer at museums, I can appreciate the work these volunteers do for art museums and how much their tours impact an audience member's museum visit. Examining the meaning and essence of lived experience of a group of people (Patton, 2002), this study sought to uncover and explain how people construct meaning of a phenomena and get "at the nature of reality with regard to that phenomenon" (p. 215).

With assistance and recommendations provided by local docent managers, fourteen docents were selected for participation in the study. Men and women age 25 years or older

whose experience at an art museum as a docent was for at least one year were invited to participate. This purposeful sample allowed for the richest cases from which one can learn a great deal (Patton, 2002).

Driven by the research question, two methods of data collection were performed, observations and interviews. Observations took place inside art museums, while docents gave tours. Field notes were taken to assist the researcher with creating specific interview questions for individual participants. In-depth and semi-structured interviews were done individually. These methods are most appropriate when seeking to get at how an individual conceives of his or her role, by recording actions done while performing it and by asking questions about it so as to increase the researcher's understanding of the educator's experience.

Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method. This involved detailed examination of interview transcripts and observations made in the field. Inductive data analysis occurred in that reoccurring themes that arose from the data were identified and coded by key phrases revealing categories. The study sought to achieve credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in its design to ensure trustworthiness. These attributes were sought by the researcher performing member checks, leaving an audit trail, using the constant comparative method, triangulating data, and keeping rich, thick, descriptive data intact so as to be true and authentic to the voice of participants.

Significance of the Study

There were a number of reasons why this study is significant, the first being that a study examining how docents perceive their interpretive role in museums has not been

performed. Since the 1890s, museums in America have used docents to educate the public (Giltinan, 2008), meaning hundreds of institutions have invested resources and personal responsibility in these educators, for which there are hundreds of thousands. Understanding how the role is performed and what effects an interpretation given on a tour could assist museums in making sure their educational and institutional goals are being met.

Museums themselves have not made a great effort to understand the nuances that occur on tours as a result of their own museum representatives. At a time when so much attention has been given to the study of visitors' experiences in museums (Chang, 2006; Falk, 1998; Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994a; Prentice, Davies, & Beeho, 1997) it was time to turn to the educator to understand the role and how the docent's work is performed. Understanding the docent, solely from the docent's perspective, could produce a study unlike any other in the existing literature on this population. Addressing this gap in the literature, this study is one of a handful that applied adult education concepts to museum educational practices in giving voice and precedence to the educator. The findings from this study could contribute to the fields of museum education, adult education, and interpretation.

For the field of museum education, this study could enlighten museum educators and administrators about how tours vary in content and even message, by both docent and by audience, about what truly impacts tour content, and how the interpretive role is viewed by the docent. This could set new expectations for qualifications in selecting docents. As quality control is a concern given the numerous tours museums offer daily by hundreds of unsupervised docents, this study could offer administrators insight into the interpretive process performed. For docent trainers, this study is distinct in that it presents a view into the

docent pool by offering the perspective of the volunteer and how a docent perceives of work done on behalf of the museum education department. It could help train docents in evaluating and assessing the audience and determining appropriate objects and stories for inclusion on a tour. Looking into the future, the findings could also help improve the diminishing docent pool by ensuring that prospective docents are able to effectively communicate with different kinds of audiences, perhaps assisting in recruiting future docents from those who enjoyed their tour experience.

Significant to the field of adult education, this study enhances our understanding of the concerns and issues of adult educators in museums who have not been a priority of late in the adult education body of knowledge. For example, studying this issue also reconnects museums in general with adult education research, as the setting is a common place where adults learn. Looking beyond the nonformal setting of the cultural institution, this study is focused on the educator. It legitimizes and shows the importance of volunteer educators. The findings could contribute to the quality of education the adult public receives at cultural and similar historical institutions. It could offer other adult educators a foundation for additional work on the topic, which could involve: creating a docent training program informed by the principles of adult education, studying the effectiveness of docent-lead tours compared to other educational activities offered in museums, comparing personal interpretation and non-personal interpretation methods in museums, and better understanding what attracts adult learners to nonformal learning settings.

Thirdly, for those who study interpretation in various settings—a field that lacks solid theoretical frameworks—this study offers two conceptual frameworks which could be used in interpretation research to explain the interpretive process. The growing body of literature

on using informative and educational stories with adults in various settings has little empirical research for use in an art museum setting. The findings could inform the field of interpretation in that the results break down the interpretive techniques used on tours, help to explain how docents negotiate meaning between exhibits and visitors, and seek to determine how docents deliver messages that connect with specific audiences and reveal meaning about objects. Those who study the nature of interpretation in intimate groups should find the story format or other interpretive processes used on docent-led museum tours of interest.

Finally, this study is personally meaningful because of the researcher's self-interest in having been a docent. Using principles of adult education to assist in carrying out the educational mission of museums by contributing to what is known about museums educators has great personal significance. The results could impact how docents give tours in the future, which would mean that my efforts positively impacted a cause for which I am passionate, that is, educating people about the arts and fostering appreciation for our cultural treasures.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

This study was based on a few critical assumptions. First, and critical to the study's design, was the assumption that the participants could and would recognize and identify what factors influence their interpretation. This was essential as without docents' ability to name or describe what impacts the interpretation they give, it would be impossible to obtain the docent's perspective. Reflecting upon their work needed to occur in order for participants to explain commonly practiced acts.

Second, this study presumed that docents do not use the exact same stories, phrases, and descriptions verbatim with each audience on every tour. Informed by symbolic interactionism, the dynamic nature of individuals meant that tours have unique aspects to them, based on a number of factors, including the interpreter, audience, setting, lessons learned over time, and other, potentially unknown, external factors.

Also, the method of this study assumed that participants would reveal the assumptions that they individually make about their audiences. Assumptions could be based on factors such as age, race, socio-economic background, education, etc. Getting participants to discuss this sometimes subconscious decision-making process, which they may perceive as stereotyping audiences, might be challenging. In sum, cooperation and a willingness to reflect on their role was required of participants in this study.

Additionally, this study presumed that docents made a concerted effort to ‘reach’ tour-goers with language that was appropriate for and could resonate with them so that connections were made with objects that, once foreign or alien (Atkins, 1988), spoke “not only in a new voice but in a clearer voice” (Gadamer in Risser, 1997, p. 14), a goal of hermeneutics. This meant that docents attempted to relate the objects as much as possible with what they know about audience members.

This study is not without its inherent limitations. First and foremost, the findings of any qualitative research study are not meant to be generalized. Findings were based on a small purposeful sample and not meant to be indicative of the experiences of the docent population at large. Perhaps transferable to those in similar contextual situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this researcher hopes the findings are useful and meaningful to other adult educators in the museum world and those who work in interpretation.

Relying on finding participants from referrals by docent managers, referred docents may not have provided the best or most information-rich participants in the museums' docent pools. The sample may not have included many people of color or of diverse socio-economic levels since the docent is most often a female, characteristically from a white, upper-middle class segment of the community (Bleick, 1980; Silver, 1978). So, while the participants may be representative of the docent pool nationally, they might not include much in the way of diversity.

Turning to the methods used in fieldwork, performing observations presented limitations. While their tours are being observed, participants may have been more nervous than usual or acted differently than if they were not being watched (Patton, 2002). By making an effort to stand peripherally, as a silent onlooker observing, this researcher attempted to counteract this.

Interviews also present challenges. The emotional state of the interviewee is always a factor (Patton, 2002). When asked about their decisions made on tours, docents may have felt they were being evaluated. The researcher did not want to jeopardize docents' relationship to the organization so pseudonyms were used to protect all participants. If distractions were observed, the participant was offered the opportunity to reschedule the interview. Additionally, when participants were asked about their actions on a tour, the researcher needed to be cognizant of docents practicing "impression management—how people want others, including the researcher, to see them" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10) rather than how they truly feel.

Looking at process, with this kind of study, getting at *how* docents interpret and make decisions, the responses could have been incredibly varied making recognizing themes

challenging for the researcher. Also, the voluntary nature of the docent population might have offered some general limitations as tours are cancelled for a variety of reasons which might have impacted observation plans and postponed data collection opportunities.

With qualitative studies, objective reality can never be captured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), which is understandable considering the researcher has led tours in museums, an experience that adds to the unique way in which data will be interpreted. The researcher could not divorce herself from her past as it was already embedded in her perspective. Having walked in docents' shoes could have provided more advantageous than detrimental as it offered credibility to participants who could feel more understood and appreciated than if their practices were being studied by someone who lacked museum experience.

The most significant limitation in this study, whether using docents or any other group of people, was that there is no single interpretive truth, but multiple criteria for evaluating research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This presented challenges to the study which the researcher tried to mitigate as much as possible with a solid, well-vetted study design that adhered to both the spirit and letter of qualitative research.

Definition of Terms

To clearly understand this study, the following definitions are offered.

Docent: A “trained volunteer teacher-guide” (Burcaw, 1997, p. 17) who leads the public on group tours in museum galleries.

Hermeneutics: The art of “clarifying and mediating by our own effort of interpretation” (Gadamer, 1976, p. 98).

Interpretation: A “mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource” (National Association for Interpretation, 2008).

Museum: a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment (International Council of Museums, 2007, art. 3, ¶1).

Symbolic interactionism: The theory that “human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another’s actions” (Blumer, 1986, p. 79).

Nonformal education setting: Places such as historical sites, natural settings, museums, and retail settings (Taylor, 2006) where the intentional, purposeful, and structured learning opportunities are provided outside of formal education system (Coombs, 1985).

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

This study sought to understand how museum docents perceive of their interpretative role on tours and what influences their interpretation. Little is known about how docents select content and assess their audiences as they strive to make tours relevant to each unique audience. Understanding docents' perception of this interpretative role and how they filter certain information could be revealing as museums seek to increase participation in and improve the quality of their educational offerings.

In order to examine this phenomenon, several areas of literature have been reviewed. They include the history of museums, museum education, docents, and interpretation. The first section informs the reader of the development of museums and their use over the last two hundred years. The changing role of museums and a number of influential educational theories have impacted the way museums perform the service of educating their visitors. Museum education has evolved into its own as a field and the 'server' delivering the education is typically the docent. In the next section, the literature about docents, who for over one hundred years have been on the frontline of nonformal public educators, is reviewed. On their tours, docents interpret objects so that they are made clear to the viewer. Various teaching strategies are utilized to educate the public on tours, including presenting facts in a story form. The final section looks at interpretation and some of its various forms, such as narrative and stories. Interpretive methods used as instructional methods are the focus.

Conceptual Frameworks

This study is informed by two theories, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism, both of which were selected because they directly relate to interpretation, a construct central to this study. While interpretation is its own research field, interpretation is not informed by any specific theoretical frameworks and there has been a call by those in the field to strengthen the theoretical foundations of interpretation research and practice (Archer & Wearing, 2003; Ballantyne, 1998; Uzzell, 1998), perhaps looking to the social sciences for inspiration (Uzzell, 1996). Without a theory from the field of interpretation from which to draw, the two conceptual frameworks were selected to inform this study as they have informed studies from the fields of religion, literature, communication, and the social sciences (Charon, 1995) including social psychology. In the descriptions following, each's connection to interpretation will be described.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the study of understanding and essential to it is a broad conception of interpretation. Interpretation is a “mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource” (National Association for Interpretation, 2008). The message-bringing process of “coming to understand” is inherent in three meanings of hermeneutics: to express aloud or verbalize; to explain, such as explaining a situation; and to translate, as in translating from one language to another (Palmer, 1969). This seems similar to the verbalizing and explanatory aspects that apply to the telling of information that occurs

on tours and to the descriptive dimension of interpretation as docents seek to convey information. Originally only applied to biblical and classical text, its principles can be applied to “any work of art” (p.10) including museum artifacts (Brodie, 1997).

The word ‘hermeneutics’ originates from the Greek verb *hermeneuein* meaning ‘to interpret’ (Palmer, 1969) and is linked to Greek mythology through Hermes, the messenger god. Hermes mediated the worlds of gods and humans by transmuting “what is beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence can grasp” (p. 13). In this process “something foreign, strange, separate in time...is made familiar... comprehensible; something requiring...explanation, or translation is somehow ‘brought to understanding’—is interpreted” (p. 14).

Philosophers Schleiermacher, Dilthey (1996, 1976), and Heidegger (1999) greatly contributed to hermeneutics but it was Gadamer who sought to uncover the nature of human understanding with relation to the humanities. He took issue with the traditional German approach, which narrowly believed that correctly interpreting a text meant recovering the original intention of the author who wrote it. Gadamer argued that people have a historically affected consciousness and they are embedded in a particular history and culture. Meaning, subconsciously, an interpreter finds ways that the object's history articulates itself in concert within the interpreter’s own background. Presuppositions and cultural traditions affect how the docent analyzes and views text or objects. By virtue of human nature, there is no neutrality or unbiased manner from which to interpret.

Gadamer (1976) calls what each person projects a “horizon of meaning” (p. xv). The current social and political milieu, one’s own value structure, and assumptions made about the person or people to whom one is interpreting influence how something is explained to the

public. Any interpretation is linked to its historical moment (Rockmore, 2005) or is “historically situated” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994a, p.13), meaning how we relate the past to the present affects our interpretation today. Thus, educators must realize that their curricular decisions, whether consciously or unconsciously, are influenced by their past (Slattery, Krasny, & O’Malley, 2007). Complete objective interpretation is impossible because humans are conditioned by internal prejudices (Gallagher, 1992).

Beyond the interpreter, hermeneutical theory asserts that the act of understanding is constituted in relation to the learner, and is about the conditions under which the learner is able to hear the voice of the object (Risser, 1997). Gadamer believed that each art object from any period has its own meaning and speaks to viewers here and now based on their particular vantage point, and the reception of that communication is critical (Mugerauer, 1995). Learning must be approached from where the person currently is (Ashworth, 2004) meaning the viewer brings a perspective, history, etc.

Gadamer also believed that hermeneutics becomes meaningful in the context of a situation demanding interpretation and hermeneutic theory cannot be separated from the interpretive situation (Tillery, 2001). Hermeneutics is a “framework that helps us keep both practical and ethical considerations in mind as we make decisions...” (p. 104). Simply put, hermeneutics are merely “interpretations of the world...based on whatever information that, according to current standards, we happen to possess” (Rockmore, 2005, p. 110).

Hermeneutical theory captures the interpretive process docents perform on tours as thinking about the teaching that occurs in museums as interpretation leads us to hermeneutics (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2007). How docents decide what to say directly relates to hermeneutics, which is “the art of clarifying and mediating by our own effort of

interpretation” (Gadamer, 1976, p. 98). The verbal interpretation docents give is based on their understanding of the object in order to express it and this understanding comes from interpreting the object. Through hermeneutics “something foreign, strange, separate in time...is made familiar...comprehensible; something requiring...explanation, or translation is somehow ‘brought to understanding’—is interpreted” (Palmer, 1969, p. 14). The interpretation docents give is based on their understanding of the object, which they express, in ways, hopefully, that are understandable and evocative to listeners. Specific words and phrases are selected in order to make something clear, reveal meaning, or explain something.

Docents model the role of Hermes and mediate between the world of objects and tour-goers. Docents are the interpreters who facilitate understanding by trying to help tour-goers make connections with objects, or make the unfamiliar familiar (Brodie, 2001). With each audience, docents must adapt (Whitmore, 1916) by presenting information in a suitable, relatable form. Subconsciously, an interpreter in a museum finds ways that the object's history articulates itself within his or her own background. Presuppositions and cultural traditions effect how objects are analyzed and viewed. The current social and political milieu, a docent's own value structure, culture, education, and assumptions made about an audience, influence how objects are selected for inclusion on a tour and more importantly, how they are explained.

From a curatorial perspective, it is the interpreter's responsibility to restore a ‘voice’ to objects which can no longer ‘speak’ clearly to viewers. “Reconnecting an object with “the ‘spirit’ of the letter when the letter itself has become opaque” (Davey, 2002, p. 436) means communicating the truth about an object, as one would with the ‘letter of the law’. Like Hermes, docents seek to increase relate-ability by making connections, offering knowledge

about the object's use, importance, etc. using contemporary references and analogies. The docent will try to hold the interest of listeners and educate them while giving factual information about the object. Letting "what seems to be far and alienated speak again" (Atkins, 1988, p. 438), "not only in a new voice but in a clearer voice" (Gadamer in Risser, 1997, p. 14), is very important when viewers are presented with objects from other cultures and time periods, which they would not see on docent-led gallery tours.

This specific learning opportunity is the focus of this study which will look at how docents perceive their interpretive role in which they verbalize information on face to face tours and explain what is unclear. Revealing the meaning of something by using words that explain and clarify is something docents strive to do in order to reach their audiences.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism examines the formation of self and identity within the context of society and explores the impact of others on the self. It focuses on interactions (Charon, 1995): between society and the self, between individuals, and within the self. This focus views the individual as active in his or her environment, constantly being changed by and the changing the nature of one's social context. The meanings that individuals hold for roles, people, actions, and reactions are essential to the perspective.

The theory also asserts that people communicate with one another through symbols and arrive at interpretations. People act based on symbolic meanings they find within a situation. The goal of our interactions with one another is to create shared meaning. This shared meaning is commonly in the form of language, which is used to anchor meanings to the symbols (Charon, 1995).

George Herbert Mead, a philosophy professor at the University of Chicago, initiated the theory of the self that asserts that “society shapes self and definitions of the situation and these in turn shape behavior” (Stryker & Gottlieb, 1981, p. 431). Mead’s student, Blumer (1937), carried out his work and gave the label symbolic interactionism to explain social psychology’s interest in the development of the individual in the social context. Blumer (1986) describes three basic premises of symbolic interactionism.

The first premise is that “human beings act toward things [and people] on the basis of the meanings that things have for them” (p. 2). One’s behavior is influenced by how one conceives of a group (Archer & Wearing, 2003) and his or her place in the setting. The result, given different groups, is interaction in which behavior is in an ongoing process of reformation (Schafer, 1974). We respond to things through “a process of interpretation” as one “selects, checks, suspends, regroup, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action” (Blumer, 1966, p. 5). Through these actions, people form rituals and roles.

The second premise is that meaning arises out of interaction with others (Blumer, 1986) in sharing our interpretations (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Meaning is neither in objects or concepts, nor in people, but emerges through communication. The individual takes the role of the other, placing oneself in the shoes of the other, in order to see things from the other’s vantage point (Blumer, 2004; Mead, 1934). This is fundamental to the theory as it places great importance on allowing one to see what a docent’s actions might mean to those with whom a docent interacts. Role taking is informal; it is simply placing oneself in the other’s position. Typically done subconsciously, the point of thinking this way is “to make certain

someone understands us and then we may become very aware of the other's cues as to whether or not we are being understood" (Charon, 1995, p. 114).

The third premise is that meanings are social products, "formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (Blumer, 1986, p. 5). Meanings change with time and are formed, sustained, or transformed by culture and social processes (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Meanings are modified through an interpretive process whereby we first internally create meaning, then check it externally with other people. Objects, such as those in museum collections, would be included in this. They are "social products in that they are formed and transformed by the defining process that takes place in social interaction" (Blumer, 1966, p. 539). Meaning ascribed to objects reflects an interpretation of the object in a particular social context (Crittenden, 1983), thus meanings are not static; they are negotiated, and modified through communication.

Applying these principles, when someone enters an interactive situation, a person defines it by applying symbols to it, to its particular features, its participants, and to oneself. Symbols have shared meaning with a society (Miller, 2005) in that their meaning is based on agreement within the community; "can be produced at will, regardless of whether the things or events they signify are present"; and can "form complex systems in which symbols stand for other symbols" (Hewitt, 2002, p. 310). Communicating without the intentional use of symbols is not symbolic (Charon, 1995). One applies symbols to organize "behavior in the situation and to help organize others' behavior through relevant interactional cues" (Stryker & Gottlieb, 1981, p. 432). Symbols are used purposely to give off meaning, i.e. winking at someone on purpose is using a symbol to communicate one's feelings. Symbolic interactionists recognize how constraining the preexisting symbol system is, "its objects

seemingly fixed and eternal” yet interactionists understand the “variability of response, the volatility of objects, and the creativity of action” (Hewitt, 2002, p. 324).

Mead’s main interest was with the more powerful significant symbols, as this is the kind that separates humans from animals and demonstrates that the actions of one organism have influenced those of another (Hewitt, 2002). Significant symbols are gestures that arouse a similar plan of response in both the user and the recipient of the symbol. For example, when a dog owner tells the dog to get into the car as it is time to leave the park, both the dog and the owner hear the words spoken and respond. The human responds to the vocal gesture, just as the animal does.

"Symbolic interaction involves interpretation..." (Blumer, 1966, p. 537) and effective communication involves arousing a certain meaning in listeners’ minds. We address someone in a language that will be understandable to them (Rosenberg, 1984). This is something docents do and a key aspect of successful interpretation. One needs to take one’s listeners into account, this means being:

aware of him, identifying him in some way, making some judgment or appraisal of him...trying to find out what he has on his mind...Such awareness of another person...becomes the occasion for orienting oneself and for the direction of one’s own conduct (Blumer, 1953, p. 194).

On each tour, docents are faced with new faces—and the information that docents can gather in the minutes before a tour begins—such as from license plates, clothing, or the person who booked the tour (Taylor & Neill, 2008) can allow docents to tailor the interpretation they give.

The theory is about communication, roles, fostering shared understanding, and offering relevance. It expects human action to be dynamic and complex given one's perspective, communication goals, and individuals with whom one is dealing.

In this study, docents interact with the audience using shared symbols, language, and meaning. As their perceptions of their role are studied and docents are asked to be introspective about what causes what they do and how it is done, symbolic interactionism informs the critical *external* aspect of what impacts an interpreter, such as past experiences giving tours, the present set of tour-goers, the tour manger, current events, etc.

Museums

Most people think of a museum as a place that displays and protects objects of lasting artistic or historic value. One might think that many Americans would not be intrigued by this and rush to museums in their spare time, but in fact, Americans are drawn to museums, places where they can reflect, revise, and reinterpret (Carr, 1991) objects. In 1998, the annual number of visits was estimated at 865 million, “more than three times the country’s population” and a number higher than the “attendance at all professional sports events combined” (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 6).

Museum directors are aware of the important role their institutions play in the lives of Americans. According to the American Association of Museums (AAM), a museum should make a unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world and museums include: arboretums, art museums, children’s museums, historic houses, history museums, natural history museums, nature centers, science museums, and zoos (Merritt, 2006). Given the wide variety of institutions that fall under the heading of

museums today, in the twenty-first century, both the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden and the Louisville Zoo are accredited museums. Similarly, the International Council of Museums (2007) defines a museum as:

a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. (art. 3, ¶1)

These definitions are all-encompassing, practical, and mission-based. Taking a different approach, Schwarzer (2006) emphasizes the unique and important features museums possess and defines a museum as service-oriented:

Being a charitable nonprofit organization in a marketplace culture, being a place of memory, reflection and learning in a nation that stresses action and immediacy, being a champion of tradition in a land of ceaseless innovation. (p. 7)

Anthropologist Richard Handler (1993) defines a museum as an:

Institution in which social relationships are oriented in terms of a collection of objects which are made meaningful by those relationships—though these objects are often understood by museum natives to be meaningful independently of those social relationships. (p. 33)

These are very broad definitions, so much so that “it is very difficult to know what is a museum and what is not” (Kolter & Kotler, 1998, p. 6) especially considering the difficulty in attaining professional recognition as a museum. A 2004 report (Boyd) found 685 accredited museums out of a total of 6,500 museums. Using data from the following year, the Institute of Museums and Library Services (2009) estimates that there are 17,500

museums, though not all accredited. To the AAM, earning recognition means a museum meets certain standards and follows particular procedures in order to uphold a specific level of professional principles. For example, the museum must, among other requirements, be a legally organized nonprofit institution, have a full-time director and at least one paid professional staff member, and offer regularly scheduled educational programming.

The AAM has had a significant influence on museums in America for over a century. The next section reviews the history of museums in America, exhibitions in museums, and museum education including the philosophies and theories that inform it. The museum education department itself provides a demonstration of the longstanding importance museums have placed in educating the public.

History of Museums

This section offers a historical tour of the museum, from the inception of the first museum to the role of museums in postmodernist society. The history offered here is tied to events in America that shaped the country and ultimately, the museum world, as museums have evolved alongside the country, in a reactionary manner.

Of course, Americans did not invent the museum, which had existed in Europe since the seventeenth century (Alexander, 1979) nor the idea of preserving objects for their beauty, which the ancient Greeks practiced (Tonelli, 1990). The first museum in America can be traced to 1786 in Philadelphia – the Peale’s Museum. Charles Willson Peale’s collection is known for its natural history specimens and portraits (Alexander, 1979; Conn, 2006). The majority of early museum proprietors were wealthy and of a high social class, and held a conception of education which was didactic and moralizing (Roberts, 1997). It was not until

1870 that in the United States public institutions established themselves, when the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston both opened. Other major cities quickly following suit and each museum was formed as a non-governmental, non-profit institution overseen by a board of trustees (Abt, 2006). There was a relationship between the occurrence of great world fairs and just after, the physical erection of museums, to house the fairs' objects (Burcaw, 1997).

From the 1870s until the early 1890s museum charters, reflecting each museum's mission, cite education as their primary purpose (Alexander & Alexander, 2007; Zeller, 1989), and indirectly, fighting vice and crime (Alexander, 1979), as craftsman and industrial engineers were offered educational programs. Based on a European model, producing and disseminating authoritative knowledge was the goal (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b). This is not what modern education theorists would deem education; rather, they would likely describe it as identity formation, rehabilitation, and self-improvement. Early museums were founded on the ideals of the Enlightenment, to promote rational instruction, civic responsibility, and cultural nationalism (Orosz, 1986). In the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1875 annual report, museum officials spoke to their efforts to appeal to the interests of mechanics and artisans with the goal of elevating their character (Zeller, 1989). Museums were more than repositories of objects; they were thought to help "shape an informed citizenry, ultimately resulting in a more productive economy" (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 9).

Instilling better behavior and creating model citizens was the hope of the Victorian-inspired museum epistemology. Galleries were spaces of controlled behavior, guarded by those who would eject tour-goers who behaved unruly (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b). Museums emphasized their ability to improve the character of attendees, raise the level of culture, and

foster good taste (Zeller, 1989). Exhibitions in galleries were object-centered, meaning “if laid out in the correct way, both the meanings of the individual objects and a substantive body of information... would be explicit in the relationships between the objects” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007b, p. 127). The notion was that objects ‘spoke’ for themselves to all viewers, with no further explanation required.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, growth was seen in the number, distribution, and participation in museums. The forming of the first professional association for museums in America, the AAM, in 1906, created a body that influenced standards, goals, and museum management. It was at this time, that American museums, which could not compete with their European counterparts on quality and extensiveness of collections, distinguished themselves with educational programs (Schwarzer, 2006). This was a niche in which American museums could excel and the opportunity was taken (Silver, 1989; Zeller, 1989). A variety of steps followed demonstrating the educational mission of museums. Examples of fostering such a mission were recorded in statements by museum directors, wording used in charters and annual reports, and articles supporting the work occurring in museums. Museums offered lectures, worked closely with schools and manufacturing firms, provided facilities for study, and aimed to increase accessibility for the working class to art (Zeller, 1989). At this time, docents came on the scene, and museums began lending objects to public schools for use in the classroom so that relics of the past could be used to illustrate teachers’ lessons. In an effort to educate the public, in 1908, the Smithsonian and the American Museum of Natural History launched a health awareness campaign with an exhibit on the tuberculosis epidemic. In 1915, one of the country’s first internal departments devoted to instructional programming began in the Cleveland Museum of Art, offering a variety of

educational programs, including children's story hours and sketching (Schwarzer, 2006).

Waves of strong educational pursuits by museums have come and gone through the years and these were some of the earliest.

At the end of World War I, market forces shifted, the dollar soared, and the focus of American museums switched from educating to collecting. While European museums were recovering, Americans robustly bought art. By 1923, the American Art Dealers' Association "estimated that Americans spent \$250 million on art purchases" (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 13). Once objects arrived in the states, researching and revering them was practiced by curators and the focus of museum administrators. During the 1920s, growth was not only in museums' bank accounts and collections, but also in city coffers, and with recognition of the value of a museum already established, every 11.4 days, a new museum building was christened in America, as businesses such as Crane & Crane Paper Company "founded museums to preserve their contributions to American progress and society" (p. 14).

Notable museums were founded for other reasons. Examining the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, sociologist DiMaggio (1991) writes that the institution was established due to: elite entrepreneurship in that it is an organization the elite group could fully control; classification, the separation of high art (property of the elite) from entertainment; and framing, referring to the development of "a new etiquette of appropriation, a new relationship between the audience and the work of art" (p.35) or the "degree of control teacher and pupil possess over the selection, organization, and pacing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationships" (Bernstein, 1975, p. 206).

After the stock market crash in 1929, the pendulum swung back toward educating the public. The 1930s were an exciting time as New Deal money and private foundations

injected funds into education programming. Unemployment was high so adult education courses were created in museums as part of an “out-of-school education” (Silver, 1978, p. 15). In 1932, William Marshall Rea published *The Museum and the Community* which used statistical data on demographics, museum attendance, museum expenditures, etc. aimed to connect museums and their publics (Zeller, 1989). Museums, typically “palatial or temple like structures” (Alexander & Alexander, 2008, p. 9) made the man on the street feel uncomfortable and discouraged his attendance and Rea’s work resulted in decentralization in the form of smaller museums and neighborhood branches of museums. This was also the beginning of another shift in museums toward education. In 1932, 15% of museums in America offered organized educational programs (Patterson, 1961). Programming delivered by paid instructors greatly increased, knowledge was shared in the professional journal—*Museum News*, and as a result the education work performed in the museum became professionalized. By 1934, many museums had a separate department devoted solely to education (Roberts, 1997) which was the beginning of museum education.

Returning to the history of museums, in the 1940s, the role of the museum in society and issues of standards of beauty were hot topics (Tonelli, 1990). Patriotism was fervent and museum exhibits were often war-related or geared toward welcoming home soldiers with visual demonstrations of American pride. Economically, prosperity was high and museums saw an influx in middle-class women volunteering their time. School teachers began using museums as destinations for class trips and often these female volunteers led tours for schoolchildren (Schwarzer, 2006). This educational supplement to formal public education would continue until the present.

After the Cold War, museums focused more on preserving their objects and less on education. In the 1950s, in response to the space race, with hopes of engaging the younger generation in space and technology, planetariums and science centers sprouted. In the early 1960s, Kennedy-Johnson social programs were in full effect and challenged institutions to serve minority populations, rejecting the exclusivity and elitism for which museums had previously been known (Newsom & Silver, 1978). Museums entered communities with mobile collections to reach underprivileged neighborhood children with the hope of attracting a broader audience (Alexander, 2007). The civil rights movement infused a new ethnic pride in society and museums, such as El Museo del Barrio in East Harlem were founded (Schwarzer, 2006) as museums began reflecting the diverse American culture.

For museums, the 1970s and 1980s were a time of securing the future, preserving the past, and discovering a new source of funding. In 1971, the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities helped museums financially accomplish the goals of caring for collections and performing public service, which would not be possible with just support of a board of trustees. Throughout the decade, attendance rose, museums erected, older museums renovated, education departments grew and were challenged with educating a broader and larger public (El-Omami, 1989), and museum staff gained more control over the direction in which museums were going (Schwarzer, 2006).

The 1980s saw a new shift in activities, as museums recognized an opportunity to increase cash flow from patrons. Grand scale membership campaigns and merchandising efforts were in full force and quite successful, as the stock market surged. All the while, there was an increase in studying the museum patron, determining who museums were reaching. A white female, “in her mid-to-late 30s, [who was] college-educated” was the typical museum-

goer, not your typical American, as “Asian and Latino populations were growing” and “the percentage of whites [was] shrinking” (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 23). Now heavily government-funded, it was critical that museums expand the demographic they were reaching, in order to be more inclusive of all Americans. In order to understand the diverse audience of the American general public, research on the museum visitor began being performed. Marilyn Hood (1983) logically divided the museum audience into three clientele groups—frequent participants, occasional participants, and nonparticipants, and offered suggestions on meeting their distinctly different needs. She found that museum-goers thought that learning was a pleasurable experience and they went to museums to learn (Rice & Yenawine, 2002).

In 1984, the AAM published *Museums for a New Century* in which education was declared to be a ‘primary’ purpose of museums (AAM, 1984). This meant increasing efforts that teach, including activities for schoolchildren, training docents, curators writing gallery labels, exhibition catalogs, and giving lectures. Today, one would consider this the basics. Over time, these types of educational efforts have increased and as Weil (2007) stated, “what the museum might be envisioned as offering to the public has grown from mere refreshment...to education...” (p. 34). This was evident in the diverse and creative types of programming offered by museums. In the late 1980s, museums began imbedding themselves in communities with satellite education programs offered in community centers, nursing homes, and hospitals as part of outreach for those unlikely or unable to visit the museum (Sachatello-Sawyer, 2002) and to be more inclusive of the general population. These changes reflect the museum’s new-found interest in building relationships with constituents and recognizing the importance of having visitors from all walks of life.

In the 1990s, museums embraced multiculturalism in order to be more relevant to the majority of Americans and more accurate in their representation of world cultures. In 1992, the AAM defined museums as “institutions of public service and education, a term that includes exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation and dialogue” (Hein, 2006, p.342). Taking their role seriously, museums did not shy away from being thought-provoking and eye opening. Cultural and social issues were often the subject of controversial exhibits, such as the National Air and Space Museum’s 1993 exhibit about the *Enola Gay* (Roberts, 1997). In the late 1990s, museums built websites and became more technology savvy in the galleries with interactive educational games. America was prosperous and technological advances were leading the way in all aspects of life.

Then, September 11, 2001 changed America’s sense of security, and museums responded. Locals came to museums (Levin, 2007) to be comforted and for a sense of history, tolerance, and familiarity. Museums waived admission fees, brought in experts to assist with grief counseling and offered themselves as a place of solace (Schwarzer, 2006; Smith, 2001) while also collecting and interpreting material “whose significance [at that moment] we can only begin to assess” (Gardner & Henry, 2002, 38). Museums have continued to respond to the changing needs and growth in society, and have risen to the occasion when dealing with the country’s political and social wars by fulfilling a variety of roles—psyche enlightener, historical narrator, and cultural educator. Not always on the cutting edge in their policies, museums have shifted their focus as needed, as America has grown and developed. Since their inception, museums have displayed and documented historic objects, and throughout the year, various kinds of exhibits are on display at museums.

Exhibits

An exhibit is “a grouping of objects and interpretive material that form a unit for presentation” (Dean, 1994, p. 161). For visitors, this means the opportunity to see real, original, one of a kind pieces that are related in some fashion, such as artist, period, inspiration, or donor. The reasons for displaying a grouping of like objects are many. Museums may be trying to educate the public, promote community interest by offering a leisure activity, raise funds for the institution with ticket and sponsorship sales, or provide proof to a donor or the public that a collection is being handled responsibly (Dean, 1994). Most museums have as part of their missions exposing people to their collections and exhibitions meet fulfill this goal.

In the late nineteenth century, exhibits were about showing off the museum’s wares. Museums exhibited “all of the objects in their collections”...compared “to the 5 percent” of objects that museums exhibit today (Schwarzer 2006, p. 122). Some were repetitive in displaying very similar objects, such as monotonous seashells, or disjointed with unrelated objects placed together, which can leave the viewer confused.

In the twentieth century, museums aimed to be more educational with their exhibits and more entertaining in their look as the world’s fairs and international expositions were looked to for examples of creating environments to display objects. The result was habitat dioramas, period rooms, and life-groups (posed mannequins) which logically grouped like objects (Schwarzer, 2006) and created a true environ that mimicked nature or the object’s home surroundings. These kinds of exhibits were popular and educational and they were used into the 1930s. Curators aimed to make period rooms as authentic and realistic as possible,

and would acquire objects from homes slated for demolition (Schwarzer, 2006) and architectural elements from various locations.

By the 1930s, Americans were becoming more literate so curators could now communicate in text and reach more of the audience. Curators were changing their approach; seeking neutral wall colors so as not to distract patrons from focusing on the objects and allowing them to switch out installations with ease. Exhibitions were beginning to tour the country which meant patrons would have a new reason to visit again. At the same time, more scrutiny was placed on organizers as museum administrators recognized that exhibitions could not be neutral in their portrayals of minority groups and foreign cultures. Recognizing that these issues must be handled sensitively and accurately, museums sometimes sought advice and assistance from representatives of the minority culture (Schwarzer, 2006) so as to be respectful.

In the 1960s, curators and artists began to push the envelope with exhibits, creating avant-garde installations which appealed to narrow audiences and the Guggenheim even displayed a piece which critiqued the museum trustees' real estate dealings. At the same time, national educational reform occurred and hands-on exhibits engaged children to learn through experiential methods. This continued into the 1980s with difficult societal issues not typically covered in school, such as disabilities, homelessness, and prejudice. Exhibits for adults became timely and issues-based such as retrospectives on influential neighborhoods such as Harlem and its African American community and in 1971 an exhibit about the drug scene in America opened, with ex-addicts hired to answer questions (Schwarzer, 2006). Temporary traveling exhibits proved to be blockbusters for the hosting institution. Traditionally designed, linear pathways helped patrons navigate around objects and wall

labels explained overarching themes and individual objects. Each exhibit has a 'narrative' or manuscript written by a curator which is a well-researched document that tells the story of the group of objects (Dean, 1994). This piece creates the storyline for the exhibit and guides the layout of objects, themes and connections emphasized among objects, and the educational programming supporting it all.

With more of an emphasis on the museum-goer in the 1980s and 1990s, museum administrators recognized that exhibits need to present multiple perspectives and interpretations as there are often many sides to a story. Seeking to be more inclusionary, museums responded, and artists with diverse ethnicity began getting displayed. Even within their own walls, curators needed to do new things, as visitor surveys showed that many visitors did not read wall labels or walk in the galleries in the pathway curators created. Museums responded, trying to be more accommodating and welcoming. The Denver Art Museum added areas in the galleries with books, catalogues, and couches to encourage visitors to stay and read in comfort. Museums rewrote wall labels in plain English, removing the jargon of art historians in an effort was made to bridge the world of the expert and the world of the layperson (Lee, 2007). Art historian jargon was moved to heavy textual brochures, designed more for intellectual, than for visual appeal (Dean, 1994), which are good options for those who want in depth knowledge. Museums embraced technology in the mid-1990s in the form of audio guides, which changed the way an exhibition is communicated to patrons so that the learning experience is more tailored, personal and individual. Finally, curators today rarely select exhibition themes in an artistic vacuum. Cross-disciplinary teams (Lee, 2007) including members of community groups aided museum staffers in creating nearly 90% of exhibitions by 2000 (Schwarzer, 2006).

The goal of exhibitions is to reach visitors in many ways and at many levels. One can choose not to read wall labels or listen to an audio guide and rather have private contemplation when looking at objects. Or, one can opt to read the catalog from cover to cover and listen to a lecture in an auditorium about the exhibition, with less time spent looking at the objects. Participation level and kind desired is up to the audience based on the visitor's individual needs. While the educational mission has become the primary focus of exhibitions (Dean, 1994) it is not so rigid as to narrowly determine how one learns or experiences the objects.

All of these efforts and changes exhibitions have undergone are in the direction of the museum being more responsive and pluralistic. Beyond the wall labels and audio guide script, the department within the museum responsible for ensuring that certain messages are communicated to patrons and that the public's educational needs are met is the museum education department.

Museum Education

This section offers an overview of what is known as 'museum education' looking at it as a concept with various philosophies and educational theories proposed through the years, and finally, examining it much more concretely, as a physical department within the museum from which programming is produced.

The concept of 'museum education' came from museum charters. The term education was "a politically savvy means of promoting democracy in a republic: equality for all through rational enlightenment" (Roberts, 1997, p. 4). The Smithsonian Institution of Washington led the way with lectures open to the public and producing publications. The

American Museum of Natural History in New York City, in cooperation with the city's Department of Education, offered free courses to the public on travel, geography, and natural science. The museum also targeted public school teachers in the city, offering special lectures and kits to bring into their classrooms (Dexter, 1916). Similarly, in 1918, recognizing that it was "performing a wartime service" (Howe, 2008, p.197), the Metropolitan Museum of Art carried out its education mission by: publishing catalogues, producing bulletins, offering lectures in schools, loaning objects to libraries, and lending photographs, textiles, prints, slides to external groups.

Museum education was given attention by the Tax Reform Act of 1969 which officially declared museums educational institutions (Caston, 1989). The same year, the AAM (1969) released a report stating:

the times call for a sharp increase in the educational and cultural opportunities which museums are uniquely equipped to provide...The relationship of museums to the educational system begins at the preschool age and continues up to and beyond the Ph.D. level. (v-vii)

Museum education was "providing specific provision for limited groups such as schoolchildren or adult tour-groups" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994a, p. 3). Teaching viewers about the collection has existed for years and similar to the changes museums have seen through the decades, what 'museum education' has meant has transformed—from offering inspiration, to teaching civics, to reforming society's underlings to preaching the history of art. Today, who is responsible for 'educating' museum patrons is not been limited to those in the education department as "every person they (museum-goers) encounter teaches them

what a museum is,” including “car park attendants, cloakroom assistants, information desk volunteers, security officers...” (Gunther, 1994, p. 127).

Not haphazard in their design of educational programs, today educators subscribe to and practice specific philosophies which relate to educational theories that inform the field. Inclusion of these speaks to how far the field of museum education has come from being home grown to now adopting proven theories of education, varied as they must be, in order to appeal to diverse audiences. Philosophies and educational theories experience popularity at different times and vary across museums, based on the role of the museum and the type of audience being served—children, teens, adults, the elderly, or a combination of them. Specifically, meeting the needs of adults is complicated and various tactics are required, hence numerous philosophies and theories informing museum education, which deserve examination.

Education Philosophies of Museums

The concept of art museum education is supported by a number of educational philosophies or approaches that a museum will take to educate its patrons. It was during the largest growth period for museums, post-Civil War 1870 until the 1929 stock market crash, that the philosophical foundations and patterns of museum education were laid. Zeller (1989) identified four museum philosophies to date: aesthetic/art appreciation, art historical, interdisciplinary/humanities, and social education. Few art museums have applied any of these rigidly or in complete isolation from others but studying each in detail is critical to understanding museum education. These labels help categorize museum education departments based on their approach to constructing educational exhibits and programs and

to which philosophy they subscribe tells us much about their range and level of inclusiveness. When museum educators craft curricula, they are selecting one of the philosophies listed below—a conscious decision that speaks to how educators interpret and carry out the museum’s education mission.

The aesthetic/art appreciation philosophy is about exhibiting only the finest quality of art that, to observers, raises the standard of ‘civilized’ thought and promotes good taste, according to the institution. The philosophy’s basis is that art should promote contemplation and raise aesthetic sensitivity. A proponent of this philosophy was Benjamin Ives Gilman, who was Secretary of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston for over thirty years. He believed that through exhibits, a museum’s role was to cultivate an appreciation of beauty (Bennett, 2007). Object-centered and with the goal of people experiencing the aesthetic beauty of objects, he proposed interpreters or docents to assist visitors (Alexander, 1979). Docents would have a significant impact on museum education, as they would become the primary deliverers of instruction at many museums and voluntarily carry out the education mission of museums.

The strict art historical philosophy is the study of attribution, iconography, period and national styles, which can inundate the public with unfamiliar jargon and abstract concepts. This would be considered a strictly curatorial, formal art history approach, what one would expect to be delivered in a college-level introductory class. One could imagine the typical “art in the dark” program of slides presented in a dim auditorium with a voiceover explanation given by a museum staffer.

The interdisciplinary/humanities philosophy expands the latter, suggesting a cultural history perspective, allowing educators to increase their teaching framework from just art, to

include the humanities, social sciences, and the performing arts, reaching viewers in a variety of ways. Theodore Low, curator of education at the Walters Art Gallery, would subscribe to this philosophy as he took a cultural history approach and believed that objects need to be accompanied with contextual material to aid visitors in decoding meaning. In the 1940s, Low rallied not for an art history, esoteric approach (Zeller, 1989), but a more practical, popular style to reach his target audience, “the intellectual middle class” (Low, 1943, p. 10-12).

Viewing themselves as ‘cultural institutions’ means museums have collections:

Made available to users; a systematic, continuous, organized knowledge structure; and scholarship, information and thought based on reliable sources and driven by a culture of inquiry. (Carr, 2003, p. xiv-xv)

The social education philosophy is about improving the quality of everyday life of patrons by making a practical difference in their lives. While the first three philosophies are art-centered, the social education philosophy is people-centered addressing the human interest concerns of the day (Zeller, 1989). Museum education pioneer John Cotton Dana’s (1999) philosophy is that museums should find out what assistance the community needs and then address those needs. Defining the museum as “an instrument of community betterment” (Alexander 1979, p. 36), Dana created exhibits that were relevant to minority groups on current social issues, espousing the social education philosophy.

The four categories described above allow for labeling and discussing of museums’ various educational approaches. With these are four approaches of how to reach museum audiences explained, it is now appropriate to look at the educational theories, based in the field of education, which validate the philosophies above.

Education Theories Relevant to Museums

When looking at the roots or goals of an educational program, one can see evidence of a belief in a particular educational theory (Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994a; Tran & King, 2007). Theories inform educational practices used in exhibits, validate approaches of educators, elucidate the assumptions placed on the learner, and set the tone for different kinds of educational programs. All theories fall somewhere on a continuum from being passive to active. Passive learning means the mind receives facts incrementally and these facts are absorbed, sorted, and learned. The learner is “the empty vessel to be filled” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994b, p. 68). Active learning means the learner is engaged and responding to stimuli, and the learner’s prior knowledge and experience is incorporated (Hein, 2006). Active learning leads to restructuring of the mind. Expectations of the educator and learner vary with each. Where a theory falls on this scale, from being passive to active, relates to a theory of epistemology—also on a continuum, with one end where knowledge exists outside of the learner (realism) and on the other end, where knowledge is constructed by the learner (idealism) (Hein & Alexander, 1998). Upon these two continua, Hein (1998) described four categories of education theory: didactic expository education, stimulus-response education, constructivism, and discovery. Each has influenced museum education and is worthy of study.

Didactic, expository education is where learning involves the direct transmission of knowledge from teacher to learner. This places the museum or the curator specifically, in the position of the authoritative figure and as the expert (Black, 2005; Witcomb, 2006). In exhibits, ideas and concepts are transmitted in a simple, easy to follow communicative process, with a clear beginning and end. Information and objects are often presented without

historical context, and the learner is not invited to critically reflect on the subject. For example, in science museums, an exhibit could fail to include any mention of a scientific debate going on in society directly related to the exhibit (Barry, 1998).

Stimulus-response education aims to “transmit knowledge by emphasizing repetition and rewarding correct answers” (Witcomb, 2006, p. 356). Grounded in behaviorism, the focus is on method, of clear cut assessment of the learner’s knowledge, and rewarding good behavior. Teacher-centered and results-focused, assessment can be done qualitatively. The stimulus-response theory is criticized for driving students toward memorization and in museums, which is inappropriate given the limited time an educator and the learner are together (Hein, 2006). Typical in formal education settings, stimulus-response allows schools to quickly gauge learner’s abilities, in for example, a true/false test, where a machine can ‘scan’ answers and tell students how they fared in seconds.

Constructivism is the process of experiencing the world and making sense of it within the context of one’s cultural background (Mayer, 2005; Witcomb, 2006). Learners use both their hands and their minds to learn, the results of which are “not validated by some external standard of truth but only within the experience of the learner” (Hein & Alexander, 1998, p. 37). Many education theorists tout a constructivist, interpretive approach in exhibits that allows museums to create dialogues with their audiences and visitors to make meaning of their own experiences (Dufresne-Tassé & Lefebvre, 1994; Hein, 2006; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a; Tran & King, 2007), but taken to an extreme, meaning can be lost in exhibits and learners could fail to see big picture themes (Witcomb, 2006). Alternatively, these experiences may foster speculation, experimentation, and drawing one’s own conclusions (Mayer, 2005).

Lastly, discovery education is action-based and is about learners doing activities where upon completion, certain educational outcomes are achieved. The idea is that exposure to information will lead the learner to form a conclusion (Hein & Alexander, 1998), a true discovery. With relation to the others, discovery exhibits are interactive, informed by constructivism because while being hands-on, learners do not find the answers from within, rather, they gather clues and form a conclusion based on that gathered information. Discovery education is currently the most popular framework for exhibition development (Witcomb, 2006) and an example is a children's exhibit on pirates, where dressing up in costumes, pulling ropes on a ship, shooting canons, and pretending to defend their treasure would be part of the hands-on nature.

These diverse categories of educational theories emphasize the choices that exist for curators and museum educators as they present information and interact with their public. Achieving learning outcomes can be accomplished with each and aligning learning outcomes with the institution's mission is critical in presenting to the public the 'face' the museum's administration wants to display, thereby ensuring that the museum's education function is being upheld in the manner in which it was established.

There is ongoing discussion by museum educators about the best way to work with audiences. Object-focused in their practice, some educators such as longtime museum educator Philip Yenawine try to empower their audiences by teaching viewers to be self-sufficient. That is, learners' activities are structured in such ways that promote growth, such as encourages viewers to think about objects and poses questions to audiences to get them involved and not be passive receptacles (Rice & Yenawine, 2002). The hope is not that various pieces of factual information about objects are remembered but rather, that viewers

learn what to look at and for, or how to be visually perceptive when approaching new works of art. Teaching this skill is not simple and museums each approach the task of education differently.

Museum Education Departments

The role of applying the philosophies and theories described above is given to those working in a museum's education department. Museum educators have "specific responsibility for organizing and delivering educational services, as well as ensuring that education as a function of the museum is kept to the fore in discussion and planning" (Talboys, 2000, p. x). The first departments were seen in museums around the 1930s, but ironically, its status, separate from curatorial and conservation departments, was not welcomed by all museum educators. Some thought that education should be deeply integrated into all museums departments, not compartmentalized where its influence limited. Curators disagreed and they have long been ahead of educators in the museum pecking order (Tapia, 2003). In the 1960s and 1970s, educators had little or no voice in museum affairs (Roberts, 1997). Budget constraints, which throughout history have proven to hit education departments hardest in museums, confirmed that museum educators needed an advocate.

In 1973, the AAM created a standing professional committee on education which did wonders for museum educators. With support in the national organization, museum educators began to experience parity with their museum colleagues. Museum educators had the special ability, in their work to assist administrators by diversifying the audience, extending community outreach, and increasing attendance, which prompted museum leaders to see their

value (Roberts, 1997). Fulfilling the institution's strategic goals is always looked well upon by administrators, but with success in one arena, there is a price to pay in another.

In the late 1980s, the field was tested and the museum education department was on shaky ground. A report sponsored by the J. Paul Getty Center for Education in the Arts found that museum educators lacked professional preparation, a unified role, recognition from their peers, and vision needed for the growth of the profession (Eisner & Dobbs, 1986). Even the AAM (1984) was critical of the museum education department when it wrote that it is "colored by its close association with volunteers" (p. 61). Because museum educators focus on the public, "their work has often existed apart from the focus of many museums: their art collections" (Czajkowski & Hill, 2008, p. 259).

Also, museum professionals "benefited from a fledgling disincipline," (Schwarzer, 2006, p. 200) called museum studies, which prepared individuals for careers in museums by establishing a set curriculum to be used in colleges and universities for those who wanted a profession in a museum. The issue is unresolved, as the field of museum education still "lacks an agreed and accepted knowledge base as a foundation for professional preparation" (Tran & King, 2007, p.132).

To prove museum educators' long held belief that the institution, or their department at a minimum, should be visitor-centered, education researchers studied the visitor's experience, wants, and behaviors in the late 1990s (Chang, 2006; Falk, 1998; Falk & Dierking, 1992; Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994a; Prentice, et al., 1997). A better understanding of visitors meant educators could build relevant future programs. For example, Falk and Dierking (2000), who studied the different kinds of, various motivations of, and interests of museum visitors, offered suggestions to museum educators on how to

better meet the diverse needs of the public. Integrating an assortment of disciplines, they created a holistic basis from which museum educators could plan programming to make the most of visitors' experiences, called the Contextual Model of Learning framework (Falk & Dierking, 1992), which has been refined over the years. The model's four dimensions—personal, sociocultural, physical, and time overlap and influence visitors' experiences when engaging in free-choice learning activities, such as listening to the radio or visiting museums. The rise in interest in visitor studies (Morgan, 2005) parallels a cultural turn in museums, a focus on the visitor, or the adult patron. This infuses adult education theories into the museum in its shift from being less object-centered or societal-centered to more people-centered.

It is important to focus briefly on the results of such research to better understand the makeup of group the museum education department's efforts are directed. During the 1990s, museum visitors could be described as "more secular, trusting, politically liberal, racially tolerant, and open to other cultures and lifestyles" (DiMaggio, 1996, p. 161) than non visitors. The best predictor of museum attendance in America is educational attainment. Appreciation of high-culture art is an example of a form of cultural capital, the cultural assets of a particular class that confer prestige upon those who have them. Coined by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986), the term is about the forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society. Those who identify themselves as museum-goers and are comfortable in the setting possess the identity of an elite group whose interest in going to museums has been cultivated, likely from an early age (DiMaggio, 1996).

Given this knowledge of the audience, returning to the goal of the department, Roberts (1997) posits that that the term education might be limiting and misleading for the museum setting because it “has long been associated with an institutional setting that is formal, classroom-based, teacher-directed, and information-driven” (p. 159, note 22). In addition to the standard lectures, guided tours, artistic performances, workshops, and short courses, some museum education departments began offering film series, field trips to other institutions, cooking demonstrations, and exotic travel tours. Today, departments allow for open-ended visitor experiences, having ‘something for everyone’. In the section on NFE, one will see the relevance of this observation, but laying the foundation with how museum education and adult learning theory are connected takes precedence.

Adult Education and Museums

To begin to understand how this study informs adult education, one must look at the field’s historical approach to museums and what type of education is occurring in this unique site. The publications in the field of adult education reveal the museum’s importance and place in it and how museums have found a niche in a segment of adult education, the NFE literature.

The field of adult education was early in recognizing museums as centers for educating adults. Even the earliest editions of the *Handbook of Adult Education in the United States* include the efforts of educators in museums. In the 1934 edition, there is a brief chapter on museums and adult education, by Lawrence Vail Coleman, who was director of the AAM at the time. After providing a history of museum education, he listed museums around the nation that offered adult programming, with the tone of museums very much

catering to adults and some even making “adult education their first interest” (Coleman, 1934, p. 106). Reference to strides and developments in evaluating museum methods and studying visitors were made.

The 1936 edition included a chapter by Coleman almost identical to his contribution two years earlier. In this version, he emphasized the growth of historic house museums and cited museums as developing scholarship. His listing of adult programs in museums was more in depth. Though not a handbook, in the same year, three contributing authors addressed museum exhibits and education in *Adult Education in Action*, a compilation of papers on various topics related to adult education, including: role, public institutions that specialize in educating adults, diverse learners, instructional opportunities, and many practical tools for how to educate adults. In a section titled “The Forces of Adult Education—Agencies” museums are included with subsections about use of exhibits, circulating objects through branch museums, and educational classes offered in museums.

In 1948, Theodore Low, education curator, wrote a chapter and cited specific societal factors that influenced museums’ philosophy—the depression in the 1930s and World War II. Museums quickly realized that they needed to appeal to the masses for support and offer programs that promoted a better way of life, tolerance, and a greater understanding of others. Low was critical of exhibition methods which are generally geared to children but praised museums for thematic shows and wall labels. He pointed out that the interest of adult patrons must coincide with the museums’ as museums in 1948 are still museum-driven and wrote that museums “must eventually accept adult education as their primary function” (1948, p. 239).

In the 1960 handbook, Director of the Field Museum, Clifford Gregg, wrote an article similar to Low's. Museums were defined as research and educational institutions, no matter the type or various subject that is a museum's specialty. Gregg (1960) classified them as either: art-historical; science museum and planetarium; science and industry; and natural history, noting the kinds of exhibits each would display, what kind of education each offers, and limitations. Recommendations were made for the interpretation efforts by museums—in the form of what wall labels and guidebooks should comprise. He concluded with the section on museums in adult education that offers little new except stating that it is a pioneering field and we cannot assume that adults just being in museums, means that adults are learning from the educational materials, the artworks. Additionally, in other part of the handbook, museums were the subject of a paragraph in a chapter on the history of adult education institutions in the country. In it is an overview of museum history, adult programs, and mention of the educational aspect of the AAM. Lastly, museums were also included in a chapter on the creative arts, as centers where adults can take art and art history classes, etc.

In 1970, two important things happened to museums demonstrating a change in the eyes of adult educators. For the first time, in the *Handbook of Adult Education*, museums shared a chapter with another institution, public libraries. Furthermore, the chapter was written by a non-museum professional, a librarian, Margaret Monroe. These signals indicate that the field of adult education no longer felt placing museums front and center was needed, perhaps because they felt the issue would be better addressed by the AAM. In 1981, the AAM published *Museums, Adults, and the Humanities: A Guide for Educational Programming*. Written by Collins, the volume included quite a few museums that applied adult education beliefs to exhibits and museum education activities. She raised the argument

that museum professionals might need to be more audience-centered and practical when applying adult learning concepts to the museum. Matching the needs of the adult audience to what existed in the permanent collection was her approach. Hein and Alexander (1998) cite Collins' decision to include so many adult educator theorists for the volume, as the beginning of museum educators' understanding of adult education theory. Further demonstrating its impact on the museum education field, the AAM reprinted the monograph in 1993.

Collins' book did not have much effect on the handbook and again in the 1989 *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*, half a chapter was devoted to museums, which described the need for a philosophical basis, supported a particular model for museum education, and described volunteers—all of course with relation to adults, adult leaning theory, and adult education principles. In the chapter, Chobot (1989) charts museum educators' search for a philosophical foundation, for which the field was criticized for lacking in the 1980s and suggests lifelong learning, an adult education philosophical framework, could apply, as it is “the process of leaning that continues throughout one's lifetime based on individual needs, circumstances, interests, and learning skills” (p. 377). Responding to Collins, Chobot explained the need to give the public what it wants, which might not be educational in nature and states that the lack of research and evaluation data on museum education adult programming means determining what is most effective for adults to learn is difficult. The one model for museum education that was promoted is that used by the Toledo Museum of Art, which created a chart based on the different visitor types: totally uninitiated general visitor, visitor with some interest and knowledge, and interested and knowledgeable visitor. Briefly, the training of docents is praised for being a significant adult education activity occurring in museums.

Surprisingly, in the twenty first century, little has been written in the handbooks about museums. Wilson and Hayes' (2000) comprehensive handbook makes no mention of museums or the arts. Of late, there has been a dearth of research by adult educators on museums in adult education publications. In one exception, while not a handbook, Merriam, et al. (2007) recognized a single aspect of museums, that is, the nonformal educational opportunities existing in them.

Nonformal Education

When considering the museum setting as a place of learning, 'local' NFE comes into play. The term captures the niche-setting of a public place, where in a limited amount of time; docents educate, and are responsible for, their adult tour-goers' experience in the museum. Teaching in this locale is complicated given competing interests and lack of a formal relationship between educator and learner. The literature surrounding NFE falls into the categories of: relief work in developing countries performed by nongovernmental agencies, education policies in developing countries, environmental education, and adult education occurring in the developed world in both profit and non-profit settings (Brennan, 1997; Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Heimlich, 1993; Reed, 1984; Shrestha, Wilson, & Singh, 2008; Taylor, 2006). Only the latter is relevant for this study.

Understanding the term nonformal education is easiest when it is defined in relation to two more established terms, formal education and informal education. Formal education is the hierarchical, traditional highly institutionalized structured education system, such as degree or for credit programs (Merriam, et al., 2007). Informal education is the unstructured and unintended knowledge or skills acquired incidentally through everyday life experiences

(Campbell & Curtin, 1999). NFE falls in between, and involves the intentional, purposeful, and structured learning opportunities provided outside of formal education system (Coombs, 1985). Non-formal offerings are typically “short-term, voluntary, and have few if any prerequisites...however they typically have a curriculum and often a facilitator” (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 30) or they are “any organized, intentional and explicit effort to promote learning to enhance the quality of life through out-of-school approaches” (Reed, 1984, p. 52). Cultural institutions offer patrons an experience “without the constraints associated with schools...” (Carr, 1991, p. 15).

Rogers (2004) stresses that descriptions of NFE (p. 102-103) are predominantly in relation to formal education, which while accurate, does not serve the term well. His compilation of descriptions illustrates both the interaction between docent and tour-goer (i.e. program is short term and specific, is context-based, seeks to legitimize a local culture, is resource sparse, etc.) and the tenets of adult education (i.e. uses participants’ experience and existing knowledge, meets the needs and convenience of clients, is learner centered, staff are facilitators, etc.). That said, distinguishing programs as either strictly formal or strictly nonformal is not always simple (Coombs, 1989; Merriam, et al., 2007; Rogers, 2004; Taylor, 2006).

NFE programs emerged in the 1960s in response to cultural, social, and political crises worldwide, often in disadvantaged international communities (Ewert, 1989). In order to be more inclusive of educational activities occurring in both developing and established nations, NFE was broken into subtypes. Brennan (1997) labeled these complement, alternative, and supplement. Complement refers to the work done that is complementary to the formal system, performing the function that formal education was designed to fulfill but

has not. Alternative means traditional, indigenous structures that predate colonization and have managed to survive. Supplement refers to the timely, reactionary, “maverick” (p. 194) type of NFE “which is designed to address the needs of developing nations” (Taylor, 2006, p. 294), as an addition to what is offered by formal education.

In order for educators to understand the different kinds of NFE, three structures have been labeled: system, setting, and process (Brennan, 1997). System refers to how much control and standardization there is for managing an organization that needs to be agile in order to respond to educational needs. Setting gets to the critical nature of education occurring outside of the formal system at other places such as churches, libraries, the workplace, and museums (Merriam, et al., 2007). Process is curricular-related, emphasizing how the teaching and learning strategies need to be matched to the learner (Brennan, 1997). While all three are relevant and important in museums, setting, in particular, is the structure which speaks to place where education is the goal and the docent is presented with unique challenges. Over thirty years ago, Silver (1978) described it best, “a museum is the ‘original drop-in learning center,’ offering a random-access educational environment rare in American society” (p. 209).

What NFE educators ‘know’ or have come to believe has been the focus of Taylor’s studies (Taylor & Neill 2008; 2006), which examine how instructors make meaning of their work, and tend to the needs and interests of learners. An interpretation of Brennan’s model, focusing on the teaching beliefs of educators, is applied in ‘local’ settings (Taylor 2006, 2005, 2004) where opportunities place an “emphasis on information sharing, skill building, and fostering personal enjoyment through learning...” (2006, p. 294). His addition of the term “local” is important and means meeting the needs in a particular region or needs that are

site-specific. Taylor (2006) adopted Brennan's theoretical framework and applied NFE to ways in which adults learn in "local" NFE settings such as historical sites, natural settings, museums, and retail settings. These sites shared similar characteristics as Brennan's (1997) conceptual model—being organized, delivered locally, and not institutionalized on a grand scale emphasizing learners' ability to come and go at will at 'local' sites (Taylor, 2006).

All of this potential coming and going is a reality for museum educators, and the word 'outside' in Coombs' definition of NFE is a double entendre. First, NFE firmly establishes itself as purposefully separate from or *outside* of formal education, which Brennan (1997) explains is a reaction to the limitations or failures of formal education. Second, in local NFE, the physical setting or environment—*outside* of four walls in some cases, often significantly impacts the interface between educator and learner. NFE today often occurs outdoors—as is the case with zoos, national parks, historical monuments, etc. The environment refers to "both the physical, or constructed surroundings and to the affective environment created by the interaction of the education, the individual learner, the group of learners, the content, and the physical environment" (Heimlich & Norland, 1993, p. 91-92).

The nature of these settings, which are often frequented on weekends or in one's free time, reminds us that unlike formal and informal education, participation in a NFE activity, such as a tour, is by choice (Heimlich, 1993), which can be a challenge to the educator (Taylor, 2006). Unlike what is often the case in formal education, participation is not mandated by the government, parents, or one's manager; nor is it accidental, as is the case in informal education. In the midst of it learners can come and go as they please (Taylor, 2006),

which is most often the case in a docent-led tour in a museum where noise from other patrons is unpredictable and learners' reasons for participation and time constraints vary.

Adult educators (Heimlich, 1996; Falk & Dierking, 1992; Heimlich, 1996; Taylor, 2006) have looked at NFE in museums from a nonformal perspective though there is certainly more work to be done, specifically studies on the various kinds of educational programming offered in museums, the meaning of success for museum educational programs, the preferences of different audience types for certain programming, and how learning can be measured both in the short and long term for visitors to NFE sites. Researching instructional methods used by museum educators and how this relates to other goals docents have could also be examined further. The special 'setting' aspect of museums shapes the practice of the educators within it.

This section has introduced the museum as an international institution, presented its history, and explained its educational mission and theories. This was followed by how the museum has been recognized in the field of adult education over the last seventy years, most recently finding itself as a NFE setting. With NFE focused on developing ways of learning that are congruent with learners' interests in the unique social setting (Reed, 1984)—the museum—the emphasis is then placed on *who* is primarily responsible for educating adults in the galleries, the docent.

Docents

In a typical American museum today, the docent, a "trained volunteer teacher-guide" (Burcaw, 1997, p. 17) is often the only person in the museum with whom patrons interact, apart from the person who collects their admission fee. This section will explore the literature

surrounding docents—their history, role, characteristics, training, and place in scholarly research, which is primarily conceptual data gathered from authors' personal experience working with docents. Little empirical research on docents has been done and that which exists is mostly in the form of doctoral dissertations and masters theses, with few scholarly peer-reviewed articles.

History

The term 'docent' comes from the Latin *docere* which means to teach, instruct, or give instructions (Bleick, 1980). First used in 1907 in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the purpose of a docent was "to lead his disciples on to enjoyment" (Gilman, 1915, p. 119) or to help visitors see the beauty of the collections by interpreting (Bay, 1974). The term assisted docents because it did not carry with it the stigma of 'education' (Low, 1948), which was too formal sounding, given the nonformal setting. Until 1920, the term was applied to hired, paid museum staff members who held high administrative and professional positions. Almost immediately, docents were embraced for their enthusiasm.

Before the term came, in the 1890s, Boston gentlemen were responsible for introducing guests to the museum and the objects and make sure patrons felt welcome. These men were academics, sometimes college professors, and taught adult audiences. The need for docents came "out of the realization that art did not 'speak' to all men—in fact, it spoke to very few" (Giltinan, 2008, p. 54). Museums in the Midwest and in the East began offering docent training programs and through the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, docents educated adults in the galleries. As intermediary between curators and museum patrons, docents as a

population changed in the 1930s as the makeup of patrons evolved and women's participation in public life increased.

At this time, Boston experienced an influx of Italian immigrants and individuals were needed to assist them “to the values, aesthetic judgments, and social structure of their adopted home” (p. 115). Second, the new audience of children came to the museum, to supplement their public school education. Concurrently, technological advances in the home resulted in middle-class educated white mothers having an increased amount of leisure time during the day. Some women, with their newfound free time, joined clubs, where they undertook social issues such as sanitation reform, well baby care, or places like the Junior League, where volunteer work was practiced. Teaching was acceptable for unmarried women but married women were prohibited—sometimes by law—from teaching as being an employee somewhere was abnormal socially (Giltinan, 2008).

Docenting became popular as volunteer work of middle-class women (Giltinan, 2008); it was a good fit as it was part of their domestic sphere—“women as the teachers of virtue, citizenship, and American culture” (p. 107) and allowed women to maintain their ladylike status. At the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, women were able to use their “stereotypical gender traits...” of nurturing, aesthetic sensitivity, and moral character to “create an acceptable role for themselves”... “in a male-dominated public sphere” (p. 107). This switch, from paid men to volunteer women was paved with the influx of children visiting, as people were needed to assist with the crowds in the galleries during the daytime.

After World War II, the number of volunteers in museums grew particularly as school children began having class trips to museums. So, docents shifted their focus from the adult audience to children. During the 1960s and 70s, when museums sought to reach diverse

communities, docents served at the satellite museums and visited schools with objects (Alexander, 1979). In the 1980s, docents proved invaluable to museums, as their tours were the most widely used educational service offered by museums (Grinder & McCoy, 1985).

Today, docents give lectures and guide tours in galleries (Berrin & Dreyfus, 1990), which can last anywhere from fifteen minutes to two hours (Sachetello-Sawyer 2002). A docent is “like a spark, an interpreter, a time machine, or a link between curators and visitors” (National Docent Symposium Council, 2001, p.19). The docent’s role is multifaceted. With the public, docents take on the role of teacher, sharing the fundamental intent of the curatorial staff, and quickly evaluating “visitors’ experience, interest, stamina, and the likelihood of visitor engagement with the exhibits...” (Abu-Shumays & Leinhardt, 2002, p. 49). Docents aim to enrich tour-goers’ learning and appreciation, sometimes by offering comparisons, contrasts, and analyses of objects (Knox, 1981).

For docents, relating to the public is just as important as knowing their subject and some of the best docents are “friendly discussion leaders” who inquire about the interests and insights of the tour-goers (Sachetello-Sawyer, 2002, p. 27). That is, aside from educating, they are also hosts in sterile sanctuaries presenting to guests their “familiar friends” (the objects), “unobtrusively giving the guest such information as will place him en rapport with his new acquaintance...” (Whitmore, 1916, p. 200). For docents themselves, establishing a rapport with tour-goers and ensuring the visitors have a good experience are often goals (Taylor & Neill, 2008; Wolins, 1990). This helps create a welcoming environment and situates the docent as mediator between learner and content.

Accomplishing the goals of educating, evaluating the audience, and engaging the audience, etc. takes a special individual. The docent community attracts well-educated

(Stamer, Lerdall & Guo, 2008), articulate people who are motivated lifelong learners (Abu-Shumays & Leinhardt, 2002). Today, the volunteer docent is almost always a female (Giltinan, 2008), characteristically from a white, upper-middle class segment of the community (Bay, 1974; Bleick, 1980; Silver, 1978). In 1989, artist Andrea Fraser parodied docents by creating a performance piece at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Schwarzer, 2006). It typified the ‘typical docent.’ Fraser lead the unassuming public on a tour of the “private preserve of the privileged”, bringing to life the stereotypical “well-educated, prosperous, white woman, free to spend her days in volunteer activity” (Silver, 1978, p. 210). Her exaggerated gestures and verbose script poked fun at the role of the docent and museums taking their collection too seriously. Including the museum cafeteria on the tour, the language Fraser used to describe spaces and objects was jargon only art historians use and not with the general public in mind. The social critique on the public’s sole interaction with a museum representative, as startling as she was as a docent, mocks the motivation and contributions of docents and politics involved in museums.

Fraser did not scoff at the commitment docents make to museums. Docents are depended on and devote much time to museums, but today, U.S. museums are struggling with a diminishing pool of volunteers to serve, as the tradition of women seeking volunteer work mid-week is fading (Alexander & Alexander, 2008) in some part due to the knowledge economy, with its demands for longer working hours (Lord, 2007). With this downward trend, it is important that docents feel committed, satisfied, and recognized, so that they are less likely to drop out of the docent pool (Sellers, 1988). We know that by donating their time to museums, individuals are fulfilling their own personal, social, professional, and civic

needs (Hirzy, 2007). Being a museum docent identifies one as social, active, a 'joiner', and a lifelong learner.

Studies on motivations for why docents volunteer (Holmes, 2007, Gunther, 1990; Kidd & Kidd, 1997) frequently point to Marilyn Hood's (1983) seminal piece on attributes associated with pleasurable leisure activities for adults. These are: being with people, doing something worthwhile, feeling comfortable and at ease in one's surroundings, having a challenge of new experiences, having an opportunity to learn, and participating actively. Studies on motivation cite docents as philanthropic (Wolins, 1990) and sociable (Stamer, et al., 2008; Wolins, 1990). While it is understandable why adults are drawn to docenting, museums need to ensure that these individuals possess sufficient knowledge about the collection, site, etc. and thus, mandate docent training. The research on forms of training, training effectiveness, and measurability of success will be discussed next.

Training

Over 90% of museums use volunteers (Merritt, 2006) and more than 90% of museums offer docent training (Cunningham, 2004; Sachetello-Sawyer, 2002), some for up to two-years (Abu-Shumays & Leinhardt, 2002). The objective is to educate docents about the collection and to train them in the best ways of presenting the information to the public. Much has been written about docent training and it reads as a how-to, practical approach (Bleick 1979; Booth, et al., 1982; Burcaw, 1997; Gartenhaus, 1998; Gough-DiJulio, 1998; Grindler & McCoy, 1985; Johnson, 2009; Krockover & Hauck 1980; Levy, Lloyd, & Schreiber, 2001; Martinello, 1983; McCoy, 1989; National Docent Symposium Council, 2001; Peyton, 1999; Sachatello-Sawyer, et al., 2002; Wolins, 1990). Heavy on specifics and

some even sample manuals, docent training varies from self-directed library time (Lin, 1991) to structured intense college-level course (Holmes, 2007; Stamer, et al., 2008) equivalents, supplemented with coaching from experienced docents acting as mentors.

While they are museum savvy, educated, and clearly loyal to their institutions, docents have been slighted in the literature. Docents can be viewed as second best to paid guides (Alexander, 1979; Lord, 2007) insofar as being less reliable, difficult to train (Bay, 1974), and less manageable, but “proper professional supervision can frequently make excellent use of the pool...” (Alexander, 1979, p. 198). Some museum staffers even look down upon training programs as social clubs (Bay, 1974). A study on the training, recruitment, and management of docents points out the flaws in museums’ docent programs which frequently adopt an inexpensive and quick alternative to interpreter programs (Bay, 1974) rather than using proven and reliable methods. After training, docents’ lack of regular evaluation has been well noted (Bleick, 1980; Flanders & Flanders, 1976; Horn, 1984). A recent study examined the accuracy of their message dissemination (Mony, 2007) and to everyone’s detriment, some docents perpetuate old myths indicating that they are not staying current with research (Theobald, 2008), while others are indifferent to the pedagogical aspects of museum instruction (Miner, 1918). For docents and museum staffers in general, their impact in facilitating learning has suffered from a lack of research (Falk & Dierking, 2000). Perhaps this would be an issue of interest to docents’ professional organizations, which for docents are relatively fledgling.

Professional Organizations

For all of the criticism docents receive from inside and outside the museum, the fact that unpaid nonprofessionals are left to perform the essential responsibility of educating museum attendees—one of the most important functions of the museum—has not gone unnoticed (Gartenhaus, 1998; Silver, 1978). The entire visitor experience rests on the shoulders of docents. With such a large duty left to the volunteer group, docents began mobilizing. In 1979, the United States Association of Museum Volunteers (USAMV) was formed and two years later, the group became an affiliated committee of the AAM. In 1986, the USAMV changed its name to American Association for Museum Volunteers (AAMV) and the national association represents almost 500,000 volunteers and docents in all categories of museums and cultural institutions (Cunningham, 2004).

In 1981, a smaller, less formal group formed, the National Docent Symposium Council (NDSC), which focuses on improving practices and is limited to museums and historic homes. Their *Docent Handbook* is a resource for docents, and is proudly written and published by docents. The unification and sense of community that the AAMV and the NDSC have fostered has professionalized the work of docents and set standards for organizations that utilize volunteers. Raising the level of professionalism and awareness of docents has piqued the interest of scholars and researchers, resulting in docents being the focus of some research studies.

Research

After examining articles, books, dissertations found from searching ERIC, JSTOR, World Cat, ProQuest, the Professional Development Collection, and Dissertation Abstracts, I

found the majority of studies in which docents were related, such as those looking at their training, manuals, etc. published in museum education, history, social science journals, and dissertations. The research is rarely linked to theory or quantifies results, but ten research studies were found in which docents were some if not all of the participants, and key themes of these were docents' training, proficiency, and motivation. Below, those as well as the studies that relate to docents are described.

One of the earliest studies identified touring competencies needed by docents for their tours for children (Bleick, 1979) and found that docent training programs rarely address many of the required competencies by the guide. Participants were museum staffers and docents. The findings showed that many of the needs museum leaders felt docents should have—the ability to adjust content for different ages, exhibiting a positive and enthusiastic attitude about volunteering, the museum, and art—were seldom covered in the docent training program. Another study looked at docent manuals in relation to what docents actually do on tours and concluded that the docents were part teacher, interpreter, spokesperson, and advocate (Hartranft, 1992).

In addition to the formal training docents receive informal education is also important in docent training. Docents learn best through a number of informal processes, such as watching, shadowing, etc. (Castle, 2001; Stamer, et al., 2008) rather than formal textbook training. The nature of docent expertise was examined and found the informal learning process, as opposed to the formal regimented training, was critical to docents' effectiveness in history museums (Grenier, 2009). Similarly, training docents in the use of active learning techniques can result in effective learning for adult patrons (Peyton, 1999). Peyton recommends that further studies apply learning techniques, "such as storytelling...or

discussion" (p. 79) to adult tours, in order to discover which are most effective. In fact, when considering the amount of effort museums put into training their docents, docents might be the "single most 'museum educated' audience in the nation" given their training courses, one-on-ones with curators, refresher courses, exams, liberal access to museum resources, etc. (Silver, 1978, p. 210).

A number of these studies focus on the docent-led tour, including its content, teaching methods used, and the teaching methods' impact on visitors. A study of schoolchildren on a scripted tour (Cox-Petersen, Marsh, Kisiel, & Melber, 2003) was filled with facts and stories. Researchers did not interview the docents, rather, researchers interviewed students, teachers, and museum educators. With a good sample size—thirty tours observed, the findings related to student learning are worthy of museum educators' attention, but offer little in understanding how docents conceive of their interpretive role.

In another study, which was content-based and on tours for schoolchildren, Foss (1994) observed docents had replaced the traditional lecture format with interactive dialogue and hands-on activities. The tours were about art criticism, half of which was interpretation, and the remainder on description and analysis of objects. Foss found docents made a concerted effort to "inform, involve, and excite museum audiences through interactive dialogue" (p. 175).

Turning to student learning on docent-led tours in art museums, predictably, thematic tours are effective in promoting learning (Sweeney, 2003). Diving into the instructional method of tours given at museums, a study compared the effectiveness of the lecture method versus the inquiry/discussion method for adults (Horn, 1984). The inquiry/discussion method was more enjoyable for adult patrons. That said, Horn chose participants who were well-

versed with the lecture method and taught them a new way of giving a tour, so, the docents may not have been as comfortable with the new instructional method by the time the data was gathered. With just ten participants, interviews with docents would have been helpful to gain an understanding of their perspective. Foss' and Horn's findings support Wolins' (1990) theories on docent education, where straight lecture is considered *passé*.

Docents as guides as well as visitors was the subject of another study (Abu-Shumays & Leinhardt, 2002), that captured docent conversations in galleries that were new to them. This kind of study, focusing on docents as learners, educators, and museum-goers, helps us better understand how docents makes sense of a museum visit and how this is reflected in their practice. Similarly, ways of knowing and teaching for docents, interpreters, and gallery educators was studied (Castle, 2001) and a theme that emerged on tours was that docents, etc. pleased, entertained, and appealed "to the appetites and emotion" (p. 319) of tour-goers. Interestingly and not contradictory, docents conceptualized their role as one of "working with learners to critically question, interpret, and analyze ..." (p. 307) objects. This demonstrates the duality of the docent-led tour: fun and educational, all in one. Using the results of this study, and informed by Grenier (2005), Castle (2006) linked curriculum theory to docent training to improve practice.

With a similar goal, volunteer recruitment, retention, development, and general management (Stamer, et al., 2008) were studied. A wider net was cast of participants, who included various kinds of museum volunteers (i.e. museum store workers, docents) and their managers. In addition to surveys, interviews were performed. They found that building a sense of community among volunteers, enhancing learning experiences of volunteers through

continuing education, and establishing ways for volunteers to self-manage were promising practices in managing volunteers.

Over the last twenty years, the research studies related to docents have been primarily focused on the themes of: children's learning on tours (Bleick, 1979; Foss, 1994; Cox-Petersen, et al., 2003; Sweney, 2003), touring methods (Bleick, 1979; Cox-Petersen et al., 2003; Foss, 1994; Horn, 1978, 1984; Peyton, 1999), and motivation for volunteering (Fleck, 2001; Kidd & Kidd, 1997; Stamer, et al., 2008). To carry out their studies, researchers have performed observations (Abu-Shumays & Leinhardt, 2002; Castle, 2001, 2006; Cox-Petersen, et al., 2003; Foss, 1994; Grenier, 2005), conducted surveys (Bleick, 1979; Horn, 1984; Stamer, et al., 2008; Sweney, 2008), and performed interviews (Abu-Shumays & Leinhardt, 2002; Bleick, 1979; Castle, 2001, 2006; Cox-Petersen, et al., 2003; Fleck, 2001; Grenier, 2009; Kidd & Kidd, 1997; Stamer, et al., 2008; Sweney, 2003).

While these studies assist us in better understanding docents in two ways, learners in the museum and as adult educators teaching the public, there are some glaring gaps in the literature. Beyond docents' training, proficiency, and motivation—primarily to the benefit of children in museums—the specific content of the tour, the interpretation visitors get, as perceived by docents, has not been addressed. No one has studied how tours vary by audience solely by observing multiple tours, how docents decide to alter their tours based on what they know about the listeners, or how the NFE setting, docent manager, or other outside influences impact the tours. The more that can be understood about this population's beliefs, approaches, assumptions, goals, etc. the better museums can prepare future docents.

The previous section described the significant responsibility docents have as educators and representatives of the museum. These volunteers wear a myriad of hats in

order to please all constituents. Though not specific to museums, but leading to a complete understanding of their role, Pond's (1993) description of what qualities a tour guide needs is the same for docents, that is:

Broad-based knowledge about the area they are guiding within, enthusiasm, commitment to life-long learning, empathy and sensitivity for people, flexibility, pride in serving others, and the ability to interpret by painting mental pictures. (p. 93)

Docents exceed this. From their training, to the tours they give, to the commitment asked of them by the institution, docents play a critical role in educating adults. How they do this, the last quality Pond listed in this description, by interpreting, will now be studied.

Interpretation

This section is devoted to deconstructing the meaning of interpretation and two of its components, narrative and stories. This section aims to understand what precisely is occurring when docents form content for the tours they lead. While each docent's practice is unique and the influence each museum education department has over its guides varies, the language used to describe the steps in the process is often blurred. A few terms reoccurred in the museum education and docent literature that seemed to be used interchangeably to describe what docents did to explain objects and illustrated how they presented information. In this section, each term will be defined and explained in relation to the others so that the terms are clear.

Defining Interpretation

The connection between place and interpretation can be traced back to ancient Greece when almost every town had its own *periegete*, an “expert local guide who led people around, pointed out notable sights, described local ritual, explained customs, and told traditional stories of historical and mythical events associated with the place” (Stewart, Hayward, & Devlin, 1998, p. 257). The root word, *interpretes*, comes from Latin, meaning a negotiator or a mediator between two parties (Edson & Dean, 1994). Interpretation is about conveying meaning (Thompson & Harper, 2000) to those who otherwise would not understand and appreciate what they are viewing.

There are a few definitions of interpretation but the earliest that has had the most impact is that interpretation is an educational activity or process which “aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information” (Tilden, 1977, p. 8). Freeman Tilden pioneered interpretation as a subject and published the definition above in 1957, which became the standard within the field for four decades. Tilden’s work is frequently cited in environmental interpretation settings such as parks and nature centers (Morgan, Absher, Loudon, & Sutherland, 1997) and the research on interpretation in national parks, eco-tourism, and historic heritage sites.

Others write that interpretation is the communication of the essential meaning of the site and of the people and events associated with it (Alderson & Low, 1976) and “the basic art of telling the story of the place, an object, or an event” (Walsh-Heron & Stevens, 1990, p. 101). The National Park Service writes that interpretation is based on three tenets that together constitute a definition:

Resources possess meanings and have significance; the visitor is seeking something of value; interpretation facilitates a connection between the interests of the visitor and the meanings of the resource. (Thompson & Harper, 2000, p.12)

A slight variation on this definition is one that specifically references and values the interpreter, which is of particular interest. Interpretation is “communication between a knowledgeable guide and an interested listener, where the listener’s knowledge and meaning-making is as important as the guide’s” (Serrell, 1996, p. 10). By communicating their passion for the objects, interpreters help visitors build emotional and intellectual connections with the objects (Beck & Cable, 2002; Tilden, 1977). Emotion is referred to repeatedly in the interpretation literature, dating back to 1977, using the terms passion, enjoyment, and provocation (Davidson & Black, 2007). In sum, interpreters deliver messages that connect with the interests of the audiences. Interpretation is more than information but it involves information. It is a communication process rather than a product. Alexander (1979) describes good interpretation completely and succinctly, it:

seeks to teach certain truths, to impart understanding, it has a serious educational purpose; is based on original objects; is supported by sound research that examines the object, audience, and presentation methods to improve communication; makes use of sensory perception to create a mood, is informal—it is voluntary and dependent only on the interest of the viewer, and is often enjoyable and entertaining. (p. 195)

Interpretation aims to stimulate, facilitate, and extend people’s understanding of a place, to reveal meanings and relationships, and to provoke thought (Stewart, et al., 1998; Tilden, 1977). Interpretation clarifies, explains, decodes, and even provokes, so that the observer can begin to understand another time (Tilden, 1977). Recently, interpretation was defined as “the

ways that art, objects, and ideas are presented to visitors in order to facilitate the visitor experience” (Czajkowski & Hill, 2008, p. 256). These definitions share a common theme, that is, interpretation is delivering messages that connect with the audience and reveal meaning. This is especially important in museums, historic sites, and national parks as they seek to educate their public.

Interpretation in Museums

In simple terms, the educational goal of museums is to make information about the past understandable in relation to the present (Vanderway, 1977). Since interpreting is the process of explaining facts and information about objects to others in such a way that the learner understands an object’s value and significance; this ‘explaining’ could be the telling of: facts, provenance (origin or source), the object’s use, history, a story related to the piece, etc. Effective interpretation is “about encouraging access in the widest sense” (Hems, 2006, p. 190) meaning help visitors make sense of what is presented to them, know the interesting myths behind specific objects, and understand why an object is revered and how it might relate to their lives.

Transporting messages that connect with listeners is important in museums today, as educators seek to inform their public and make “links between the object and the viewer” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994a, p. 12), connecting visitors to objects that are, in some cases, unidentifiable. But, with planning exhibits and writing wall texts left to curators, often with no discussion of the target audience results in exhibits that appeal to those who have the same “frameworks of intelligibility and strategies of interpretation as the curator” (2000b, p. 137). While it is rare to find good histories of interpretation, we know that in the 1940s, curators

believed interpretation “demeaned art by turning it from an aesthetic phenomenon into a social or historical construct” (Roberts, 1997, p. 63). Then, visitor attendance soared, museums became more accountable with federal funding, time passed, and by 1980 interpretation was an accepted institutional function. Museums finally adopted the term *interpretation* to describe the learning process that occurs within them, because it connotes informality, voluntariness, and recreation (Alexander, 1979).

Interpreting in museums galleries is evident in many forms: brochures, wall labels, tours, and the exhibition catalog. Most simply accessible to a patron who enters a gallery is the wall label because of its static nature and prominent location. First evident in the small text placed alongside objects, wall labels were minimalist interpretation. Instead of just including the title, artist, date, and medium, interpretive writing described other information about the object, such as how this piece was the prize in the collection of the collector who traveled abroad to purchase it—which tells the reader little about the object itself. American museums tended to express a European, usually upper-class, and often male perspective (Roberts, 1997) in wall label and brochure text, which, in recent decades, has softened to be more careful and less hegemonic in tone. “Dilemma labels” include wall text that is “racist, sexist, and [promotes] colonist attitudes on the part of museum” (Corrin, 1994, p. 2). The National Museum of Natural History has amended some of its wall labels. Today, museums are well aware that they “present *an* interpretation not *the* interpretation” (p. 119) as interpretation is “performed, prejudiced...partial... [and] incapable of reaching any straightforwardly neutral or objective account of what is interpreted” (Honderich, 1995, p. 13).

Museums recognize the need for interpretation, because it “provokes the dialogue fundamental to education, without it, visitors may come once, but they are unlikely to return” (Talboys, 2005, p. 9). In art museums especially, “the spoken message [of a docent] can often communicate better than textual materials” (Dean, 1994, p. 119).

Typically in museums, the docent is that interpreter; the docent is “an integral part of the museum’s interpretive function” (Booth, et al., 1982, p.15) and a negotiator of meaning between exhibits and visitors (Castle, 2002). Drawing from objects, texts, and exhibits to interpret (Abu-Shumays & Leinhardt, 2002), all of the docent’s efforts as an interpreter are to make a particular exhibit more meaningful, or at a minimum, understandable, for a group, through the sharing of information (Booth, et al., 1982).

There are two types of interpretation, personal interpretation and non-personal interpretation. Most museums utilize both kinds, depending on resources, volunteer workforce, museum location, and museum mission.

Personal interpretation is one person interpreting to another person or persons in person orally, such as presenting a formal program in a lecture hall, guiding on a trail, re-enactments, storytelling (Hems, 2006) a scheduled guided walking tour (Ham & Krumpe, 1996), or a staffed information desk. A curator, staff educator, or docent could deliver personal interpretation in a museum, which allows the interpreter to continually adapt to the audience, and connect with them based on what is known about them, their interests, etc. Questions can be answered and background information provided for those patrons who need it. Sam Ham (2003), who studies environmental interpretation, views interpretation as an approach to communication and his recipe for success in personal interpretation programs

is to make the touring experience enjoyable, relevant, organized, and theme-based (Brochu & Merriman, 2002).

The downside to personal interpretation is that opportunities to take advantage of it are limited and inconsistent depending on the site, time of day of visit, availability of volunteers, and the varying skill and mood of interpreters (Brochu & Merriman, 2002). Also, personal interpretation is laborious for institutions. Staff and volunteers require extensive training about the objects, the museum, and dealing with diversity within the general public.

Non-personal interpretation includes exhibition catalogs (Thompson & Harper, 2000), brochures, display panels, audiovisual shows, audio guides, guidebooks, and wall labels. These static forms of non-personal interpretive services are typically found at visitor centers, galleries (Stewart, et al., 1998), national parks, information desks, and bookstores. They offer consistent messaging to the public no matter what time of day the visit, or who is the educator on staff, if at all. A museum can maintain quality control when the public hears a single voice ensuring that a consistent message is sent to patrons.

The downside to non-personal communication is that the individual writing the script attempts to hold ultimate control over interpretation and as meanings change or history is uncovered revealing new information, frequent changes to wall labels and audio guides are costly. In non-personal interpretative methods, there is no dialogue created with patrons and the opportunity for patrons to ask questions is often nonexistent. This is a form of one way communication. As we well know, interpretations convey institutional messages, which can backfire. A grand scale interpretation controversy in a national public museum highlighted the danger in unilateral institutional messages. For example, informational text in the 1995 *Enola Gay* exhibit at the Smithsonian (Schwarzer, 2006) misrepresented the facts of war. The

museum's interpretation of the number of lives lost and saved by dropping the bomb outraged veterans and became political, resulting in museum staff resignations, protests, and Senate hearings.

In both personal and non-personal interpretive methods, museums often adhere to the 'story-line' approach as a key to effective interpretation on tours (Knudson, et al., 1995) and exhibition designs. A storyline is evident in their interpretive methods of communication (i.e., titles and text panels in display), and selection and placement of objects (Dean, 1994). A storyline approach is where information is revealed in logical, often chronological steps so the exhibition has a definite starting and ending points. Interpreters can "think of the tour as a method of storytelling in which the space and the collection help them unravel the mystery of the site" (Levy, 2002, p. 194) but practically, if and how interpreters use different stories based on different audiences is not focused on by researchers. This unraveling and unfolding of details makes for the telling of a good story and good stories are essential to effective interpretation (Ellis, 2002). Storytelling will be discussed in greater depth in the following section.

The literature related to both personal and non-personal interpretation in museums is sparse. Only two works in the docent training literature make mention of interpretation.

Levy, et al. (2001) recommend guides interpret history by:

Weaving facts, context, and the site's resources into fascinating, memorable, and effective stories that bring a historic site to life for a broad-based public. Far from being watered-down history this approach actually organizes information in such a way that the site becomes an engaging three-dimension laboratory where people see, hear about, experience, and think about complex ideas. Mastery of every date and

name matters less than the development of well-presented, powerful stories that illustrate a site to its best advantage. (p. 59)

While Levy, et al. (2001) are referring to historic sites, the AAM specifically addressed interpretation. Cunningham's (2004) *Interpreter's Training Manual for Museums*, demonstrates the need for museums to "explore the interpretive techniques that encourage visitors to actively engage in learning" (p. ix) and is a resource for staff and volunteer interpreters in how to engage visitors in meaningful, message-based dialogue.

Cunningham's avoidance of the term 'museum educator' speaks to interpretation as its own profession separate from museum education. In 1988, the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) was formed. The professional organization, which is primarily made up of environmental interpreters, is dedicated to advancing the profession of heritage interpretation and members work at parks, museums, nature centers, zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums, commercial tour companies, and theme parks (Merriman & Brochu, 2006). The organization defines interpretation as "a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource" (National Association for Interpretation, 2008).

Some interpretive practices have been criticized, for such things as: not valuing objects as documents in their own right, not addressing what objects illustrate about history or for educators' lack of teaching strategy. Sometimes interpretations demonstrate a "romanticized infatuation with history...eulogizing the past" (Herbst, 1990, p. 119), making the artist into a hero, which presents an unbalanced view of history. For example, "most western history museums teach history by associating their objects and buildings to historical events and people...which...leaves a legacy of hero-worship and elite cultural hegemony"

(Van West, 1989, p. 7). Sometimes historical interpretation of objects falls victim to a shrine mentality (Van West, 1989) when content is not always kept up to date and factual. For instance, visitors to the Woodrow Wilson House in Washington, D.C. are taught to assess material culture by searching the house for specific clues. Docents analyze objects for visitors so that visitors develop skills that they can use when visiting other historic homes (Herbst, 1990).

The other side of this issue is that not all objects easily lend themselves to interpretation or would make for the most interesting tour stop—given for example, their size or ease of relate-ability to an audience, yet are excellent pieces and skipping them would be doing a disservice to the audience. It is important for patrons to realize that many objects presented as artworks were not created strictly “to be looked at or interpreted, but also for practical, ritualistic, religious, or other cultural reasons” (Hubard, 2007, p. 411).

In an attempt to understand what viewers talk about in front of paintings in an art gallery, Bruder & Ucak (2000) analyzed fifty-five conversations through the perspective of symbolic interactionism. Trying to understand how viewers make sense of the art works was done by audio-recording what viewers said in the minutes they spent in front of objects. The researchers found that the objects became meaningful for viewers when visitors engaged in conversations about them and that in the process of sense-making, which often included the creation of stories, “paintings can elicit personal—often powerful—responses from viewers” (p. 356).

Interpretation in Historic Sites

Like museums, historic sites have powerful stories, and this telling of the story of a place, such as Gettysburg National Military Park or the Alamo is ‘interpretation’ (Thompson & Harper, 2000). At heritage sites, guests are mainly seeking enjoyment, not instruction (Brochu & Merriman, 2002; Ham, 1992; Tilden, 1977) and high quality live interpretation creates a sense of shared experience between interpreter and audience (Thompson & Harper, 2000), and it need not be formal. A circulating interpreter casually greeting visitors on the porch of a historic house might become a mini-tour. Questions asked by the audience and information the interpreter gathers, from reading license plates, names on clothing, etc. could cause the interpreter to select stories based on this information. The situation just described is “flexible, spontaneous, and personalized” (Thompson & Harper, 2000, p. 24) and an example of personalized interpretation. The primary difference between interpretation and instruction is that interpretation, “by necessity, is tailored to a non-captive audience—that is, an audience that freely chooses to attend or ignore communication content without fear of punishment or forfeiture of reward” (Ham & Krumpe, 1996, p. 13) which aligns with the nonformal setting.

Leading the way with interpretive programming, the National Park Service provides its parks manuals on comprehensive interpretive planning (2000) and creating compelling stories (1997). Despite this organization’s mandate of how parks should be educating the public, the National Park Service is actually quite *laissez faire* when it comes to *creating* stories in their parks as it is the individual interpreter who creates the story “based on rich and accurate subject matter knowledge” (p. 2). The role of the interpreter is to “plan and

deliver pleasurable, relevant, thematic presentations that meet the objectives of both visitor and sponsoring agency" (Atkinson & Mullins, 1998, p. 49).

Interpretation has been the focus of some qualitative research and the studies are varied from best practices in institutions to focusing on the visitors. It is common knowledge in the museum world that institutions are not adequately critiquing their interpretive positions (Feldhusen, 2006; Meszaros, 2004), likely due to lack of oversight by the board of directors and museum administrators.

Institutions do encourage visitors to make their own meaning (Mezaros, 2004), learn from persistence among veteran interpreters (Bormann, 2004), and strive to create a sense of place (Stewart, et al., 1998; Uzzell, 1996) at their site. Focusing on the audience, visitors prefer unscripted tours (Barrie, 2001), that is, a tour that engages them in the interpretive process (Feldhusen, 2006). All said, scholars have noted the absence of research on both kinds of interpretation (Ward, 2006; Uzzell, 1998), stating that interpretation will only have a significant impact... "when practice is informed by consciously articulated theory" (Uzzell, 1998, p. 12). A more theory-driven approach to research in interpretation, perhaps drawing from the social sciences, is proposed (Uzzell, 1996), and can be accomplished using symbolic interactionism (Charon, 1995).

Repeatedly, references to stories, storytelling, and narrative appear in the definitions and explanations of interpretation. Personal interpretive programming involves the transformation of raw data or the 'facts' of a site or an object into a compelling verbal narrative rich in meaning (Howett, 2002). Now, a greater understanding of narrative and stories and the roles each play is needed.

Narrative

Narrative refers to a structure that organizes ideas and events into a story-like form in order to give them meaning (Lauritzen & Jaeger, 1997). It is the recounting of temporal events (Packer, 1991) into “a unique sequence of events, mental states, happenings involving human beings as characters...” (Bruner, 1990, p.43) so that a meaningful sequence is portrayed, that is, the story or plot of the narrative (Kerby, 1991). Reviewing this literature is important because when docents give tours, they often produce a narrative with the information they tell. As a tool frequently used by museum educators, the term narrative needs to be better understood via examination of existing research.

Visualize the narrative as the “container for the curriculum” (Lauritzen & Jaeger, 1997, p. 177). Story and narrative are closely related and sometimes taken to refer to the same thing (Gudmundsdottir, 1995). However, structuralist literary theorists distinguish narrative, story, and discourse. Narrative has two parts, story and discourse. Story is the events, characters, and settings that form the content of the narrative. The discourse is the telling, expression, presentation, or narration of the story. This recounting, done by individuals, can look different based on each narrator’s or storyteller’s (Kerby, 1991) approach, value judgments, and perception, hence narratives are interpretations (Gudmundsdottir, 1995).

The role of narrative is complicated and multifaceted. It is used to engage the interest of others (Schauble, Leinhardt, & Martin, 1997) and enables us to make sense of our experiences (Clark, 2001). Narrative assists with memory by providing an organizing structure for knowledge (Mandler, 1984) and by coherently linking events in time (Packer, 1991) which makes its use attractive to educators. The application of narrative to teaching

and learning is natural. A narrative style of teaching can collect a great diversity of people “under a common umbrella of understanding” (Paley, 1995, p. 96). Narrative is a fundamental mode of meaning making (Bruner, 2002; Clark, 2001) whether the meaning making has to do with the self (Connelly & Clandinen, 1988) or the content of instruction (Merriam, et al., 2007). Tying together the concepts of narrative, interpretation, and storytelling, the role of the educator is to narrate the content or *story* the subject matter and to bring the learner into an interpretive relationship with it (Gudmundsdottir, 1995).

Narrative learning is learning through stories (Merriam, et al., 2007) “heard, told, and recognized” (Rossiter & Clark, 2007, p. 70). In a history class, educators can shift the focus from rote memorization of facts to an analysis of compelling historical figures including their motivations, and the geographical contexts in which they lived. Active narrative learning environments enable learners to participate by co-constructing the narrative, exploring the contents of it, and later, reflecting on the narrative (Mott, Callaway, Zettlemyer, Lee, & Lester, 1999). Placing the onus on the narrator or educator, knowledge is communicated most effectively through a convincing narrative that is “delivered with formal elegance and passion” (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p. 81) by a skilled teller.

A framework has been constructed to categorize three ways stories appear in practice (Rossiter & Clark, 2007) in education, with stories’ roots in narrative as the foundation. The first category is narrative as *storying* the curriculum, which is when the curriculum is treated as a story and students interacting with the texts “to come to some understanding or interpretation of the subject” (p. 209). *Storying* the curriculum is an active learning process where the individual is trying to make sense of the material by attempting to narrate it or work it into a story. The construction of that narrative is how understanding comes together

and the final product, a story, is how learning is visible. *Storying* the curriculum is an active process and the result is a narrative or narrated curriculum.

Second, narrative as storytelling engages students in understanding concepts and ideas that are part of course content. It is a powerful way of making connections and fostering understanding. Examples include fiction, case studies, and role-playing. Third, narrative as autobiography is an individual writing about the self, and can include journaling, dream logs, or blogs.

Many art museums use narrative dramatically, although research on its impact is not widely acknowledged (Schauble, et al., 1997). Drama can be used successfully to “communicate complex factual information [and] provide context” and is considered to be “a useful tool in interpretation and non-formal education” (Adcock & Ballantyne, 2007, p. 32) because it helps grab and maintain tour-goers’ attention and facilitate emotional connections for viewers to cultural heritage. On a tour one can see drama in the use of humor, props, dramatic tension, involvement, etc. (Adcock & Ballantyne, 2007).

In her research on museums, Reese (2001) applied the concepts of narrative to exhibitions, where no single authoritative narrative should be imposed on visitors, suggesting that visitors’ experiences could be enhanced if the museum fostered intertextual narrative. Drawing a parallel, Reese likened characters in a story as works of art, the narrators as the museum professionals permitted to construct institutional stories, and the audience as the visitor. Applying narrative to docent training, it is beneficial for novices to listen to the language used by experienced docents, revealing their experiences (Castle, 1996), voices from the trenches. Similarly, when giving a tour, a narrative framework sees the life of a site

or an object as a story to be unfolded, one constructed and interpreted by the individual (Merriam, et al., 2007). A narrative is nothing without its content, a story.

Stories

Since narrative learning is learning through stories (Merriam, et al., 2007) and a story is a particular form of narrative (Carr, 2003; Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002; McDrury & Alterio, 2003; Simmons, 2001) it is necessary to review the literature on stories as educational tools, the nuances tellers inherently give the stories, and the far reaching nature of the interpretive technique as a way to educate in various settings, beyond the museum. A story “recounts the actions and events of interest in some kind of temporal sequence” (Tappan, 1991, p. 8) and is a shape or pattern into which information can be arranged (Livo & Rietz, 1986). In order to make a story, information is organized so that the action unravels. Typically, a story has at least one character, a beginning, a middle, and an end, and is held together by a series of organized events, called plots (Gudmundsdottir, 1995) but none of these are critical. Stories deliver complex ideas in a “simple, consistent, and memorable form” (Snowden, 2001, p. 28). The epistemological function of a story is to serve an education purpose, to equip people with knowledge (Beck & Cable, 2002; Jackson, 1995) though stories also instruct, entertain, warm, and warn (Zemke, 1990).

Stories, due to their detail and particularity, have the capacity to engage the listener both cognitively and affectively (Rossiter & Clark, 2007; Yoder-Wise & Kowalski, 2003) more so than a statement of fact or argument (English, 2005). The whole brain needs to work to process a story, both the left hemisphere associated with logic-based, analytical thought, and the right hemisphere, which is associated with visual and symbolic thinking.

“Whenever it is necessary to report ‘the way it really happened’...the natural impulse is to tell a story” (Tappan, 1991). This quote encapsulates the power of a story. Stories are effective tools for making their content—no matter its significance—meaningful (Egan, 1979), which is especially important when trying to convey the meaning of something to people who know little about it. A story can take something seemingly ordinary and trivial and reveal its importance (Livo & Rietz, 1986). Stories orient our feeling about content (Egan, 1991), deal with human experiences, and involve us in the actions and intentions of the characters. Listeners tend to perceive them as authentic, credible sources of knowledge and with their memorable quality, they invite meaning making (Neuhauser, 1993) long after the story ends.

For the teller, stories offer flexibility, because the teller can work with stories in different ways: walk around them, “wander through them, step into their center, or hover on the edge” (McDrury & Alterio, 2003, p. 35) depending on the teller’s goal and the listener’s needs. Tellers choose the portion of a story that will give shape and the most meaning to the events (Lauritzen and Jaeger, 1997), which means storytellers hold the power over the use of the story.

Storytelling to Educate

An interpretive technique that warrants more attention is storytelling. This section contains a definition and explanation of the term. Also included is research on storytelling, its use in teaching in numerous settings including the museum, and careful attention paid to the studies done on the subject.

Storytelling is the presentation of a story or a narrative. It “is an oral art form whose practice provides a means of preserving and transmitting images, ideas, motivations, and emotions that are universal across human communities” (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 7). Verbalized stories allow listeners to “understand the message which is communicated through words, vocal intonation, gesture, facial expression, and bodily movement” (Mallan, 1998, p. 130). Storytelling is synergistic (Collins & Cooper, 1997), delightful, engaging (Egan, 2007), entertaining (Haven & Ducey, 2007; Neuhauser, 1993), and inspiring (Neuhauser, 1993). Storytelling has been used as a means of imparting knowledge (Davenport & Prusak, 1998) since the beginning of time (Agan, 2006; Tooze, 1959) and whole cultures have persisted through centuries, passing their rituals, beliefs, skills and perceptions from generation to generation through stories (Knudson, et al., 1995). In oral cultures, it is the most powerful of all communicating devices, as people only know what they can remember (Egan, 1987).

How storytelling has persisted as a technique throughout history is easily explained when one studies the benefits of using storytelling and power it holds. This power is formed by a simple formula, teller plus good story equals magic for the listeners. In live storytelling, a “visceral and intimate connection between the teller and the listeners” (Beck & Cable, 2002, p. 36) occurs. Poignantly, Collins and Cooper (1997) describe the “coming together of a carefully chosen story, a heartfelt telling, and an engaged audience” (p. 31) as enchanting. When story selection is combined with style, drama, humor, and effective delivery, storytelling connects the listeners to the values, information, and principles (Yoder-Wise & Kowalski, 2003) the teller intends. Storytelling helps listeners interpret and integrate new ideas (Paley, 1995) and can provoke emotional (Sternberg, 1989) and empathic (English,

2005) responses from listeners and what a person usually remembers the longest is information that has an emotional impact (Abrahamson, 1998; Egan, 1989).

Listener age is irrelevant to the success of stories (Livo & Rietz, 1986) as stories are approachable from any background, resonating across cultures and ages. Talboys (2005) reminds us, “Do not make the mistake of assuming it is for young people only” (p. 100), as the “child within us earns for stories” (Paley, 1995, p. 93).

Naturally, educators are drawn to the power of storytelling and have been for some time. Great teachers, including Homer, Plato, Jesus, and Gandhi, have used stories, myths, parables, and personal history to instruct their students (Zabel, 1991). Storytelling is the “oldest form of teaching methodology” (Lessinger & Gillis, 1976, p. 94) because it is a relatively straightforward and inexpensive interpretive technique (Knudson, et al., 1995) or learning tool (McDrury & Alterio, 2003). Storytelling fulfils the need for didactic instruction integrating inspiration and fascination (Levy-Bruhl, 1985). Focusing on the transmission and reception of messages, storytelling could be informed by communications theory (Roberts, 1997) and as a teaching process (McDrury & Alterio, 2003; Sternberg, 1989), storytelling is ‘a way *to* knowing’, since it has the capacity to uncover, discover, create or re-imagine meaning and to enable learning for the construction of knowledge (McDrury & Alterio, 2003).

Storytelling is an extremely effective teaching strategy (Butcher, 2006; Neuhauser, 1993) and the link to meaningful learning (Egan, 1989). Many educators in higher education view the curriculum as a collection of the great stories (Abrahamson, 1998). Cognitive research shows that universally, people can mentally organize information effectively if it is recounted to them in a story (Mandler & Goodman, 1982; Schauble, et al., 1997) and most

importantly, remember those things (Sachatello-Sawyer, et al., 2002). The images that stories conjure up in our head are vivid in listeners' minds and they retain what they have heard (Knudson, et al., 1995).

Practically, storytelling can promote an audience's understanding of different cultures, times, and places (Haven & Ducey, 2007), as well as an appreciation of their own cultural heritage (Sternberg, 1989). Telling stories can make situations 'real' for listeners and creates a learning situation by allowing listeners to identify with the character of the story and to see his way of thinking (Butcher, 2006), which allows for reflection and exploring the motivation behind a character's decision (Goodwin & Jenkins, 1997). When trying to reach disinterested listeners, storytelling proves livelier than lecturing as "most people learn and retain little by listening to a lecture" (Gough-DiJulio, 1998, p. 20). Storytelling is an excellent way of conveying information while having fun, and passing on local myths, legends, and history (Talboys, 2005).

Educators from various disciplines and sectors have embraced the power storytelling and have applied it in their fields. Researchers have studied its use in: nursing education (Hodge, Pasqua, Marquez, Beishirt-Cantrell, 2002; Yoder-Wise & Kowalski, 2003), correctional education (Butcher, 2006), social work education (Carter-Black, 2007), adult education (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000; Merriam, et al., 2007; Wettlaufer-Adcock, 2004), transformational learning (Yackley, 2006), higher education (Abrahamson, 1998; McDrury & Alterio, 2003), elementary education (Egan, 1986, 1987; Haven & Ducey, 2007; Mallan, 1998), business organizations (Boje, 2006; Brown, Denning, Groh, & Prusak, 2005; Neuhauser, 1993; Snowden, 2001; Zemke, 1990), corporate training (Wacker & Silverman, 2003), human resource development (Gargiulo, 2002; Tyler, 2007), and health education

(Goodwin & Jenkins, 1997) in the native American communities (Hodge, et al., 2002; Moody & Lamont, 1984) and for infection control (Cole, 2009). Not to be excluded, storytelling has been studied in museum education (Morris, 1997) for children (deBlasio & deBlasio, 1983; Falk & Dierking, 2000; Whitmore, 1916), and adults (Chadbourne, 1991).

The vast majority of the studies above are recommendations, commentary pieces, manuals for best practices, and notes from the field. Very few are empirical in nature and most are qualitative studies (Butcher, 2006; Deblasio & Deblasio, 1983; Hodge, et al., 2002; Moody & Lamont, 1984; Tyler, 2007; Wettlaufer-Adcock, 2004). Butcher (2006) examined the use of storytelling as a teaching strategy by corrections professionals with offenders and found that storytelling exposed offenders to different worlds, promoted thinking outside of the box, and allowed for critical thinking.

For their research in using storytelling in higher education, McDrury & Alterio (2003) created a model of pathways based on setting, number of listeners, and type of story, determining the level of catharsis and reflective learning which can be achieved. Also, storytelling can be a strategy for education in a family literacy setting as the technique was significant in: transferring tacit knowledge, promoting critical thinking, and facilitating transformational learning (Wettlaufer-Adcock, 2004).

Two health-related studies used storytelling within Native American tribes, which were already familiar with its use to transmit educational messages. One found that health educators were viewed as trustworthy sources of information having merit to motivate practice of healthier lifestyles in the community (Moody & Laurent, 1984). The second study, carried out in rural tribal health clinics, tested storytelling as a means to promote healthier behavior (Hodge, et al., 2002). The relaxed informal nature of interaction with

community educators in this setting contributed positively for storytelling's use. Both of these studies benefit from using participants in a culture well-versed with storytelling as a communicative method. Perhaps using stories with communities not used to the practice may yield different results.

In a very different setting, implementing storytelling in a for-profit setting was found to be beneficial to human resource development practitioners (Tyler, 2007). Results revealed what types of stories were most popularly used and the need for participants to reflect and dialogue after a story is told. Story-based techniques are not new to the corporate world; the use of case studies, critical incidents, role playing and simulations is well established (Taylor, et al., 2000).

Storytelling in Museums

In the museum setting, stories have been designed to inform and enlighten. A study focused on storytelling as an interpretive technique used by docents on tours of Native American material culture (Morris, 1997). It found that Native American docents had an edge over other docents because they were "raised in a culture where storytelling is the primary means of education" (p. 55). Storytelling lends itself well to an art museum setting, because it is a vehicle for "binding one together with the past, present, and future..." (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 5) which museum educators hope happens for visitors when confronted with a foreign object. Storytelling is appreciated in museums as it can be used to "dramatize a work of art as well as to compare and contrast historical and cultural periods" (Sternberg, 1989, p. 161) and stories recreate "the intellectual and emotional framework" (Deblasio & Deblasio, 1983, p. 7) when the images and issues presented are foreign or seemingly not relatable.

Importantly, stories establish connections not only between the docent and the audience, but based on the contents of the story, also between the audience and the object (National Docent Symposium Council, 2001).

Exhibits are dependent upon the art of storytelling to convey their messages, especially at locally-based exhibits in which historical artifacts surround the museum (Chadbourne, 1991). Stories arouse interest about history, humanizing and giving insight into otherwise sterile subjects (Regnier, Gross & Zimmerman, 1994). In fact, it can be the associated *story* that comes with objects that renders the object unique or important (Gurian, 1995). For example, at a museum, on display may be a blue and white porcelain plate, nine inches round. Thousands exist just like it. Reproductions are sold at department stores. Only a story would tell you that this plate has had an exciting history. Made circa 1780, presidents and foreign heads of state have eaten off of it at the most important occasions in American history. It has lived its life in a cabinet at the White House for years and this month, at this particular museum, is the first time it has left the White House. This plate has never been viewed by the public before; only White House staff and respected dinner guests have ever seen it. With the plate's story told to visitors, everyday Americans can get a glimpse of the taste and style of the United States presidents. The story situates in their minds the significance of the object—what would otherwise be, without its story told—a typical old dinner plate. Visitors can imagine a White House staff member removing this plate from a cabinet, setting a large decorated table with this plate, and presidents and heads of foreign nations eating their main course off of this plate. “Visitors are at an advantage when hearing a story in a museum setting—looking at the exhibit while listening to a story makes visualizing easier” (National Docent Symposium Council, 2001, p. 61).

Those guiding a tour know that storytelling has the potential to hold the audience's attention (Knudson, et al., 1995), something vital for tour guides. For docents who give tours to people of all ages, "even slight knowledge of its fundamentals is an invaluable aid" (Vaughn, 1918, p. 121) as storytelling has had great appeal with high school students, in some cases more so than children (Deblasio & Deblasio, 1983).

When one examines a thematic tour, typically offered in museums to groups of all ages, it has an overarching theme or topic and the contents of are the life stories of those who lived, worked and visited the place or the objects within them. The goal of the thematic tour is not to overwhelm visitors with a myriad of disconnected facts, but to distil the information, organize it, and carefully construct it into a cohesive, "strong story" (Levy, et al., 2001, p. 4) that people will enjoy and remember.

Seven principles of effective museum storytelling are, stories should: balance entertainment and educational soundness; be compact; be concrete, employ highly visual language; be personally appealing; not only describe artifacts but tell how some are made; dislodge mistaken stereotypes; and invite cross-cultural comparisons (Deblasio & Deblasio, 1983). While their study pertained to children, the principles are relevant to stories told to visitors of all ages. Docents could benefit from incorporating these guidelines into the creation of their stories. The power of storytelling in museums is great. Simply put, "it is the story told, the message given, and the ability of social groups to experience it together that provide the essential ingredients of making a museum important" (Gurian, 1995, p. 182).

In conclusion, when we think about how interpretation, narrative, stories, and storytelling relate, there is a way to describe the process and interrelationships. With curricular content as narrative text, docents interpret that text so as to make it relevant and

understandable to the tour-goer. In order to narrate the content, docents perform the act of “storying the curriculum” (Rossiter & Clark, 2007, p.74), that is, putting it in a story format. After docents story the content (Livo & Rietz, 1986) storytelling is what occurs on tours. The umbrella term ‘interpretation’ encompasses narrative, stories, and storytelling as part of the hermeneutic methods educators use to inform and educate their audiences.

Summary

This literature review captured the relevant and most recent research for the study of how docents perceive their role as interpreters. The theories of hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism provide frameworks for the current study by focusing on the importance of the interpreter, fostering understanding, and the communication between docents and tour-goers. Museums as cultural institutions were described, with attention paid to their education department. Docents were introduced along with a description of the research studies related to them. The voice of the docent has been central to few studies. Perhaps the fact that docents are unsupervised, unpaid, and often underappreciated, demonstrates how this population of adult educators who carry out the museum’s educational mission has fallen through the cracks in both real life and research. Finally, interpretation was examined and examples given of its use and importance. The results of the literature review yielded that despite conceptual pieces describing best practices for docent training programs and empirical visitor studies focused on docents’ training, proficiency, and motivation, there is much to be learned about museum docents as storytelling, and more generally, as interpretive beings.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how museum docents perceive their interpretative role and uncover what influences their interpretation. Currently, the experience of the docent as an interpreter is not a part of the existing body of adult education literature, but making an effort to speak with the educators about how they view their practice and what they do on tours could assist future docents in better performing their role. This chapter begins with an overview of the research type and why such a paradigm is appropriate given the study's purpose. The sections following will present the design of the study, the researcher's background, and procedures for selecting study participants. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the most appropriate data collection procedures, how the data was analyzed, and strategies used throughout the study to insure its trustworthiness.

Research Questions

The study of exploring docents' perceptions of their interpretive role and determining how those perceptions shape their practice in museums was guided by the following questions:

1. How do docent training, the audience, the nonformal setting, and museum content influence how docents perceive their interpretive role?
2. What and how are interpretive techniques used to educate tour-goers?

3. How do docents' beliefs about the role of a museum as education center impact their practice of interpretation?

Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a “worldview—a way of thinking about and making sense of the complexities of the real world” (Patton, 2002, p. 69). Understanding someone’s paradigm or perspective can help the researcher identify relationships between what a participant does and what they say. Conceptual frameworks can align with particular paradigms and symbolic interactionists tend to use qualitative research methods (Symbolic Interactionism, 2008). In order to understand docents’ conception of the interpretation they do in museums and determine what factors influence their interpretations, a qualitative study was needed. Qualitative research is an “umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us to understand and explain the meaning of a social phenomenon with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). The qualitative research paradigm is appropriate for adult education—which docents are practicing—where the purpose is to understand people’s experiences in order to influence and improve practice (Merriam & Simpson, 2000).

Key characteristics of interpretive qualitative studies are: the researcher strives to understand the meaning people construct about their experiences, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the process is inductive, and lastly, the product is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2002). Each of these was achieved in this study, as described below. First, the researcher strove to understand the meaning people construct about their experiences. The goal was an in-depth understanding of individuals who possess

knowledge and characteristics that are specific to the study (Patton, 2002). The researcher explored the “people’s knowledge, views, understanding, interpretations, experiences, and interactions” (Mason, 1996, p. 39). Since one sought to understand a phenomenon, the perspective of the people involved (Merriam, 2002) would most effectively yield the kind of results that answer the research question at hand. Uncovering the factors that influence the interpretation that docents perform involved revealing the assumptions docents make about their audiences. Understanding the filtering docents do when interpreting for different audiences is complex. The results have a potential for a variety of outcomes but qualitative research allows for the researcher not to be “constrained by predetermined categories of analysis, contributing to the depth, openness, and detail of the inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 14).

Second, the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. As such, the researcher observed, interviewed, took notes, and analyzed. Since a single person is aware of all progress made as the data is collected, this allows for agility and flexibility in interviews. The ability to use nonverbal communication, immediately clarifies things said by participants, and “explore(s) unusual or unanticipated responses” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5) showed the critical responsibility placed on the researcher. Part of that responsibility included trying to remain objective and unbiased. Since bias always exists, identifying and monitoring it demonstrated the researcher understood her impact on how the data would be viewed. Erring on the side of asking for clarification was done so any nuances in docents’ actions were not overlooked. Additionally, interview questions were written in an objective manner and read neutrally so as not to lead the participants.

Third, the research process was inductive, meaning “researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories” (p. 5). The result was the creation or discovery of themes,

categories, concepts, etc. formed out of the data. Some themes rose to the surface after conducting just a few interviews. This allowed the researcher a potential glimpse of categories which were supported with additional data collected. The researcher had no preconceived findings. The quality of entities, processes, and meanings are what this study sought to uncover, are not “experimentally measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). Qualitative research seeks to discover rather than test variables and to connect with participants at a human level, which is of great importance to this researcher.

Finally, the richly descriptive aspect of qualitative research where participants are seen in their own environment and heard in their words, allows the researcher to pick up on subtleties in participants’ actions and responses (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Seeking to understand *docents’ conception* of what they do on tours, qualitative research is apt since it focuses on the spoken words and perceptions of participants, and is conducted through concentrated involvement with them (Punch, 2005). The findings, usually words, at times stories, “have a quality of undeniability” as they have a “concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor...” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1). With knowledge construction, Patton (2002) reminds researchers to capture and honor multiple perspectives, be aware of the way language distorts understandings, how one’s methods determine findings, and the importance of considering the power issues embedded in the relationship between researcher and participant. Each of these important aspects was considered.

In order to get at understanding how docents perceive their interpretive role, a study that has not been previously performed that is qualitative in nature, was needed. Specifically, the aspects of qualitative studies that made it appropriate for this research are its use of

observations, in-depth interviews with personalized follow up questions, the ability to be flexible as the study progresses, the richness that comes from participants describing things in their own words, and the inductive quality.

Research Type

This basic interpretive study examined the meaning and essence of lived experience of a group of people (Patton, 2002). Uncovering and interpreting how people construct meaning of their lives (Merriam, 2002) or a phenomena and getting “at the nature of reality with regard to that phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 215) was the goal of the researcher performing a basic interpretive study. Looking at “real world situations as they unfold naturally” (p. 40), this investigation uncovered how a particular group of docents perceive of the interpretation they do on museum tours and the factors influencing that interpretation. How they conceive of these experiences, construct their worldviews, and the meanings they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2002) were of particular interest. In basic interpretive studies, data is collected through a combination of interviews, observations, or document analysis. Reoccurring themes were recognized in the data, all viewed through the single lens of the researcher. This ‘basic’ type of qualitative research has the ability to help others understand issues that otherwise would not have been studied and can lead to the creation of new concepts and theories which can inform the particular field (Patton, 2002).

Background of the Researcher

My first experience as an adult educator was as a docent leading tours through a contemporary art museum. My personal mission was to get those on my tour as interested in

the art I was. I studied art history and have interned and worked in art museums' museum education, development, and publications departments. Now, I get to share my passion for art when I teach undergraduate adult students Western humanities and non-Western art. I find myself wanting students to fall in love with objects, to understand them more fully than they thought possible, to want to learn more, and to enjoy themselves in the process.

Having taken many docent-led tours, I have had guides who have tried to bring stale objects to life with stories, aimed to meet tour-goers' educational needs, attempted to entertain and sought to forge connections between foreign objects and perfect strangers. I appreciate those volunteers' efforts and wanted to understand how these individuals perceive their role and what affects their varied interpretation. Recording the thoughts and perspective of the adult educator in this setting will hopefully help other educators understand what docents go through as they prepare their tours. Understanding what impacts their tours, how they decide what to include, and how content may vary from audience to audience, day to day, etc. has benefits for museum educators.

As a researcher, this study got me back in museums on tours, to witness the personal interpretation that occurs daily in museums. Findings from this study offer a window into how docents see the tour, the audience, and their role as interpreters. Having done what they do, I believed that I could relate to the participants. This background knowledge assisted in my being flexible, sensitive, and accommodating to participants' needs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Since the quality of the data and findings in this study was dependent on the researcher's skills and integrity (Patton, 2002), I am fortunate to have participated in a prior study where docents were observed and interviewed (Taylor & Neill, 2008) which has made me more experienced and comfortable in the role of researcher in this setting. I demonstrated

balance in perspective (Patton, 2002) as far as being an insider having performed the role of docent, but also as an outsider in that I never volunteered at one of the sites in this study.

Due to the nature of the study, where the researcher was so intimately involved, a declaration of my personal experiences, assumptions, bias, etc. allows readers to understand my perspective (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Acknowledging subjectivity is an important aspect of research studies (Patton, 2002) and full disclosure allows both participants in the study and fellow researchers to better understand the study's context.

Personally, relinquishing control, forbidding expectations, and allowing the data to flow and coagulate into its own findings was both challenging and a wonderful learning experience. The researcher must be flexible and open to following what the data dictated, not quick to draw conclusions. Viewing "research as a nonlinear, recursive process in which data collection, data analysis, and interpretation occur throughout the study and influence each other" (Willis, 2007, p. 202) was practiced. The research could have gone in unforeseeable directions and the researcher needed to be comfortable with that ambiguity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), embracing and appreciating the discoveries made along the way, just as docents do when they give tours to populations whose questions and interests are unknown to the adult educator until the tour begins.

My interest in this study was to see what effects the interpretation docents give, hearing it from their perspective. While I appreciated the efforts they go to in order to give good tours, I did not understand nor have read in the literature about the influences that shape their interpretations. Asking docents to thoroughly and thoughtfully consider their practice offers meaning to museum educators, both the docents themselves, and those responsible for the hiring and training of the docents.

Participant Selection Procedures

Participants in this study were affiliated with one of four art museums sites in the northeastern United States, each an institution fitting the International Council of Museum's (2007) definition of a museum, that is, a "non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment" (art. 3, ¶1). Art museums in particular were used as static exhibits permit a great degree of interpretation of objects and explanations are often needed, which allows for a richer context for interpretation. Some sites were regional museums catering to locals while other large sites attract international tourists regularly. This way, docents gave tours to a variety of audience types, whose needs and interests vary. These sites selected had a sufficient amount of material culture from which tours were based, docent programs were active and strong, and importantly, where tours were not scripted word for word. Individuals were purposefully selected based on the following criteria: men and women age twenty-five years or older and docent experience exceeding one year so that participants have had sufficient touring with a diversity of audiences from which to draw. To maintain consistency, all were be unpaid volunteers. Selection aimed to represent diversity in gender, age, race, class, and culture. The researcher relied on recommendations from the docent organizer so that selected participants imbued the museum's educational mission and were deemed appropriate representatives of the institution. Referrals were critical to get docents to consider participation. Each of the recommended docents was phoned or written, an introduction made, the study explained, and docents were invited to participate in the study.

“Information rich cases” from “which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 46) were selected to form the purposeful sample. The focused group was chosen especially for their inside status and knowledge of the topic studied. The quality of the sources was the focus (Stake, 1994). An adequate number of participants to achieve saturation, when no new data emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2003), was used. While there is no minimum number of participants prescribed in qualitative studies, working with fourteen participants allowed a narrow lens to be placed on the docent experience with depth rather than breadth gleaned from participants. Researchers performing a qualitative study often ask the question, ‘What can be learned from a single case so that I can optimize the understanding of the case rather than generalizations beyond?’ (Stake, 1994). The goal when selecting participants was to determine settings and groups where the processes trying to be understood were most likely to occur, focusing not on a grand sample size, but on the quality of the source (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In sum, all fourteen participants were Caucasian. Ten were female, and four were male. All were college educated, some holding advanced degrees and certificates. Participants could afford to volunteer their time in the museum; they could be described as middle class to upper middle class.

Data Collection

The method and design chosen for this study was driven by the research questions. In this case, docents were studied to elicit the essence of their role as interpreters in museums. The study sought to gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge from examining and interpreting data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) obtained through observations followed by interviews. This method was appropriate given the conceptual framework of symbolic

interactionism as the theory has a long history of the use of observational approaches (vom Lehn, Heath, & Hindmarsh, 2001) as "most interactionists view social realities as processes and employ qualitative research methods, especially participant observation and interviewing" (Symbolic Interactionism, 2008). Similarly:

because social interaction is constructed by the people engaged in it, one should try to see it from their point of view and appreciate how they interpret the indications given to them by other and the meaning they assign to them and how they construct their own action (Woods, 1992, p. 353-4).

The structure of observing a docent-led tour and the interview following were similar in format to that used in Grenier's (2009) study. She performed a qualitative study using a purposeful sample of twelve docents from four history museums. Each docent was observed giving a tour and field notes were taken. Subsequently, semi-structured and open-ended interviews were performed. Semi-structured is when an "interviewer introduces a topic, then guides the discussion by asking specific questions" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 5). Reviewing documents such as training materials, brochures, and website text were part of Grenier's collection methods but were not relevant for this study.

Observations

In this study, docents had one of their tours observed. Observations help the researcher become familiar with the setting and the vocabulary, and help the researcher be less of an outsider (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Also, since people are not always aware of or able to describe, the "subtleties of what goes on in interactions between themselves and others" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 30) witnessing the action is important. Each tour typically lasted

from forty to sixty minutes. Unobtrusively observing each docent allowed the researcher a window into each individual participant's tour style. Field notes, "detailed nonjudgmental, concrete descriptions of what has been observed" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 107) were taken as participants were observed in their natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher watched docents interact with tour-goers before the tour began and noted the kind of introduction the docent gave to the group and if/how a docent described the role. On the tour, the researcher noted what teaching techniques were used, and the manner in which information was delivered, including word choice. The researcher listened for docents' use of similes, stories, age-appropriate references, and any tailoring done for the group. These observations provided a basis for discussion topics in the interview, as recalling a situation or incident from a tour can trigger participants' memories and give the researcher and participant a shared experience from which to reflect in the interview (Taylor, 2005).

Note that before participants were observed, the researcher thoroughly explained the purpose of the study, her goals and intentions, and what was done to protect the data. Participants were explained that if at any point during the study, they no longer were interested in being a part of it; they had the right to opt out. After signing the informed consent form, each participant was given a copy.

Interviews

Following the tours, individual, face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended (Patton, 2002) interviews allowed the researcher to "enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 341) and created an environment where participants conveyed their understanding in their own terms (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Questions were about meaning,

process, and understanding and framed in general terms so as not to impose preconceptions (Merriam, et al., 2002). For example, docents were asked how they would explain to others what they do on tours. Asking general questions based on what was just observed in the galleries allowed the researcher to gain “an understanding of a particular situation or context” (Willis, 2007, p. 99), in this case docents’ conceptions of their interpretation. The nature of these questions, which became conversational (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), allowed the researcher to see participants’ points of view, while assessing nonverbal communication (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The loose interview structure permits the researcher opportunities for clarification and to explore in-depth atypical or idiosyncratic responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Follow up questions (Patton, 2002) can enhance and clarify responses to get at the root of understanding participants’ experiences. It is the nuances in how participants answer questions and when they hesitate to say something, or when participants want to offer an example or simile, which can be the basis for more probing questions. The richness of qualitative data is that it has a great potential for revealing complexity (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which is anticipated in this study, as the research questions are those that participants likely will not have given much thought.

Each participant was posed a standard set of open-ended questions. In these, docents were encouraged to share certain taken-for-granted assumptions (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975) about what factors influenced their interpretation, the stories they told on tours, and how they conceived of their role. Interviews, which lasted approximately an hour, were tape recorded and transcribed. Since all but one of the observations and interviews occurred in the museum, the normal setting of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), participants should have responded naturally and with greater profundity, drawing meaning from the familiar setting.

Due to scheduling, one interview occurred in the home of the researcher. Redundancy was the determining factor in achieving information saturation, meaning when no new themes emerged in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) no further participants were utilized.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis aims “to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” by “examining and interpreting data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 1) and has been the “most successful strategy to learn the impacts of an interpretive experience” (Knapp, 2007, p. 5).

Since the researcher did not know if participants had given prior thought to some of the topics discussed during the interview, questions such as ‘Assuming you do not use the exact same words, stories, analogies, etc. on each tour, what influences what you tell?’ often led to long, detailed answers which included stories and examples from past tours. Like Bruder & Ucok’s (2000) study, after a little time, “all seemed to be relaxed...as evidenced by their increased fluid and duration—and the forthcoming nature—of their replies as the conversation progressed” (p. 341). In an attempt to understand things from somebody else's point of view, appreciating the cultural and social forces that have influenced their outlook (hermeneutics), the researcher asked follow up questions seeking to connect the participants’ backgrounds with motivation for doing or believing something.

This study’s data was analyzed as Grenier (2005) analyzed her data collected from observations and interviews with docents. Transcribed interviews were examined, read repeatedly, and the constant comparative method, which involves systematically examining

and refining variations in emergent and grounded concepts (Patton, 2002) while comparing different pieces of data for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2003) were used. Its purpose is “to develop theory, through an iterative process of data analysis and theoretical analysis, with verification of hypothesis ongoing throughout the study” (p. 239) hopefully revealing multiple realities. As part of inductive data analysis, reoccurring themes were identified, patterns detected, and the data coded by key phrases to reveal broad categories (Willis, 2007). One way this was done was to see if participants from the same museum had any overlapping responses, given that their training would have been the same, if not similar. Similarly, the sisters’ answers were checked for this as were those who were of similar generations. The influence of similar backgrounds was not overlooked.

Key word searches assisted with recognizing the jargon docents used to answer questions. Commonalities and patterns were discovered in the participants’ responses. Outliers were recognized and evaluated. The researcher had no predetermined idea about the anticipated results or findings.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is about the researcher being “balanced, fair, and conscientious in taking account multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities” (Patton, 2002, p. 575). Trustworthiness is necessary to ensure the vigor of the study and is a fundamental concern. The researcher must establish her credibility and hold certain ethical standards throughout the entire study process: entering the field, the period of data collection, data analysis, and writing the findings. Trustworthiness was sought by building in practices and techniques that ensured credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability.

The first aspect of trustworthiness is credibility, which was determined by the researcher's ability to represent participants' perspectives in such a way that demonstrates authenticity to their voices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Authenticity is genuine appreciation for the perspective of others and "fairness in depicting constructions in the values that undergird them" (Patton, 2002, p. 546). It is about being true to the data, taking into account multiple realities, investigating conscientiously, and most importantly, respecting and honoring what participants say.

Techniques to ensure this included use of the constant comparative method, performing member checks, and triangulation techniques. The constant comparative method, described above, allowed for recognition of themes emerging in the data so that categories are substantiated and appropriately recognized throughout the data collection process. To carry this out, each participant was sent a transcript of the interview in order to review for accuracy. Participants were encouraged to make any corrections or clarifications (Patton, 2002) in order to create reputable and convincing results. After the findings were made, the researcher had one on one telephone conversations with eight participants. Presenting the findings to them was a way for the researcher to check her findings. Substantiating findings was done by using specific examples from field notes, with use of quotes from interviews. These conversations lasted from fifteen to forty minutes.

The use of overlapping methods, in this case, observations and interviews, created a methodical triangulation of data. Triangulation is using a variety of research methods to study different aspects of the research question and to test for consistency in the findings (Patton, 2002). The combination contributes to dependability provides more insights (Mony, 2007) and is an alternative to validation (Flick, 2002).

Second, dependability refers to using stable process over time and across research methods, thus the study is able to be replicated (Merriam, 2002). This means that the same methods were used at each of the four sites, and with each of the participants, making the data reliable so that logical conclusions could be drawn that are consistent with the findings. Achieving dependability means that the researcher may need to adjust the study design to accommodate the dynamic nature of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) midway in the study.

Time was allowed for withdrawal from the sites, so that the researcher had the opportunity to reflect upon the data and see how it related to the other data gathered there. Also, an audit trail was left, including raw data from field notes, mechanical audio recordings of interviews transcribed with key words and phrases highlighted, data reduction steps, themed categories, and other notes taken in the research and analysis stages (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This last item, other notes, included written notes taken by the researcher while observing the tour, and written notes taken during the interview; coded transcripts and notes where themes and outliers emerged and were recognized; responses as a result of the member and peer checks; and the final written report complete with findings, conclusions, and connections to the existing literature. The audit trail helps the study be deemed dependable if its nature, design, methods, and findings are found to be reasonable and most importantly, systematic (Patton, 2002).

Third, confirmability is the researcher's ability to transfer findings to results while objectively maintaining participants' meanings, rather than the researcher's opinions manipulating the data to produce other findings. This will allow other researchers to confirm the results. To establish conformability, the same methods used to establish credibility and

dependability were used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Especially relevant, the researcher used member checks to help ensure that the conclusions formed were appropriate and unbiased (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005); recognized outliers; left an audit trail; and used triangulation.

Triangulation of data source and data collection methods helps increase confirmability by using multiple methods to understand something. This strategy added rigor, breadth, and depth to the study (Flick, 2002). Data triangulation was accomplished through a few tactics. Participants came based on a referral from key informants, docent organizers. Second, multiple methods, observations and interviews, were used to collect data. Third, data came from several participants who each bring a unique background and perspective which created a more complete picture. When multiple items within the same scale measure the same construct, triangulation occurs (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003). Thus, the researcher's personal observations were contrasted and compared to the interviews, and what is already known from the literature.

Fourth, transferability is the ability the study has to be applicable to other contexts. It is an aspect that is not guaranteed, but the data was presented in such a manner that readers should be able to apply or reference it in future work as needed. Perhaps aspects of this study may be applied to other situations with a similar context that exist in a similar setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To increase the opportunity for transferability, rich, thick descriptive data was captured in focused note taking (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989) while observations were made in the field. Thick data identifies "the vitality, trauma, and uniqueness of the case" (Stake, 1994, p. 242) and allows the researcher to make a detailed interpretation describing the essence of experience and meaning in participants' lives. Capturing the essence of what

participants report by using their words presents a crisp picture of docents' perspectives and intended meaning. Additionally, a description of the participants' qualifications (e.g. educational background, experience, age) and their context, intent, and voice were included so that transparency exists. Direct quotes from the purposeful sample were used so other researchers can assess the data for their own needs. An audit trail offers details of how the study was performed. This is part of how the study contributes to the field of adult education and museum education. The rigor of a qualitative research study is the disciplined approach used to maintain pre-established standards that ensure the quality of the study (Kinchlore & McLaren, 2003). The criteria described above are to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and its findings.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, the researcher exercised common sense and moral judgment. Her responsibility was to the participants first, to the study second, and to herself last (Punch, 2005). In accordance with The Pennsylvania State University Office of Research Protections, study participants were protected in several ways via procedures in accordance with the institutional review process. Participants have the right to privacy and anonymity. To protect their confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Most importantly, the researcher made all attempts to protect participants from any physical or emotional harm as a result of participating in the study (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Summary

This chapter explained the research paradigm most appropriate for this study and the aspects of qualitative research that were captured in this research. The basic interpretive study was explained and why it is most fitting for a study on docent's perceptions of their role. The researcher's background and interest in this topic was established followed by detailed descriptions of the kind of museum needed in the study, the participants, and the manner in which data was collected and analyzed. Trustworthiness of the data was sought by various techniques to ensure veracity and reliability of the findings.

Chapter 4

Overview of Setting and Participants

Introduction

The intention of this qualitative study was to explore docents' perceptions of their interpretive role in museums and determine how those perceptions shape docents' practice.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do docent training, the audience, the nonformal setting, and museum content influence how docents perceive their interpretive role?
2. What and how are interpretive techniques used to educate tour-goers?
3. How do docents' beliefs about the role of a museum as education center impact their practice of interpretation?

This chapter describes the study's participating art museums and the docents who were part of the study. A description of each site and participant is offered in order to provide context and background information.

Setting

This study took place in private art museums in northeastern United States that offered docent-led tours of the collection. Seven museums that met these criteria were selected, contacted via email or telephone, and invited to participate. One never responded but six expressed interest and four museums agreed to participate. At the four participating sites, an education coordinator or docent manager assisted in providing clearance for observations and interviews onsite at each museum. At three museums, four docents

participated and at one museum, two docents participated, totaling fourteen. Below is a description of each participating site.

Museum A

Located in the countryside, Museum A is focused on the art of the region and the permanent collection consists of paintings and illustrations. Operating for nearly forty years, the museum is internationally known for its collection of works by three generations of an artist's family and its collection of American illustration, still life, and landscape painting. It is part of a conservancy whose mission is to preserve important American art and the natural and cultural environment of historic river valley in which the museum sits. The museum has three floors with six large galleries. Museum A has approximately fifty active docents. Four were participants in this study. The tours they give represent the interests and passion of the docent while some key objects such as those by the family whose works dominate the collection, are typically included. Some docents chose to give chronological tour while others did not have a particular order. Tours are approximately forty-five to sixty minutes and almost each gallery is visited on the walking tour. Over 94,000 visitors came in 2008 and 455 public tours were given by educators on staff, experts, and docents. Programs are geared toward adults, children, families and art and history teachers and tours can be tailored in advance to an audience's interests. Many senior citizens and children frequent the museum.

Museum B

Museum B is located in an historic small bedroom community. The museum showcases regional artists and regularly hosts nationally touring special exhibitions.

Formerly the site of a prison, operating for the last eleven years, the museum is home to a world-class and large collection of Pennsylvania Impressionist paintings. Additionally, the permanent collection includes sculpture, wall murals, furniture, mixed media works, etc. The mission of the museum is to preserve, interpret and exhibit the art and cultural heritage of the region. Across two floors, the museum has approximately a dozen galleries in addition to an outdoor sculpture garden. The museum was undergoing an expansion of its gallery space when observations were conducted. Museum B has approximately thirty-five active docents. Four were participants in this study. Walk-in tours led by docents are held on the weekends and last for forty-five minutes while scheduled tours go during the work week. Groups from senior centers or social clubs frequently book private docent-led tours that are tailored to the groups' interests. Tours consist of highlights of the permanent collection and the visiting exhibits. Docents select which objects they would like to include and begin in any gallery they like. Objects discussed on the tour include paintings, sculpture, furniture, etc. A traditional Japanese-style sitting room is a tour favorite. Unlike Museum A, there are benches in the galleries of Museum B where tour groups congregate and take a break while the docent stands. The museum has a large children's outreach program and partners with scouting organizations, schools, etc. in the region. In 2008, 133,699 people visited Museum B and 560 tours were given to 10,466 people, over 80% of which were to children. The museum had twelve traveling exhibits in 2009.

Museum C

Museum C is an artist's personal house and studio located in a residential suburban neighborhood thirty minutes outside of a metropolitan city. The permanent collection

consists primarily of modern sculpture and woodworking by a single artist. Objects such as chairs, tables, and sculptural figures are made of a variety of wood types. Operating for the last thirty-six years, the museum is a historic site and a National Historic Landmark for Architecture. It is one of only a few historic artists' studios still in existence in the nation. The small house is two stories and can accommodate up to two dozen visitors at a time. Open by appointment only, visitors cannot be unaccompanied in the house; they must take a tour. The mission of the museum is to preserve, maintain and exhibit the artistic creations of the artist so that the general public, and in particular, arts and craftspeople may gain enjoyment, education and inspiration from the works. Museum C has approximately thirty active docents. Four were participants in this study. Tours represent the interests and passion of the docent in that they are encouraged to write their own tours. The permanent collection is the focus of their hour-long tours. Tours at this museum have a structured order; they begin outside of the home, move into the first floor of the home, then to the second floor, and conclude outside again. Unlike most other museums, visitors here are encouraged to touch the large wood objects. Given the size of the home, tour-goers stand throughout the tour and turn or take a few steps to see other objects in the room. The museum has relationships with local libraries, elementary schools, colleges, and extracurricular night schools for adults. In 2008, 561 tours were given to almost 4,800 visitors over a period of ten months, as the museum is closed for tours in the winter.

Museum D

Museum D is a stately residence that is the focal point in an extensive 1,000-acre country estate. Open to the public for nearly sixty years, the museum's permanent collection

is focused on the decorative arts and includes antiques and Americana that were specially purchased to decorate the home. There are 175 period-rooms in the house and approximately 85,000 objects including clocks, mirrors, beds, paintings, prints, dining room sets, etc. that represent American objects made or used between 1640-1860. The mission of the museum is to inspire, enlighten, and delight all of its visitors while preserving and enhancing its buildings and landscape, its collections and programs, and its history as a great American country estate. The sprawling mansion has many levels and subsequent additions have been added through the years. Museum D has forty active volunteer docents. Two were participants in this study. Introductory tours are forty-five minutes and offer an overview of the estate. The general collection tour takes place on two levels of the house and concludes on the balcony overlooking the home's pool. On the tour, visitors see and hear about furniture, textiles, paintings, prints, ceramics, and brass, to name a few. Docents must follow a particular order of visiting rooms and those rooms that are not on the scheduled tour are roped off to prevent visitors from wandering unaccompanied. Tour-goers follow the docent whose light wand illuminates each room's objects being discussed. The theme of the tour changes seasonally as the home is decorated for each season. In addition to forty docents, over the past five years, the museum has hired seven professional interpreters who started as docents, who also regularly give tours, though their tours are typically specialized and narrower in focus. In 2008, over 142,000 guests visit Museum D and 64,517 people took a tour.

Biographies of the Participants

The response from interested docents to participate in the study was overwhelmingly positive. Tour organizers and docent managers recruited participants. All participants were unpaid volunteers. Fourteen docents, four male and ten female, participated throughout the entire duration of the study. After the researcher observed a tour by each docent, each docent participated in a semi-structured interview. Thirteen interviews took place at the museum where the docent was affiliated, and one interview was held at the home of researcher. Questions asked were of two types: specific, individual questions formed based on observations made by the researcher during the docent's tour, and other standard pre-established questions. Interviews were conversational in tone and lasted approximately fifty minutes. Follow-up interviews were conducted by email with participants so as to clarify meaning of what was stated in the initial interview and to provide further insight.

Participants represent various fields and backgrounds. Participants' ages vary from thirty-eight years old to eighty-three years old with the average sixty-six years. Participants were docents for at least one year, with twenty-five years being the most senior and one year the most junior. The average length of time as a docent at the institution was 7.6 years. The following brief description of each participant illustrates the nuances within this population and includes details about each individual's views on being a docent, touring techniques, and influences.

Judith

Judith is sixty-seven years old and has been a docent at Museum A for four years. Before that, she was the merchandise coordinator at a museum shop and taught fourth grade,

where she learned many tour techniques. Judith earned an undergraduate degree in education. Judith sees her interpretive role as to accept something and then learn in, study it, sift it a bit, pick out what she's comfortable saying and present it to a visitor. Not trying to impose on viewers her interpretation of an object or make a judgment statement, Judith thinks artists put their work "out there like a smorgasbord...you take what you want out of it" depending on what you see. Judith's tours are like a performance in a play. She is conscious of her physical placement in relation to her tour-goers, facial expression, and voice cadence, modulation, and volume. This is especially evident in the stories she tells and Judith prides herself on a good storytelling technique. She learned some of this from the docent manager but also by also from trial and error. Judith appreciatively says the docent manger "very much" influences what she tells and that the education staff "know what works...and they know their...clientele here so they 'warn us' ahead of time so we don't have to find it all out on our own my making mistakes." She "shoots from the hip" when deciding exactly which paintings to show an audience, though is bound by loose general guidelines. On the tour, she emphasizes the lesser-known brother and son of well-known artists who was primarily an engineer as she "has a personal investment in" him; Judith's husband worked with this individual so she has insider knowledge of the man's invention and values him and his engineering work as a "type of art in its own right." Judith is very pleased with the training she received from Museum A and does not "want to see anything dumbed down" by the museum curators and educators as the public "can handle the level of learning that we want to create here."

Lawrence

Lawrence is seventy-four years old has been a docent at Museum A for eleven years. Before that, he was a docent at another local museum, from which he states he learned most of his training. He views this more formal training as very helpful in making him one of the more experienced docents. Lawrence worked at a major local company for thirty-five years. He retired from there as a plant manager, where communicating with those below him was essential to his job. He once had to address three hundred people. Lawrence earned an undergraduate degree in chemical engineering. He believes that an interpretive role is to bring out in a work of art the things that are important in an artistic sense and what is important to the artist. His goal is to keep his tours informal and fun. His tours combine lecture with time for questions and answers. Lawrence believes that the more involvement he can get with tour-goers, the better, and he aims to have all tour-goers speak at least once by the end of the tour. He often injects into the tour personal experiences of meeting the artists or visiting the sites depicted, making the tour less formal and more personal for him. Related to this, Lawrence tells human interest stories—“half a dozen different stories or [relates] humorous family stories” with the hope that tour-goers will find him relatable to them. He believes that the more tour-goers like him, the more they will like the tour. Lawrence feels one of his “best characteristics is to be passionate” about the objects he covers, which he demonstrates with his facial expressions and animation. He takes his role very seriously and believes the museum should continue to strive to be an important part of the community providing “an artistic base of knowledge” and an original art scene.

Cheryl

Cheryl is seventy-two years old and has been a docent at Museum A for twenty-five years. Before that, she was a journalist and editor. She also produced college publications and did fundraising and public relations. She earned an undergraduate degree in English. Cheryl's sees her interpretive role as that of a leader. She is "leading them to the art... I'm trying to get them to think about art, to think about what they see" and for "people to look at art with a fresh eye." She offers "insight" into works so that viewers can make their own discoveries with the art. She emphasizes the museum's link to the conservancy because it is unique among museums and demonstrates early adaption of conservation, which is part of the museum's mission. Cheryl's tour incorporated both the permanent collection and a traveling exhibit, a collection of works by a single illustrator, which was of particular interest to her. Over the years in her professional life, Cheryl employed illustrators for different publication projects and came to really love illustrations. Throughout the tour, Cheryl made a point of describing the media, so tour-goers could learn the different kinds of materials artists use. Her tours are interactive by asking many questions in order "to guide people so that they can draw from their own experiences" and because she "really, really like[s] people and...the interplay with people" one can have on tours. As a seasoned docent, she prides herself on her ability to "size up a group" or "survey her audience" due to "years of doing community relations" where she got to know what people are like. Her tour preparation is ongoing and extensive; she reads artists' biographies, exhibit reviews, and performs research well beyond what the museum provides. Cheryl's impact on the visitor's experience is not lost on her. She said, "In a way it's like, I'm selling art, in a sense. I guess I'm selling the art in a way because I want them to really enjoy what they are seeing."

Michael

Michael is eighty-three years old and has been a docent at Museum A for eight years. Before that, he was a docent at Museum B for five years. He worked in marketing and advertising for many years abroad. Michael earned an undergraduate degree in journalism and completed graduate work in Paris. Michael sees his interpretive role as facilitator, communicating to tour-goers about the objects on behalf of the artists. He delivers this message in a few ways. He tells stories on tours “to bring the portraits to life” in order “to give a little bit of background as to what goes through the artist’s mind.” It is very important to him to “give a bit of human interest” to works of art. Michael does not focus on artistic techniques as he’s “not well versed” in them, but rather, shares “stories about the artists and why they painted something a particular way” and “anecdotes of the artists’ lives.” He asks questions to see if the group is chatty and if he does not get much of a response, he may switch to a lecture format, which he does not prefer. The objects covered on his tour were pointedly connected by theme or artist as Michael tries “to find a segue” and to “make links” where he can. Having grown up in an artist’s colony, Michael knew painters from an early age and considering his career, he finds that being a docent came naturally, as it is “part of [his] personality-talking to people and trying to get their attention.” Michael pays attention to what is offered by the docent manger insofar as how to present objects, tailoring content to specific groups of visitors, and updates on the collection. Yet, his tours are each unique and when asked how he decided to tell a story or give an anecdote, he said it was a “spur of the moment” decision and that, “I just wing it...it is what comes into my mind.”

Wesley

Wesley is seventy-one years old and has been a docent at Museum B for fourteen years. Before that, he was an electrical engineer for many years until he retired. He earned an undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering. Wesley believes that his role as an interpreter is to “show how this group [of artists] developed, where they came from, why they moved into the area...” He does not ask tour-goers questions about what they see in the paintings because he finds it “intimidating to the group.” Also, when he goes on a tour in other museums, he wants the docent to speak and interpret for him. He sees the docent as the teacher. With this expectation of himself, Wesley “loves” the freedom to write his own tours, as he gets to talk about the art he likes, which is the permanent collection, as it is important to him that the regional aspect of the museum is highlighted. As he says, “I come in on Saturday and Sunday and I do my thing.” Based on the age, size, and sex of the audience he has in front of him, he selects works that he thinks appeal to most people, some of which are not his personal favorites. Less interested in giving art historical content, Wesley tries to tell what he “think(s) people would find interesting and might remember” which he delivers in a “folksy down home” style. He is a straight shooter and openly gives his opinions about the subjects of paintings and the collectors, which once resulted in the docent manager receiving a complaint about him. Wesley occasionally tells what paintings sold for at auction “so the art means more than something just hanging on the wall” and also “because most of the people who view the art here are not educated art lovers.” He aims to make his tours enjoyable to both tour-goers and himself.

Kaye

Kaye is sixty-four years old and has been a docent at Site B for nineteen years. Before that, she did market research and substitute teaching. She credits her market research experience for prompting her to consider the audiences' needs by thinking about the mean of each group. Kaye "thinks about what the majority of people are thinking about" which impacts how she presents objects. This could range from a group bidding time until lunch to a group of men interested in war-related art. Kaye earned an undergraduate degree in sociology and a graduate degree in mathematics. Kaye describes an interpretive role as a person giving a series of facts in a traditional art historical context where in addition to wall label data, the title is explained and information about the other artists who painted at that time is given to provide a context. This is not the type of tour she likes to give because visitors "should be here to give their opinions, their feelings, not mine..." She makes her tours interactive by asking a lot of questions, making age-appropriate references, and trying to seek connections in similar-themed works when viewers express interest. Her tours do not include the same objects each time, as she says that would bore her. In fact, it is "the changing exhibits that keep her" at Museum B. Kaye frequently poses questions to tour-goers about what they see as "people don't focus unless you make them focus." Her goal is to make the visit fun and hopes people will return and also want to visit other museums "without feeling intimidated." Making the museum a welcoming place for locals and people of all ages is also important to her. Interestingly, Kaye personally opts not to go on docent-led tours when visiting museums as she has "been to so many places where 'docent' [the role] really puts you off."

Gertie

Gertie is sixty-seven years old and has been a docent at Museum B for two years. Before that, she was a librarian where she managed people and taught classes to adults. Gertie earned a graduate degree in library science and holds a teaching degree. To Gertie, interpretation is showing “a painting to a person and letting them figure out what it is...you are trying to get your viewer to have a feeling about the art.” She emphasized the need to understand each group, by taking the temperature of her audience at the beginning of the tour with humorous stories to gauge their reaction. When presenting the first object on the tour, Gertie told a humorous self-deprecating story of her first experience with an object in order “to warm them up.” This tactic worked well with the group who laughed out loud. Gertie believes that the audience does effect the interpretation—“If I have a group that really responds to what I’m saying, I change the tour to make it more interactive.” Gertie prides herself on her ability to “read people” from her time hiring and managing library staff. To engage tour-goers, she will ask simple questions so get participation. She is honest about her limitations in the collection, “If I don’t understand the art I tend not to spend much time on it during a tour.” Gertie sees her prior work teaching library classes as similar to docenting, “You are teaching something.” She wants her tour-goers to experience “the joy of looking at...different types of art” which for Gertie, includes even those that are commonly complex and challenging to mainstream audiences, such as abstract art. Extremely impressed with Museum B’s docent training program, Gertie continues her education by attending local meetings of the national professional organization for docents. Her enthusiasm for the role is recognized by the museum staff.

Mabel

Mabel is seventy-five years old and has been a docent at Museum B for about five years. Before that, she was an occupational therapist and worked with veterans for thirty years. From her work, she has a lot of experience with craft construction which can carry into her tours. Mabel earned an undergraduate degree in occupational therapy and graduate degree in liberal studies. When asked about her interpretive role, Mabel was quick to clarify the role of docents at Museum B by saying, “We really don’t interpret. We describe what is there but I don’t think that we interpret... That is pretty much left to the viewer to do but we help them see what is there.” She sees herself as a guide not an interpreter. In her descriptions, Mabel tries to be clear and concise when speaking about objects in order to foster understanding. She injects lesser known tidbits of information gleaned from a variety of sources, including television, to give the audience something unexpected. Mabel’s goal for tour-goers is that they learn the basic elements of art, how to look at a painting, understand what a regional museum is and does, and come away with the feeling that interacting with art is good. For her own growth, Mabel appreciates the travelling exhibits Museum B has and finds it “a constant learning experience.” Mabel encourages interaction on her tours, as she thinks “people will remember things they had something to say about.” Sensitive to older visitors, Mabel was concerned that she was audible. She gave tour-goers a good deal of free time in a gallery to look on their own and ask her individual questions. Later in the tour, she referred to some of questions she was posed. Near the end, she spoke about how all the objects covered could be described with a single themes that unified them despite their different styles, media, purpose, etc.

William

William is thirty-eight years old and has been a docent at Museum C for one year. He is a carpenter. His knowledge of woodworking is extensive and he speaks about tour objects and their craftsmanship with a strong appreciation for the art of woodworking. William earned an undergraduate degree in English literature. He describes interpretation as:

“taking something that people know has meaning, but they can’t understand it and you are explaining that meaning to them. You are taking something that is unfamiliar and...familiarizing people with it by telling them about it or by doing word for word stuff, like taking a language and putting it into another.”

He believes that this museum “is a place that needs interpretation” or a docent leading visitors as it is not self-explanatory has no wall labels. William encourages visitors to touch the objects and appreciates the unique tactile nature of the museum. On the tour he asked tour-goers “softball question that makes them more engaged.” This was effective with the group of visitors who were students in a poetry class at a local college who were on a field trip. Receptive to visitors, if he senses boredom or visitors not paying attention, he will stop talking and ask what people want to hear about, allowing them to refocus the tour around their interests. The artist’s life’s work is important to William as it is his. His goal is to have visitors recognize the artist’s importance. William introduces himself as a carpenter so visitors are aware of his perspective. His knowledge of building construction leads William to regularly include anecdotes about production runs, crafting techniques, the role of helpers in the studio, and what would happen to scrap wood. He purposely uses the words ‘artist’ and ‘woodworker’ interchangeably. “As carpenter, I have a vested interest...it’s important that woodworking is definitely a craft, an art.”

Vera

Vera is sixty-four years old and has been a docent at Museum C for three years. Before that, she was a middle school teacher for thirty years. Vera earned undergraduate degrees in German and French and a graduate degree. Thinking about her role, Vera questioned whether she is “trying to give too much [information] because there is so much to see and allowing people to interpret for themselves too” [adds value]. When she goes to museums, she prefers not to go on a tour, but rather experience it for herself. When confronted with the label ‘docent’, Vera hesitated believing a docent is an expert, of which she does not describe herself. When Vera retired from teaching, she began volunteering at Museum C at the front desk. The curator encouraged her to try being a docent but she resisted with memories of disciplining children and fears of “disagreeable” tour-goers causing her stress in retirement. After much encouragement, and after “listening to a tour starting outside the visitor’s center” and wanting “to get in there” Vera decided to train. Her teaching experience carries over into docenting as she breaks “things up so that you’re not doing the same thing all the way through so that information is received” to prevent the learner from getting bored. She makes her tours physically interactive, encouraging people to touch or pull certain objects to demonstrate their uses. Her goal is for visitors to learn who the artist was and why he is important. Vera tells stories and little anecdotes to help convey aspects of the artist’s personality that she found in the docent training manual and were told to her by other docents. Vera enjoys hearing what tour-goers have to say about objects and from their questions about objects she learns to “think about things more” that perhaps she was unaware of before.

Danielle

Danielle is sixty-three years old and has been a docent at Museum C for one year. She taught art to children for a few years and then worked as a graphic designer for a major local corporation for twenty-seven years. She has an undergraduate degree in art education. Danielle's tours contain the objects she thinks are most relevant to exemplifying the artist's work and those which she appreciates most. She hopes tour-goers get "an appreciation for the place" and based on their backgrounds, she helps that along as much as she feels is needed. Recognizing that everyone explains things from a certain point of view, she says, "nobody is going to give the tour exactly the same way because you are interested in certain things more than others." Danielle very occasionally tells groups which objects she dislikes. While telling stories about the subject the artist depicted, she reminisced about her own childhood experiences with the subject. She thinks that visitors "can relate to [stories] a lot more...than just a recitation of each piece." Danielle enjoys speaking about the artist's familial relationships because she has "always been interested in family trees." As far as consistency among tours, Danielle is not concerned, as "it just changes based on what I think of that day, sometimes, as well as questions they ask." She is consistent on aiming to convey to guests who the artist was, why he is important to the field, and examples of his body of work. She follows the same path and order of objects of the docent whom she followed when she was a trainee. She credits observing others give tours as helpful in her training. The more experience Danielle has touring, the more animated she feels she is. She sees herself as teacher-like in that she needs to be "in control" and if tour-goers are not cooperating she

needs to “be forceful” and request people come to her since she is responsible for protecting the collection.

Tammy

Tammy is sixty-two years old and has been a docent at Museum C for ten years. She is the membership manager at a public radio station in Philadelphia and also does photography for fun. Before coming to the radio station, Tammy taught art and photography courses at the college, high school, and middle school levels. Tammy earned an undergraduate degree in fine arts and has completed some graduate coursework. Tammy was a participant in a 2008 study performed by the researcher. Tammy sees her role as to “tease out people’s experiences” and hopes guests come to have a direct relationship with objects. She recognizes that her tours “look like [her] interpretation each time” but she is careful not to “restrict what someone else might get from a piece of artwork.” She encourages visitors to discover things for themselves in the museum so that they can form their own connection. It is important to her that tour-goers trust her and are aware of the perspective she has as an artist describing the work of another artist. To keep from getting bored, she will focus on the group’s interests so that each tour is unique. Even mid-tour she will ask, “Did anything else catch your eye?” She prides herself on being “most-time docent” for completing tours just at the time limit. Tammy enjoys the authority she has on a tour as she gets to be the boss, the leader, and to show off. Tammy wants to convey to her audience that she is connected to the place; she has an ego, so she shares personal experiences even though they are not essential to the tour. That said, Tammy would not continue as a docent if tour-goers were not “contributing to” her as she sees “what people pick out [in their observations] is a gift” to

her. Since Tammy does not enjoy learning by lecture, she tries not to do it on tours. She also encourages tour-goers to bring their friends to the museum on future visits.

Shirley

Shirley is a sixty-two years old and has been a docent at Museum D for almost two years. She and her sister, Lucille, co-own and independent travel agency, which Shirley has been doing for thirty-seven years. For the past eleven years, Shirley also has been a docent at a large museum in the region. She is also a painter. Shirley earned an undergraduate degree in art education and is a certified travel counselor. Shirley believes that her interpretive role is “to get people to look at things perhaps in a way that they have not seen them before” or with a fresh eye. She is concerned with “trying to stay on message and trying to stay on time” so that everything she needs to cover is covered. Part of this is related to the fact that the tour’s route is preset and numerous tours occur throughout the day on that path. Shirley focuses on the social history of objects and their use as that is how the tour is billed. There are objects she does not cover because they are outside of the seasonal theme, even though they are of particular interest to her. While she “would not want to give this tour” with just the two weeks of training required to do so, she appreciates the continuing education opportunities made available to docents. Her background of visiting historic homes and gardens throughout the world and as a painter and needle worker works its way into her tours as she is able to explain things from the perspective of a seasoned traveler and an artist. Shirley sees her responsibilities as protecting the objects and giving people the tour that was described to them. She uses humor to lighten the mood with often foreign objects and practices. When thinking about her role, Shirley joked that wallflowers are not attracted to

docenting and, referencing her professional life, said, “We’re the ones with a microphone in the front of the bus.”

Lucille

Lucille is fifty-six years old and has been a docent at Museum D for a year and a half. She is the director of a travel tour company that she and her sister, Shirley, own. Before that, she was a history teacher. For the past eight years, Lucille has also been a docent at a large major art museum in the region. Lucille earned an undergraduate degree in history. Lucille views her interpretive role as trying to put the object and the visitor in some kind of relationship so that tour-goers connect with the art. She believes that making connections between tour-goers, objects, and the context is essential for successful interpretation. Lucille tries to make her tours interactive and likes to tease her groups that there will be a test at the end. She likes to find out why tour-goers are visiting by “qualifying” guests so that she can tailor what she says based on their interests and background. Related to this, she sees tour-goers as “buying a product” and she hopes to meet their expectations. Even though Lucille goes through the same rooms in the same order on each tour, she feels her tours are never the same. Part of the reason she alters the words she uses and objects she discusses is to prevent her own boredom. Doing four tours through the same rooms a day, she does not “want to be a machine...[or] sound like [she’s] saying something that [she’s] said earlier in the day or ten times or a hundred times.” Cognizant that tour-goers frequently revisit Museum D, she factors in if guests have been on the tour before and will alter the level of depth accordingly depending on the experience of the group. Lucille recognizes that the museum’s tours need to appeal to the visiting population and museums need to change with the times to ensure that

their themes and approaches to discussing objects are visitor-friendly in the twenty-first century.

Chart of Participants

Docent	Museum	Years as a Docent at the Museum	Age	Profession
Judith	A	4	67	Retired teacher
Lawrence	A	11	74	Retired plant manager
Cheryl	A	25	72	Retired editor
Michael	A	8	83	Retired marketing professional
Wesley	B	14	71	Retired electrical engineer
Kaye	B	19	64	Retired market researcher and teacher
Gertie	B	2	67	Retired librarian
Mabel	B	5	75	Retired occupational therapist
William	C	1	38	Carpenter
Vera	C	3	64	Retired teacher
Danielle	C	1	63	Retired graphic designer and teacher
Tammy	C	19	62	Manager at a radio station and former teacher
Shirley	D	2	62	Travel agency owner
Lucille	D	1.5	56	Travel agency director and former teacher

Summary

This chapter provided a description of each of the four settings docent-led tours took place and a biography of each of the fourteen participating docents. The settings were described so that the kind of art displayed at each museum and the general size and scope of each institution was clear. Each participant's educational and professional background was given, in addition to memorable aspects of the docent's touring style and general philosophy of tour giving.

Chapter 5

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore docents' perceptions of their interpretive role in museums and determine how those perceptions shape docents' practice. In this chapter, the findings are presented. Participants in the study spoke with ease when asked about their practice during interviews. Many seemed to have given prior thought to their role and why they conduct tours the way that they do. Interview questions seemed to provide an opportunity for participants to share established beliefs about various aspects of being a docent in an art museum, including: the art exhibited in the galleries, the kinds of visitors attracted to the museum, and what they thought about leading tours. Data was grouped into four large categories: delivering an individualized and valued tour, throwing light upon, projecting one's horizon of meaning, and outcomes docents hope to achieve. Data collected from observations and interviews supports the themes and subthemes described below.

Delivering an Individualized and Valued Tour

When considering how docents made sense of their role, two main themes emerged for the majority of the sample: making tours personal by individualizing each of them to the tour-goers before them and demonstrating dedication to the museum so that their volunteer work is perceived as valuable to the institution and tour-goers.

There were a number of ways in which docents made a personal imprint on their tours and each was aware that his or her tour was different from other docents'. Each had a unique personality and was aware of how it came off to tour-goers. They made their tours personal by: projecting their individual approach to touring; allowing their personal agendas to come through; having a tour's content sometimes be about them, meaning the docent; and letting their professional life influence tour content. Second, docents in this study had given sincere thought about how they approached their practice in both the particular museum with which they are affiliated and in a general larger sense, as a guide in an art museum. Docents spoke frankly about their dedication to the museum: adding valuing to the institution; respecting their role; preparing for tours which involves significant time and energy; and adhering to a code or maintaining a sense of professionalism on tours. Nine of the twelve participants individualized their tour and also spoke of ways that demonstrated the value they bring to the museum and their need to be valued by the institution.

Making Tours Personal

Twelve docents—nearly the entire sample size—demonstrated different ways that they made their tours personal. They did this by: projecting their approach to tour giving onto the tours they led; allowing their personal agendas to come through; making the tour very much 'about them'; and having their professional life influence their tour's content.

A common theme among these docents was that they preferred to offer the tour in a way that they personally liked to receive a tour. Meaning, docents put themselves in tour-goers' shoes and thought about how they would like a tour to be run and acted as such. For example, when asked about whether Wesley used the teaching technique of posing questions

to the audience, either with open-ended questions or closed questions where there is one right answer, Wesley was quick to refute this technique: “No, because I feel people don’t want that. When I go on a tour I want the docent to tell me. I don’t need to interpret what I see...” Here, the docent is projecting his own likes and dislikes onto the audience and making decisions under the logic that Wesley does not like being asked questions, and thus he does not force them upon others.

Analogous in motivation to Wesley, though dissimilar in preference, Tammy explained how she operated on tours: “I can’t stand being lectured to so don’t want to do it to other people...I prefer to participate while on a tour and have my own time to absorb stuff. I try to have that balance on my tours.” Her tour involved a great deal of interaction on the part of tour-goers (Field notes, 3/22/09) and when asked why she did it this way, Tammy gave the reason that: “The fact that I like to...discover for myself rather than be told.” Also interactive in nature and asking many open-ended questions of tour-goers, Kaye explained her style, similar to Tammy’s: “I don’t like to go to a museum and get lectured to. I like it when they put questions to us that we can answer to get more of an interaction.” Finding the right balance between giving an address to the audience and soliciting help from audience members to contribute, Tammy and Kaye have found equilibrium for themselves. Wesley, Tammy, and Kaye crafted their touring styles around the kinds of ways they were fond of learning.

Vera, on the other hand is still seeking balance and struggling with her own preferred touring style in light of her responsibilities. She shared:

I question whether I’m trying to give too much because there is so much to see and [there is] allowing people to interpret for themselves, too...That would be valuable I

think because when I go to an art museum, I don't like to go on a tour, I want to experience it for myself.

As she spoke, there was a pronounced pause between the two thoughts indicating that she may have been considering this for the first time or it is something unresolved (Field notes, 4/19/09). Additionally and interestingly, she is voluntarily serving in a role of a person who she admittedly avoids when visiting a museum. Her tour was predominately lecture with some opportunities for tour-goers to physically interact with objects, which Vera was observed appearing to enjoy facilitating as she smiled when tour-goers discovered things for themselves (Field notes, 3/22/09). Overall, when considering the projecting by docents, they deliver the tour in the manner in which they would like to receive it. Docents are purposely considering the experience—as they imagine it—of tour-goers when deciding how interactive their tour would be.

A second way a docent makes a tour personal is to allow the docent's own agenda and ideas to float to the surface. For example, Tammy, Kaye, and Wesley introduced one or a few objects as ones they liked most (Field notes, 3/22/09, 4/7/09, 3/21/09). In contrast, near the end of the tour, Danielle pointed out an object which was 'not her favorite'. Tour-goers were then observed laughing and looking at one another (Field notes, 3/23/2009). It should be noted that later, when asked about the object she dismissed, Danielle said, "I hardly ever say that." When asked if she thought her feelings about certain objects determined whether they got in the tour, she said, "I don't spend a lot of time on the sculptures because I don't think they are as relevant." Since docents select objects for inclusion on the tour, their favorites seem to make the cut.

For example, William, a carpenter, was upfront about his personal interests by sharing his profession of carpentry with tour-goers. Being a docent at this museum was important to him as it was a way to exemplify carpentry in its highest form, as a work of art. He said: “I want people to realize that [the artist] is really important in American woodworking and as carpenter, I have a vested interest in that...” The pride he felt was evident when he spoke. He carefully handled objects, such as when he described the amount of time and effort it would take to make a desk (Field notes, 3/27/09). Dismissive of carpenters who do not care about their work, William explained, “It upsets me when I go into a house and see shotty work... For me, when people come here, it’s important that woodworking is definitely a craft, is an art.”

Similarly, referencing her career’s work on the tour, Gertie, a retired librarian, spoke of an observant librarian who uncovered a missing hidden gem which had been forgotten, the object Gertie was speaking about on the tour (Field notes, 2/24/09). None of the three other docents who presented this object on tours at Museum B mentioned the librarian. Gertie explained:

I included the librarian part because I worked as a librarian for so many years. No one seems to know just what a librarian does and it is fun to tell the story because it shows that we are aware of more than stamping books... We are not the bun-wearing, ax-wielding, shhhing people who are pictured in comics.

This story of a librarian making a discovery may only be meaningful in light of Gertie’s background, and it shows a docent connecting tour content to her own life experiences.

More explicit in her motivations, Judith did something very similar. She chose to spend time speaking about a lesser known member of a family of artists, who, of the three

other docents observed at Museum A, only one other had mentioned in passing (Field notes, 3/24/09). This person had no works of art in the museum but was an engineer at a major local company who invented some very creative items, which Judith described. When asked about why a few minutes were spent discussing this individual, Judith said, “I think engineering is an art and I have a personal investment in it.” She further explained, “Oh, you’re not going to hear that [on anyone else’s tour] because my husband worked for (this person) as an engineer.” Knowing Judith’s personal interests and beliefs, one can better understand her motives for highlighting this individual and making a point to publicly acknowledge his work as much as that of his family members. Whether docents are sharing personal likes and dislikes of objects or subtly injecting information about objects or artists that is somehow intimately related or meaningful to them, tour-goers learn not just about the objects but a little bit about the docent’s point of view.

When asked to reflect upon what influenced them and shaped how they gave the tour, docents were vocal about how often they inject themselves into stories or explanations of works of art. Their perspective and opinion were not always hidden. For instance, when asked about why Lawrence shared with tour-goers his personal experience speaking with an artist at a holiday party (Field notes, 3/20/09), he explained that incident “illustrates [his] own personal likes and dislikes” which he thinks “is important to a tour.” Wesley also, when talking about an artist’s work on the tour, revealed meeting the artist decades ago to discuss potentially having a work commissioned for Wesley’s home (Field notes, 3/21/09). At the time, financially it was not possible though Wesley stated, in retrospect, it would have been “a fantastic investment.” Wesley said that he injects this story in tours because, as he states, “I can show a personal interest and that shows that I know what I’m talking about and that I love

the artwork that I show. Even if people don't like the artwork, they know I love it." Lawrence and Wesley's desire to have their personal experiences and feelings about the artists and the objects communicated shows how 'close' they are to the artists who work they were presenting.

While Lawrence and Wesley explained how sharing personal knowledge was for the benefit of the tour, others pointed out their role as controller of artistic content. Judith likened the role to make-believe: "I feel like a fairy godmothers sprinkling fairy dust on them." She continued, "I've got this sponge of knowledge in my head and I've to figure out how much I can squeeze out of my head to get that [appropriate] amount." Tammy described the benefits of being a docent, "I get to be the boss, the leader, I get to talk, and I get to show off." She continued, "I have an ego; so I share personal experiences even though they are not essential to the tour. I try to show that I'm connected to this place." Her interest in the objects and passion for creative outlets in general overflowed, sometimes producing tears, when she spoke about her role and how it fulfilled for her something very personal and meaningful (Field notes, 3/22/09). Tammy explained her reaction to being in the presence of the objects: "I'm pretty friggin' inspired."

While Tammy's fondness for being a docent came across during the interview in a personal way, Cheryl shared her personal ideas when interpreting specific objects. Presenting to her group a large painting that depicted an elderly couple in their farmhouse, Cheryl injected a bit of her own perspective (Field notes, 4/6/09). In the painting, the farmer, who was headed out the farmhouse door, had a shotgun pointed behind him, in the general direction of his wife. The title did not explain what was happening but the painting's ambiguous meaning provoked tour-goers to ask why the gun was pointed in this way. Cheryl

proceeded to share what she thought the painting was about. Later recounting how she handled the tour-goers' question about what was happening in the painting, Cheryl emphasized that she included a disclaimer: "This is my interpretation; it is not the way...I don't know if [the artist] meant it to be that way or not, its how I interpret it...." Even with this disclaimer prefacing Cheryl's interpretation, she said, "It's actually a little cheeky on my part to do my own story but I just can't help it because I love that painting so much."

Docents also injected personal views and feelings in their tours—whether it is a one of a kind experience with the artist, personal preferences between objects, or how they interpret a painting—as they saw fit. With these insertions, docents believe that they are enhancing the tour and with this personal coloring, tour-goers also get a bit of the docent's personality.

Another way that docents in this study made their tours personal to them was to turn to their professional life to offer insights into objects. Thus, docents made comments that stemmed from knowledge gleaned in their careers. The first example comes from one of the few employed docents. William felt stating his profession very early on in the tour offered him authority and credibility with the audience. He said, "I do make a point that I am a carpenter, that way they kind of get an idea of where I'm coming from...As a woodworker, I could probably explain stuff to people a little more competently than an art historian could. I've done joints, dovetails." During the tour, William would add 'insider knowledge' about the techniques the artist used to make something. For instance, he would comment on the level of difficulty involved and if more than one person would need to construct something (Field notes, 3/27/09). These are the kinds of insights that one would likely only hear at Museum C if on a tour led by William.

In a similar vein, mid-tour while showing period bedroom furniture, Lucille stated to tour-goers that she was “putting on my history hat” after having previously introduced herself as a former history teacher (Field notes, 3/22/09). She proceeded to give a mini history lesson about what was happening during the time period in which the furniture was constructed. Wearing different hats, being both a carpenter and a guide, and a history teacher and a guide, and approaching objects from multiple perspectives, allows information to be communicated to tour-goers that is not learned in docent training, but is specific knowledge to this particular docent.

Other docents were less overt about how their professional life influenced tour content. Rather, their work experiences inserted itself in subtle ways, such as in determining which objects were discussed. When interviewed, Cheryl revealed, “I was a dancer for a long time and I really enjoy talking about...Nureyev,” a famed Russian ballet dancer of whom there are large paintings in the museum. Cheryl’s interest and knowledge in this particular subject influenced her tour’s content. Offering insight into what is being shown visitors, Tammy explained, “...my art school experience and my work as an artist brings much to my touring...I can speak from the point of view of an artist...” She finds the ability to share her personal expertise “personally satisfying.” Also, Shirley’s education and career in the global travel business enhanced her tours: “I use my other travel experience, my other personal museum background, history background, art background.” While Cheryl, Tammy and Shirley were less explicit than William or Lucille in sharing their training and expertise in particular subjects, one’s career’s work influenced what they showed and then told tour-goers.

These examples represent how docents’ professional lives influenced and often enhanced their tours. Docents did not leave their professional lives at the door. Rather, it can

influence what objects they showed and information they gave. These are examples of docents—wearing many hats, as Lucille said—contributing to tour content and making the tour their own. In fact, tours were purposely made very personal by and to docents. The methods by which they delivered the tour matched their own individual preferred style. Docents’ beliefs, bias, perspectives, and opinions surfaced on tours. When asked to reflect on their touring in general, and not personal aspects of their tours, docents spoke of numerous practices, some overt some subtle, which benefited the museum and tour-goers alike, which demonstrated their dedication.

Dedication to the Docents’ Role

Widening the perspective from trying to understand the personal nature of tours, to studying docents’ reflections on their role, yielded rich data demonstrating loyalty, commitment, and professionalism. Participants were articulate and vocal, most speaking at length and with ease about their service. Those who made their tours personal also spoke about practices that they held in high esteem and adhered to at their museums demonstrating their dedication. Docents saw themselves as adding value to the institution; respected their role, prepared for tours; and upheld a code of professional standards.

Docents believe that their volunteer work adds tangible value to a museum. In fact, if they are not adding value to the museum, it negated their work. For example, Judith explained, “If I can’t do a good job, if I can’t give value to this place, there is no sense in my being here.” Being perceived as contributing to the museum’s education outreach efforts and feeling like they play a part in propagating the mission was a theme. Similarly, retiree Judith said, “I value in being in this organization. Being part of a team is what I value.” Lawrence

said he feels part of the museum and respected for this role in it. Staff and curators make an effort to say “hello” and he feels part of the team.

Likewise, aware that they only get one opportunity to impact the impression a particular group of museum visitors, docents tried to meet the expectations of the institution, their docent manager, and tour-goers. Kaye explained, “I think that because we aren’t paid and [the director of education] is so good about the training that you feel an obligation to do your very best.” Offering a tour valuable to museum visitors has been instilled in Kaye, regardless of the voluntary nature of her work. Also looking to give back, retiree Lucille was frank about the manner in which she was able to contribute to the museum: “I’m not a curator and I’m not able to write a big check but it is a way that I can help the institution to continue to grow and I hope in some small way, keep the mission going.” She sees her contribution as “monetary value for the institution [because] after they train me, they don’t have to pay me so that’s a benefit [to the museum].…” Feeling similarly, Lawrence said, docents “should be one of the most highly valued groups in a museum because they are not paid employees.”

In a similar vein, an employed docent, William, felt that his professional knowledge offered what he saw as a direct benefit to the museum: “... to give that firsthand knowledge of the way the wood was worked, or a way a spline joined together....” While William could surely give that answer whether he was an employed carpenter or a retired one, each docent was aware of the value each offered to the museum. At the same time, participants made clear that they valued their role.

While docents were not asked directly if they felt appreciated or respected by the institution as it was not part of the research questions, docents overwhelmingly spoke about how they respected their function and sincerely did their best. Cheryl explained, “I take this

seriously. This is like a job for me.” In fact, a sense of duty was exhibited by docents early on as both newer and more senior docents spoke of this.

At Museum C, it was evident that docents respected their role. There, due to the size of the museum, there was no private space for docents to relax or prepare for tours. Also, since the museum is only open when tours are scheduled, there is little opportunity for docents to interact with one another or see other docents giving tours. Since those on a tour group are frequently the only people in the museum at one time, at a place that does not use wall labels or security guards, the docents knew that they were protectors of the works. Longtime docent Tammy said, “I have the privilege to be able to lead people through the museum...I’ve been given the responsibility and the freedom to introduce people to it.” As an artist herself, she respected the responsibility that comes with speaking about the works of another artist. William, a newer docent and the youngest participant said, “I am just excited that I get to be a part of it.” These docents exuded awe for the artist as demonstrated by how animated they got during the interviews (Field notes, 3/22/09, 3/27/09, 4/19/09).

While Museum C has some unique aspects given the limited space and accessibility issues, it was not the only site where docents outwardly expressed respect for the role. In some cases, docents are validated from sources outside of the museum. At a Museum B, Gertie described her involvement in a docent professional society, a group of docents who are organized at the national level. She explained, “...there is a National Docent’s Society and local meetings for all the museum docents. I’ve attended local meetings...” Looking to learn from a professional society demonstrates dedication to the field.

Second, Lawrence spoke about an excursion planned by the museum he was a docent at prior to Museum A where docents heard a renowned museum educator in Boston (Field

notes, 3/20/09). Referring twice to the educator during the interview, Lawrence praised the man's innovative touring techniques which made an impression on him:

There was a docent at the Clark Art Institute and...the way he gave a tour was wonderful. He was touring with us and he dropped his voice so I leaned in to hear what he was saying and he said that's exactly the reaction he wanted. He wanted to know we were listening.

Lawrence was impressed with this educator's abilities and liked that he had a new trick to use to enhance his own tours. For years, Lawrence has suggested to Museum A to offer retraining of docents or for them to bring in special expert educators such as the one he saw in Boston.

Whether feeling a sense of responsibility was instilled in docents by museum administrators, or by being entrusted with a tour group, or by having the entire museum to oneself, participants took the job seriously and respected the role. This respect for the role was also evident in the amount of preparation docents did on an ongoing basis to make their tours the best that they could be.

Preparation

While the average length of experience as a docent was over seven years for study participants that did not equate with docents complacent in their knowledge of the collection. Docents repeatedly commented on the importance of preparation. Preparing was an important part of the role and it happened at the museum, en route to the museum, and in between tours. Cheryl described her process:

I always come early so I can get myself focused...Sometimes I spend an hour or two just going around deciding what to use. I almost always go over my notes. I guess I would say I prepare the same way that you would prepare for a test.

This kind of dedication was also seen in others. Lawrence explained:

The way I train for that is to talk to myself and give myself a tour. A lot of times I give myself the whole tour. Sometimes while driving I might talk about the tour as well and will be visualizing how I would give the tour.

Vera also said she reviewed the tour “to get transitioned from whatever [she] was doing before” as she drives to the museum.” This behavior demonstrated that docents are dedicated to ongoing preparation.

In addition to dry runs of what will be said, docents also spoke about preparing in a more methodical way, with ongoing review of the research, since as Cheryl said; docenting is “an intellectual endeavor.” She shared that she has accumulated “over a hundred books about artists and over the years...” including biographies and stories of the artists’ lives to enrich her tours and stay current. Demonstrating her desire for accuracy, before her tour, Cheryl was overheard checking with the museum’s researcher on a fact just published in the newspaper in its review of the museum’s newest exhibit (4/6/09). Like Cheryl’s editorial past being exhibited, Gertie’s years of being in a library contributed to her preparation. “Taking the job helps me stay fresh, as I librarian I was learning all the time. It is fun to keep learning in retirement.”

Some also like to keep the tour fresh for themselves. Tammy, demonstrating the value she sees in ongoing preparation, shared that, “Today I thought it would be smart of me to

learn something new before every tour and share with the group.” Likewise, William shared, “Doing as much research as I’ve done, I have the [docent] manual stuffed with stuff I was able to find on [the artist]. Anything I can find on [the artist], I’ll devour.” William commented on how he uses the docent manual: “The handbook is ... a good read. If I’m eating lunch, I always read when I’m eating lunch. When I’m kicking around the house, a lot of times, I’ll pull out the handbook and read about a certain piece, to keep it fresh.” Lawrence’s reference to museum-provided training to improve his tours and Cheryl, Tammy, and William’s self-directed research exemplify the importance these docents felt about preparing. Another example of the dedication of these docents, whether directed or self-imposed, is adherence to professional standards.

As representatives of the museum and frequently the only person in the museum with whom visitors interact, docents in the study understood that certain expectations were placed upon them by museum administrators. These take the form of standard ways to lead a tour, maintaining professionalism when dealing with sensitive subjects, following protocol, and reciting approved facts rather than hearsay. Gertie explained, “There is an ethical code for docents. They taught us by having docents do tours for us to show what they do. We had to go out to three other places and take a tour so we see how other museums do tours.” Gertie’s experience, where trainees were sent to other museums to see how their tours were run and even to critique a tour viewed, puts the task on the individual docent to reflect on what his or her tour should look like.

Determining what topics to discuss on a tour could be like opening Pandora’s Box for docents, since often tour-goers bring stories about artists’ lives that they would like confirmed. Sensitive to this, Vera said:

I try to stick to either what they've (artist's family, curators) said or what the manual said because they (the curators) are very clear that it's real easy to get away from what actually happened, they say how one docent hears one story and then it's whisper down the lane. It's away from the truth and so I try to stick really closely to what they've verified.

Similarly, Michael explained, "We have to follow certain guidelines in terms of not being able to make stories up. We must tell real stories." Respectful of boundaries, Judith said:

You've got to be careful to make sure you are telling the truth, that's the thing and there are some things you shouldn't talk about. I should not tell them where the Wyeths live even though I know. I should never impart that information.

Echoing confidentiality issues, Cheryl said, "We must respect artists' privacy, we don't discuss personal aspects of their life." Accuracy was also something taken very seriously by docents. Cheryl, who checked the newspaper's facts, was concerned about "a line in it that said that he (the artist) almost always did his illustrations the same size as is published in the book. I called our researcher and asked her. She said, 'You don't want to say *always*, he did most.'" Adhering to a professional code of sorts and sticking to the institution's researched analysis is part of the respect docents have for their role and for what image they project to the public. Shirley stated, "You always try to be as professional as you can. Think of the institution, protect the objects..." Also concerned about objects, William spoke about the importance of speaking with groups about behavior before they enter the museum:

It's essential that you give them ground rules outside and I think...if you let them know that this was entrusted to tour groups by the family and that this a person's home, that they are going to be a little more respectful.

In sum, there were numerous ways in which docents demonstrated how they respect their role within the museum. They shared different ways that they do their best, how they see themselves as adding value to the institution, prepare sufficiently for tours, and adhere to an ethical code of responsibility. These qualities—sincere effort, pride in one’s work, contributing to the larger good, exhibiting professionalism and respecting boundaries—are examples of dedication to the role and the institution.

In conclusion, docents spoke candidly about their role; individualized tours based a number of factors and influences, and behaved with respect for the museum and the role. While docents hoped their contribution was valued by the institution, their commitment to ongoing preparation and adherence to professional standards was consistently exhibited.

Throwing Light Upon

While on a tour, docents elucidate or shine light on something foreign by making art objects clear to museum visitors. This process happens in many ways depending on the docent and the tour-goers. Docents used four techniques to throw light upon or make foreign objects clear to those who now or little prior knowledge of them. The first group modeled Hermes, the Greek messenger god, by translating art jargon into colloquial speech so it would be understandable. They acted as intermediaries between the artist and the public in that they tried to communicate to tour-goers about the objects in an understandable language. One way docents did this was to act as spokespeople for the artists to ensure that what the artist wanted to achieve with the object was conveyed, so that the artist’s voice was heard. Other docents took a different approach and acted as guides on the side, keeping quiet and letting tour-goers find meaning in the objects by themselves. This approach is one where docents opted to take

the backseat when it came to interpreting. Instead, they left interpretation up to the tour-goers. Docents described or stated facts about objects, instead of imposing a single interpretation. The third group mediated, meaning they assumed the role of an intervening agency, between curator and layperson, deciding what to say about museum content and how to present it. Mediation takes into account the individual docent's filter and preconceptions about his or her tour-goers. The last group focused on engagement, making a strong connection between object and audience with the use of humor and theatrics.

Modeling Hermes

First, in order to educate tour-goers in a way that was understandable to them, docents modeled the messenger god Hermes, who is known for mediating between the worlds of gods and humans. For docents, the worlds mediated are that of curator and the tour-goer. This means conveying messages from the perspective and vocabulary of a very educated art expert to that of a layman. For example, Shirley said, it is “explaining or pointing out things that they [tour-goers] can then learn.” Similarly, William said:

You are taking something that people know has meaning, but they can't understand it and you are explaining that meaning to them. You are taking something that is unfamiliar and letting them know, you are familiarizing people with it by telling them about it or by... taking a language and putting it into another.

William's description of translating between languages where one puts a word into another language is a form of interpreting. Along the same lines, Lucille did exactly this when she spoke about an old fashioned wine chiller, and asked tour-goers to “think of it as a Coleman cooler”(Field notes, 4/22/09). This put the object into an understandable context. She took

something that appeared unrecognizable and made it plain. Throwing light upon or making clear is something docents strove to do.

Another way that docents modeled Hermes is by giving voice to the artist. As such the docent assumes the role of the mouthpiece of the artist, relaying information about what the artist intended with a piece. The docent ensures that what the artist wanted viewers to see and take away from being in the presence of the object occurs. Making the voice of the artist clear, Michael explained that he was “trying to interpret what the artist is trying to say to the audience and why he is trying to say it.” Similarly, Lawrence described the process as “trying to interpret what the artist had in mind when he did the work. Why is he doing certain things, [for example] why is he using diagonals, or using a certain color.” Cheryl takes into account the artist’s intentions: “When you get into the Andrew Wyeth gallery, he really wants people to look at his paintings and interpret them for themselves and so I don’t focus on the interpretation as much as I focus on how he painted.” The docent is the vessel for the artist to communicate to viewers so that the artists’ creative intentions are respected.

Guiding From the Side

Conversely, there was a camp of docents who were resistant to play messenger between object and tour-goer and artist and tour-goer. These docents took more of a supporting role. Kaye described her position as such: “I think they (tour-goers) should be there to give their opinions, their feelings, not mine. I don’t want to impose; I don’t want to tell them what to see.” Judith concurred:

I think they (curators) are putting it out there like a smorgasbord. You take what you want out of it... I should not impart a judgment statement about, ‘He’s a good artist or

he's a bad artist.' I mean, that's my interpretation! I should not put that on somebody else's shoulders, whether I like it or not.

Careful not to impose, Cheryl said, "... You are trying to lead them. You are leading them to the art... I'm trying to get them to think about art, to think about what they see." She continued: "When you interpret it, you're giving just your view, of what you see; I don't want to do that. I will specifically say, 'I want to look at it and this, this and this, and tell me what you see'. These docents are letting each individual take away from an object what he or she chooses. When asked about interpreting, Mabel got visibly uncomfortable and asked that that word not be used (Field notes, 4/3/09) because, "We are not supposed to interpret. That is not something we do. We describe what is there... We help them see what is there."

Docents' hesitancy to mediate puts the onus on tour-goers to have an individual experience with an object taking whatever they see as being all right. Lawrence said, "A docent's role is to precipitate a conversation about objects." For example, Gertie found joy when she would:

Show a painting to a person and then let them figure out what it is... You are trying to get your viewer to have a feeling about that art.... That is what I think is kind of wonderful when you can say ... 'no answer is wrong'.

These docents want tour-goers to experience the artwork for themselves. Tammy said, "What I delight in is watching people light up as they relate to the work and realize how they have a direct relationship to it. There does not need to be any intermediary between them and the work." This approach gives tour-goers the opportunity for self-discovery at the museum and puts docents in a supporting role.

Mediating Content

A third way docents threw light upon objects was to mediate content. Meaning, on their own, docents decided what content to include on the tour and how to present it. For example, Shirley omitted some material another docent was overheard sharing and when asked about it she said, “But, as I could see them, I’m thinking, I don’t need to go down there (that path), it’s too much information. Let’s get them moving out. I started to say it but then I realized, this isn’t the group that might be valuable to.” Shirley described her tour-goers on the day she was observed as “three people who barely spoke, one who understood more English than she spoke...” Similarly, when deciding what to tell and what words to use to do so, Mabel explained, “If there are artists on the tour, the questions (I ask tour-goers) would be more technical usually...” In the same way, William said he regularly asks tour-goers, “‘Are any of you woodworkers or enthusiasts?’ And if they say ‘yes’ then I try to steer the tour a little bit more towards the types of woods used, joinery techniques. That kind of shapes the way the tour’s going to be.”

Literally acting as a mediator or one who filters material, some docents explained the impact they had on what material gets included in tours. Michael explained:

Some guides may talk more about technique or other things that I’m not as well versed in. Since I’m not creative myself, I tend to do more human interest stories and stories about the artists and why they painted something in a particular way rather than about the technique the artists used.

Turning to how docents present material, some docents were conscious of larger themes that tied a museum’s collection together. Wesley, in particular, was cognizant of placement of objects in particular galleries and imparted that to his audiences. He

communicated curators' ideas to his group and explained how the school of local artists developed:

My role is to show how this group (of artists) developed, where they came from, why they moved into the area...and who influenced who (m). Lathrop was the first guy who came here but Garber was an instructor who later came and he was a great artist. People wanted to live close to him. In my talk I get this info across in a very high level.”

Communicating this background art historical knowledge on a tour in a way that is thorough but does not overwhelm his tour-goers is a balance that Wesley tries to maintain.

Mediating to account for his tour-goers knowledge of art, to a group of art teachers, Lawrence went into great depth on some paintings and seemed to enjoy that his group had a good deal of background knowledge. He explained:

I knew the group knew the Hudson River School ... It is one of the first things you learn when you are taught art. A lot of audiences have never heard of the school and then I have to talk about the techniques that make a Hudson River painting. With these guys it was easy because they knew the school.

On the other hand, when faced with tour-goers they viewed as less educated, Michael and Judith opted to skip certain material or present it differently. On his observed tour, Michael said that he had: “to lecture because I don't think that this group will have the knowledge or feel for the art.” Judith cut some content because she “...didn't think they had the interest level, the literary level.” Making decisions mid-tour about what to tell and in what amount of depth was regularly practiced.

For those who modeled Hermes, were more hesitant to mediate between tour-goers and objects, or negotiated content and its presentation, docents are utilizing strategies they deemed most appropriate to make objects clear to museum visitors. What also factors into how they shape their tour is a docent's perspective or horizon of meaning.

Engaging Visitors on Tours

The final finding related to docents throwing light upon the art objects was that their tours were dominantly art-centered. The tour was focused on the objects shown that day and how tour-goers could be connected to them in some way. There were several techniques docents utilized that fostered art-centered approach, those being: levity and humor, storytelling, interaction, and theatrics. Some techniques were used to try to grab people's attention, other techniques to convey facts in an interesting way, others techniques were used as coping mechanisms for having shy if not silent tour-goers, and others were used to spark a bit of dialogue to get people actively looking at objects. These made tourgoers laugh, engaged them in conversations, and drew them in using dramatic practices. Tried and true techniques were regularly used by docents in an effort to make the art more accessible and relatable to tour-goers.

Using humor and levity to connect tour-goers with art was commonly used by docents in this study. Humor and levity often manifested as laughter with the intent to loosen up a group in the first five minutes as seen on the tours led by Gertie, Kaye, and Shirley (Field notes, 2/24/09, 4/7/09, 4/22/09). This practice was especially helpful in very unfamiliar settings or where docents were not getting a reaction from tour-goers based on what they said. Lucille said, "I try to use humor at times if you can't get any reaction..." Shirley

explained that in period rooms where the lifestyle replicated is so foreign to most tour-goers today, she stated:

I try to use humor if I can. I have to be careful not to use sarcasm. Bringing in something like, 'Don't you travel with your staff? I know I don't anymore!' That kind of thing. People sort of relate to that, yeah, just because you are the one giving the tour, you didn't grow up this way either. I'll often say in the dining room, 'It was a formal dinner, and none of us no matter how our dress, would have been permitted into dinner.' Getting to put them into the tour and try to make it light.

Shirley's joking aimed to make tour-goers more comfortable and put the docent on their side, as an everyday person, not someone in a formal world who is demonstrating how the other half live.

Taking the spotlight off of the tour-goers, another way docents used levity and humor to help tour-goers smile and laugh was to share with them what children have said about objects they are looking at. This often resulted in humorous interpretations of the paintings on the tour. For example, Michael, Gertie, Lawrence, Tammy, Judith, Cheryl, and Kaye were observed telling tour-goers how kids on previous tours saw works of art and this, without fail, solicited laughs (Field notes 2/12/09, 2/24/09, 3/20/09, 3/22/09, 3/24/09, 4/6/09, 4/7/09). For example, when asked about how she decided to share the perspective of the youngest museum-goer, Judith said, "If I mention children, it almost seems to pull the people in. It's something that they...can hook onto right away in case they are wandering or getting bored or tired." The frequency of use of this technique at three of the four museums demonstrates it is well-known.

A third humorous way that docents grabbed people's attention was to pretend that tour-goers were going to be tested on the material covered in the tour. Kaye explained how she did this: "If a group was so-so, at [a particular object], I would have said, like, 'Look at those colors, because I'm going to test you when we go to the next gallery to see if you can find those colors in another painting.'" Lucille also ribbed tour-goers with this threat:

I've joked with adults that have come through when they've asked lots and lots and lots of questions and I'll say, 'Well I'm glad you've asked because there will a test!' which is amazing because people will look at you like, 'you are joking!?' It's a connection with a group.

Docents' use of good-natured sarcasm, funny quips by children to lighten the mood, and mild teasing about an assessment at the end of the tour were techniques utilized to manifest art-centeredness when the objects were sometimes incredibly foreign, erudite, or complicated. Prepared humorous material was reliable for docents as tour-goers' reactions were somewhat predictable.

When docents recounted children's interpretations of objects to adults, they were telling a little story about a past event which they experienced. Stories of all kinds were told on tours: how a commission came to be, why an object was created, how an artist worked, what a patron thought about an object, how prior tour-goers interpreted art, and how the museum came to own an object. When considering sharing this kind of information with others, Judith said, "Interpretation is kind of fun because it gives you the creativity to weave a story." Docents chose what pieces to include in each story and what portion of a story they told. As mentioned in their individual biographies, docents at each museum were avid storytellers though the stories they told were typically one to four minutes.

Stories were used on tours to present information in a memorable way for the viewer rather than reciting dates, names, and places as one would in a lecture. At Museum D, where Shirley guided tour-goers through period rooms on a thematic tour, she explained, “I use social history as a story rather than doing chapter and verse on every object in a room. I call that machine-gun guiding and that serves no one unless you are another guide that wants to know it.” At Museum C, telling stories on tours was encouraged by the museum. Vera explained, “When we get the manual for the training they have a piece in there, they highlight that they would like it to be told as a story, to kind of make it flow.” She thinks the reason stories are promoted by the museum “is because they help to build a personality for [the artist], like his wit and his really knowing what he wants, like where he took the mortar out of the stone or where he got the curves in the walls.... it shows him as a person.” Similarly, William shared that he tells stories about the artist because “you want to flesh out the person that you are trying to explain... I don’t think you can do that just with facts, numbers, and figures and stuff.”

Along similar lines, stories were used to connect tour-goers with objects. While describing a work by a female artist, Kaye told the brief “story of a group of women going around the U.S. painting so that makes women (on the tour) very, very proud. You get that connection right there, feminism. A lot of them (tour-goers) you find out dabble in paint themselves.” Prefacing a story he wanted to tell, William asked tour-goers if they had read any works by a classic author who had inspired the artist (Field notes, 3/27/09). After tour-goers answered, William told a little story of how the writer influenced the artist’s works. Both Kaye and William attempted to connect with tour-goers through the stories they choose to share.

Docents were aware of how stories were being received by their audiences and this factored into whether they continued telling them. Wesley looked at nonverbal cues to ensure stories were resonating. He said, "I can see by the people's eyes that they find these stories interesting." Checking in with people was also done by Gertie who, when describing an artist's technique, explained:

Every tour is different. Sometimes I use this story and sometimes I don't. This group responded really well to stories so you throw many stories into the tour. My experience is that people remember better with stories than facts. So any story I can learn about an artist or a painting; I love to have that information.

In sum, stories were told to: present information in a thematic manner, offer specific examples that demonstrated an artist's personality, and connect people to works and artists they might not look at twice. Docents treated each tour-group as new, telling different stories depending on the audience and testing stories to see how tour-goers responded to determine if the use of stories continued.

Along with humor and stories, many docents advocated interaction with tour-goers in that they sought to get visitors to speak during the tour and take an active role in it. Cheryl said that Museum A likes docent-led tours to be interactive but docents from all museums in the study were often observed using various interactive techniques such as engaging tour-goers in tour content and asking them softball questions to begin a dialogue. For example, Cheryl encouraged interaction on her tour by asking all tour-goers to participate by sharing what they saw in a painting. During our interview, Cheryl raised the issue of interactivity. She wanted her interactive method to be noticed. While answering a question about what she hoped people learn on her tour, Cheryl said:

Did you notice I asked a lot of questions? ...I specifically did that with the...painting of Jim Hawkins on the boat (from the book, *Kidnapped*). We looked at it and I had everyone (answer the questions) ‘Where is this, and What do you think?’ I asked them all...’What does that mean? What were pirate ships? How was the parrot evil?’

By tour-goers sharing their personal thoughts about the art they became active participants on the tour. Cheryl explained:

Encouraging them to look at the painting and tell you what they see... it is a collective experience because we had eight people and they were all in on what was happening in that picture... To me, to be interactive is a better way of teaching.

In this situation, tour-goers were told that there were no wrong answers, and alerted that many interpretations of this painting had been heard over the years (Field notes, 4/6/09). This let tour-goers know that they were part of a lineage where interactivity was common and comfortable. When asked why she made a habit of this, Cheryl stated that “people learn a lot more if they can feel that they are a part of what you’re doing...” Here, Cheryl shared the reins for a bit, by creating a personal and interactive moment with an open-ended question, though she still maintained ultimate control of when to end the idea exchange and move on to the next work of art.

Likewise, Mabel, whose audience was older, asked many history-type questions, things her audience members could remember and seemed to appreciate hearing and discussing as they perked up and chatted amongst themselves recalling memories (Field notes, 4/3/09). When asked why she chose to ask tour-goers about their recollections, she explained: “The important thing is to engage people to make this an interactive experience rather than to be a passive experience. It gives people an opportunity to shine and to feel

good.” Her tour-goers left having been able to share stories of wars and old news events, which was related to the objects on the tour.

On her tour, Danielle asked tour-goers to guess the material of the legs of a chair. Instigating more dialogue, when Michael brought his group to a depiction of the Goldilocks story, he immediately asked what the visitors saw and asked them to describe the scene. In front of a painting from the Hudson River school movement, Lawrence asked tour-goers what reminds them of the Hudson and what feelings they get about it. Both Michael and Lawrence’s questions led to a group conversation. On a different tour, after introducing herself, Kaye asked her tour-goers a question about what they thought might be the meaning behind the first object on her tour. When asked about her questioning the audience and expectations for their response, she explained “They are looking at that painting... and you have to wait. You have to understand as a docent is that it’s not going to come right the first 30 seconds. You can wait up to a minute and half to get a response.” Kay was patient, allowing tour-goers time to respond.

Interaction was also used to create buy-in from tour-goers. Lucille explained, “It’s that interaction that I think makes someone have a connection. They now own the tour; they are part of it, in some way, looking at something differently.” A few docents chose tactics intended to compel tour-goers to be more invested in the tour, so that it was more applicable to their interests and needs. On Tammy’s tour, before she left a room that was full of objects to lead them into the next, she turned and asked, “Anything else catch your eye?” (Field notes, 3/22/09) This simple question let tour-goers know that what they wanted to hear about would be covered. It provided an opportunity for people to speak up and have their needs met.

Interestingly, in the same room, when he felt interest waning from his audience, William asked, “Which sculptures are you interested in finding out more about?” The direct question put the ball in the court of tour-goers whose attention was quickly regained and they became reengaged and asked about specific objects (Field notes, 3/27). It also reminded tour-goers that this tour is for them and if they are done hearing about objects in a particular room, the group can safely move on since everyone had an opportunity to speak up.

Another way docents were observed getting tour-goers to speak, other than by asking direct questions about their viewing interests, is docents asking softball or easy questions. In particular, one audience at Museum C, comprised of a group of college students who were on a required class field trip, was very quiet. They were shy until William posed basic questions where people knew they would be giving the correct response (Field notes, 3/27/09). When asked about doing this, William said: “Giving them softball question like that makes them more engaged.” The result was that the group became chattier, showed reactions, and then eagerly had multiple people answer questions when the questions were simple. Lawrence also used this technique, as a bit of an ice breaker to loosen up the audience (Field notes, 3/20/09). He said if you:

Ask questions and they should be general...You want all the answers to be right. You don't want a person on the tour to feel that he or she doesn't know. If you ask a specific question and someone is wrong how would they feel?

He typically asks the name of the person who gave the correct answer, to highlight and praise him or her. Softball questions are about making tour-goers feel good in a foreign setting and that they are part of the tour. Each person who contributes an answer is helping the tour move

along and helping the docent cover material. Engaging and investing tour-goers and the use of softball questions make for an interactive tour.

Another way to get and hold the attention of people was for the docent to use theatrical techniques. Not reliant on a cooperative audience to achieve success with interactive techniques, dramatic techniques were used by docents to enliven their tours. Some docents were well-versed with savvy presentation techniques to draw in one's audience. Vera explained what she considers when presenting objects: "The docent is aware of ... whether they're talking loud enough, whether they're talking enthusiastically enough, whether they're going in a monotone just reciting." Lawrence said he lowers his voice so that tour-goers strain to hear which he believes makes them more attentive. Judith combined voice modulation and physicality to draw in tour-goers (Field notes, 3/24/09). She said plainly, "If I want to pull people closer to me, I lower my voice." Where she stood in relation to the visitors was key, as was where the docent looked. Judith explained how she did this when in front of a large painting of an old glass bottle that reflected light:

I've blocked. I pushed myself off the corner and I wanted to bring them to 'Dusty Bottle' (a painting)... so where you put your body has a lot to do with it, we've noticed... where you position yourself, how you get your eyes going back and forth to kind of pull people in.

This move—standing to the side of the painting, which is approximately three feet square—let tour-goers get in closer, allowing them to see its details. Tour-goers focus on the object, so that, without physically touching an object, the docent can 'point' to what she is talking about and get people to focus their attention where she wants during their time in front of the painting.

Another way to draw in tour-goers and hold their attention is to demonstrate one's enthusiasm about the subject. Lawrence said, "I feel one of my best characteristics is to be passionate about what I'm talking about...my interest, my facial expression, my animations, my recognition." During his tour, he got animated telling stories about the artists and their commissions using hand gestures and pretending to be the artist considering a job (Field notes, 3/20/09). Lastly, a classic theatrical technique is to employ a prop. When Cheryl led her audience through a gallery of a single artist's illustrations, she surprised tour-goers by pulling out a book that featured the artist's work. This move turned people's attentions from the gallery walls directly to her. Tour-goers moved closer to her to see the small book (Field notes, 4/6/09). Cheryl slowly flipped pages and discussed the objects, a way to give a tangible example of the artist's work and captivate the attention of those on tour.

Though not a way to determine or deliver content, one presentation technique of note, observed by a few, was the docent making eye contact with one individual on the tour and then after a few minutes, switching to someone else and keep moving through the group. Tammy explained the technique of looking and speaking to a single tour-goer by saying, "You become a more engaged learner. When you watch someone who is being looked at by the docent, you identify with the person spoken being to." She attributed this technique to her years in radio where the speaker tries to sound like she is speaking to one person.

In sum, aiming to personally connect with tour-goers around the art objects and different techniques to facilitate this are part of what kept the objects under the spotlight during these tours. Every action, joke, question, and prop used by a docent was meant to focus or refocus people to the art before them.

Docents ‘threw light upon’ objects in different ways, some communicating in the most appropriate way given the group while others stepping aside and seeking to put visitors in a direct relationship with art. Docents were willing to mold themselves based on the makeup of the audience in order to foster understanding and ensure that the most suitable perspective was conveyed. To get visitors connected to erudite art, jokes, sarcasm, questions, and drama were used on tour-goers. Docents did not exhibit a ‘one size fits all’ attitude when it came to making art clear to people, but treated groups of museum visitors as unique and one of a kind, like the art objects they presented.

Projecting one’s Horizon of Meaning

While strategies to throw light upon foreign objects are effective and vary by docent, each approached this task differently, some more direct and others more laissez faire. Modeling Hermes and guiding from the side are *how* a docent acted, the approach taken. *What* a docent said on a tour is different than tour style. Each said things for a specific reason given the audience of the moment. Gadamer (1976) calls what each person projects in an interpretation a “horizon of meaning” (p. xv) and docents projected different perspectives depending on the situation. The current social and political milieu, one’s own value structure, and assumption made about the person or people to whom one is interpreting influence how something is explained to the public. Docents were able to speak about their individual horizon of meaning and how they were able to mold their presentation based on those who they had on a tour since one’s horizon of meaning is adaptable depending on whom the audience is and the docent’s assumptions about the people to whom the docent is speaking.

Many aspects of tour-goers played a part in a docent's presentation. Docents listed a number of factors they took into consideration in order to personalize their tours. These assumptions about the audience vary based on tour-goers' value structure, influences, background, etc. This meant that with each group, docents responded slightly differently and tried to give the most appropriate presentation.

The notion of having a unique perspective was not lost on these docents. In addition to reading the audience, docents were aware that each of their perspectives was distinct from the next. Tammy was sensitive to her impact on how objects on a tour were presented. She stated: "We may pretend that some things are a fact but it depends upon how we present it.... What a tour looks like is my interpretation each time." Danielle also recognized the imprint she had on a tour and how she explained something:

...but from a certain point of view. Nobody is the same and nobody is going to the give exactly the tour exactly the same way because you are interested in certain things more than others. You are explaining something but...it's affected by your background and your view on it.

This is an acknowledgement that the docent has an innate effect on the presentation of tour content. Each docent does his or her tour a little differently. As Lucille said, "All these docent tours you'll take are going to be totally different because of personal interest or style." One can go on two different docent-led tours and see new objects on each tour and hear about different aspects of the collection, artists, museum, etc. When a docent gears the tour toward the audience, this is done based on a number of factors. Visual and audible clues made by tour-goers help indicate to the docent to whom he or she is speaking and what brought them to the museum. This continually occurs during the tour.

Docents listed a number of considerations they made involving visitors when deciding what to tell. These included tour-goers': residence, prior knowledge of art, gestures made during the tour, reasons for attendance, and frequency at the museum.

Residence

The first factor affecting how docents frame the tour is where tour-goers reside. At the beginning of their tours, Michael, Wesley, Vera, William, Cheryl, Shirley, and Lucille asked where tour-goers were from (Field notes, 2/12/09, 3/21/09, 3/22/09, 3/27/09, 4/6/09, 4/22/09, 4/22/09). Since three of the museums in the study focus on regional artists, it was important to docents to determine whether or not visitors knew the local sites depicted, the region's history, etc. For this reason, William said, "If people are from out of town it makes a big difference on the tour." On the other hand, if there are locals who find the locations, people, and settings recognizable, there is a bit of common ground already established. Michael spoke a lot about what farm used to be where decades ago because the tour-goers were longtime locals (Field notes, 2/12/09). He explained: "I gave a bit of local color because I assumed they were familiar with most of these locations... They (the observed tour-goers) knew a lot of the painters and their backgrounds. Therefore, I didn't have to give them a lot of background information."

Another reason docents seek to know where tour-goers reside is so that the docent can relate an object geographically to someone from that region. For example, Shirley said, "If they tell me they are from Hudson River I can then bring it into a tour. If they tell me they are from Charleston, I can relate it to a house." Similarly, Cheryl said she likes to find out where people are from "because we might have a show here or there might be a person here who

might have come from their area. I try to personalize the tours as much as I can.” Docents’ efforts to make objects relatable to tour-goers demonstrated that they sought to find common ground and offer a perspective that would be appropriate to and meaningful for a particular group.

Prior Knowledge

Second, factoring in tour-goers’ perceived education level or art savviness was something that docents acknowledged but spoke about in vague terms. Docents assessed the prior knowledge of art the individuals might have when they presented objects to tour-goers whose sophistication level they were able to determine in relation to the work presented. For instance, Cheryl referred to a recent tour she led to demonstrate why she gave the tour the way she did: “I had a group here the other day from a farming community. Well it’s not going to be as sophisticated as if I had somebody that comes from the Corcoran Gallery in Washington.” Therefore, her artistic references were more general. Testing waters, in a nonchalant way, Vera and Mabel asked if anyone on their tours was an artist (Field notes, 3/22/09, 4/3/09). Vera said that if she had an artist or woodworker, she “might point out certain things...or allow them to, or encourage them to get down and really look, [as] sometimes you get people who get down under the desk to see how it’s constructed.” Mabel said that: “If there are artists on the tour the questions [she would ask of the group] would be more technical usually and the answers will be more technical.”

Also letting tour-goers’ prior knowledge of art factor into what they said, Lawrence explained, “You have to know your audience and that might color a lot of the ways I ask questions and follow up because I know they are knowledgeable.” Having art-savvy visitors

means that insider references can be used and with this information the docent is meeting tour-goers at a level appropriate for them.

Gestures

Continuing with the personal nuances docents assess a fourth factor, that of, physical gestures tour-goers made during the tour. Actions speak louder than words and docents picked up on tour-goers' symbolic gestures such as their body language, facial expression, and general response to what was being said. Vera explained, "You're aware of how things are being received and whether you need to change things around or not." Docents were continually aware of how they were being received by the audience and made adjustments based on how things went.

Carefully watching the facial movements and body was repeatedly cited as indicators to docents as to how things were being received. For example, Gertie said that she can "...see how they respond by their faces and body language. They have a way of telling you. Touring a lot, you begin to pick up on cues and make a decision." Tour-goers' faces were a window into how the experience was going for visitors. Similarly, Judith explained: "It's their faces I think that are best thing, that's why you end up reading them." In particular, Tammy focused on their eyes: "I see where people are looking... I can see where people's interests are and I start there." So, without asking what is of interest to them, she let tour-goers lead by what captured their attention and watching them. The physicality and attitude tour-goers display also helped docents assess the situation. William described a kind of low energy his tour-goers displayed, "When they didn't want to know any more about the sculpture, they kind of made that point...you could tell because they were starting to chat amongst themselves,

started to wander.” As a result, William decided it was time to leave that room and move them on to something different.

Likewise, Lucille said that physicality is something she considered when determining if the tour is going well: “Looking at body posture, if the shoulders are down and the head is down, I’m not saying anything that strikes a chord ...” Similarly, Kaye said she can tell how she is being received by: “The look on their face, they’re not looking at the art. They’re looking at their friends, they are just not responding to what is going on in front of them.” When asked how Shirley based how she gauged people’s interest level she responded that it “depends on the body language of the visitor...” Watching gestures assisted in determining if docents continued with more of the same or if things need to be modified. Gertie told some stories in her tour and said, “This group responded really well to stories so you throw many stories into the tour.” She continued with a technique that worked. Vera said, “The response of the people there, if they’re showing enthusiasm and interest for a certain things, then I might include that more and drop something else.” Alternatively, if something was not working as well as a docent would like, docents were willing to make quick adjustments mid-tour. Michael explained: “I try and gauge as we’re going around how they are responding and I may change the focus of the tour if I’m not getting a response from the group.”

Docents’ continual awareness of the situation, looking at tour-goers for clues as to their demeanor and interest level allowed for quick adaption on the part of guides. Based on what information or a feeling they obtained from tour-goers, docents reacted and projected a certain perspective they deemed most appropriate. Likewise, docents did this based on what brought someone to the museum in the first place. This gets into tour-goers’ motives, which include people: genuinely interested in being in the museum, not interested and

accompanying a spouse, tourists in town seeing the sites, or artist or museum aficionados who have extensive backgrounds in the subjects.

Reason for Attendance

Before almost each tour, docents sought to determine what information the tour manager knew about the group such as where they were from, the organization or club with which they were affiliated, and if there were any physical limitations (Field notes, 3/20/09, 3/23/09, 3/24/09, 3/27/09, 4/3/09, 4/6/09, 4/7/09). Cheryl explained: “We almost always are told whether it’s a general tour or if they want a special focus on history or...I have some who just want to do all of the illustrations that we have. It’s very individualized.” Lucille also liked to know information about why tour-goers visited:

If you can figure out why they’ve come here today then that helps most docents, certainly it helps me, where I’m going to go. Is it going to be more light and breezy or are we really going to talk about some things very specific in the room that would bore someone else to tears. It’s qualifying your guests...

Attributing their cognizance of lackadaisical husbands in tow on ladies’ museum visits due to their careers in tourism and market research respectively, Lucille and Kaye handled these men differently. Sizing up a group, Lucille rhetorically asked, “Is this a forced march your wife is making you walk through?” Then, “if that’s the case then maybe you try to, the part of the group that is not interested, to pull them into it”, a technique also seen at Museum B and C. Trying to make a connection, find something on the tour that these visitors could be interested in and enjoy, was Lucille’s tactic. Taking a somewhat different response, Kaye recently had a group where the wives had “dragged their husbands” to the museum and

the men were “not interested.” When she took the tour to a trench art exhibit, Kaye left the men in the trench art gallery and told them, “You guys are really having a good time down here. You know? You are more than welcome to stay here, and the rest of us just go somewhere else.” She determined that this room of objects from various world wars would contain those objects in the museum that the men would be most interested in seeing. She said she broke the tour up for the men’s sake: “I want them to leave with the idea [that] I can go to a museum and have a good time.” Kaye proceeded with the others on the rest of the tour.

Getting to the root of what brought someone in the museum, and then, to take a docent-led tour, can help the guide in providing and the visitor in having a meaningful tour. Docents cared about the visitors’ motives and interests and adjusted their tour accordingly, demonstrated visitor-centeredness.

Frequency of Attendance

Finally, not interested in wasting anyone’s time by repeating information that tour-goers already knew, docents took into account how often visitors came to the museum. At the beginning of their tours, Michael, Lawrence, Vera, William, Mabel, Cheryl, and Shirley asked tour-goers if they had visited the museum before (Field notes, 2/12/09, 3/20/09, 3/22/09, 3/27/09, 4/3/09, 4/6/09, 4/22/09). For a few, that was the extent of their interactivity, demonstrating that this question was important enough for them to ask early on. Lucille explained how she altered her content if she had repeat guests: “If they have been here a number of times, you cut back on some of the basic introductory information.” Similarly, Mabel shared: “If the people have been here before, then I might not go into as

much of a description of the origin of the museum.” Vera said she asks the question because it gives her “a feel for people, how many times they return and... I guess that if there are others on the tour for the first time, they see that people do return which is important for the museum.” From her perspective, she would “give more time for them to ask questions about things that they see...” Lawrence said that with repeat guests, “Sometimes when I’m giving a tour and they’ve seen something I might refer back.” Meeting the tour-goers where they are, experience-wise, showed that docents aimed to offer the right tour for the right audience.

It is also important to note that when responding to the questions asked during their interview, docents were also projecting a particular horizon of meaning, which is somewhat related to impression management, as it is based on assumptions the docent makes about the person or people to whom one is interpreting (Rockmore, 2005). Since the horizon of meaning docents project to tour-goers may vary slightly from the one the researcher gets in the interview, the researcher considered this and questions about the data gathered during tour observations attempted to make participants focus on decisions they made in the galleries in the midst of it all, in an effort to reveal their most authentic selves.

In conclusion, a variety of aspects related to tour-goers impacted how docents responded to them. Tour-goers’ residence, gender, level of sophistication, physical gestures, reasons of being at the museum, and frequency at the museum affected: how docents conducted the tour; what they said; how much time they spent reviewing the basics; and the horizon of meaning docents projected.

Outcomes Docents Hope to Achieve

The final theme that was evident was that docents have specific and pointed outcomes that they hope to achieve on their tours. These outcomes are related to the success and feelings of fulfillment docents have upon completion of a tour and reflect upon what results the tour has for tour-goers. These results are related to creating certain feelings, behaviors, and outcomes docents have for museum tour-goers in the short term and in the longer term. The short term outcomes were tour-goers giving docents various kinds of feedback mid-tour and after and viewing the tour as a worthwhile experience. The longer term goals were that tour-goers look at art in a new way and in the future, return to the museum or another similar museum. These hopes reflect the educators' desire to have a positive impact on museum visitors and in the long term, the well-being of cultural institutions.

Short Term Goals

The most basic outcome that docents described was receiving feedback from tour-goers. Feedback allowed docents to 'take the temperature' of the audience, to see if people were engaged, bored, etc. Mid-tour, they would survey tour-goers' facial and physical reactions, and post-tour, listen to what tour-goers said and asked. This provided opportunities for docents to know how the experience was received.

Beginning with feedback offered mid-tour, this is where docents are juggling multiple tasks. Speaking about objects, being aware of the environment, and 'reading' their audience for any kind of feedback occurs simultaneously. Seeking some kind of reaction from the group was common and Lucille explained that tour-goers' actions were there to read: "You are either getting some kind of feedback either visually—expressions or a verbal, just looking

at people. You know, if they are yawning, if their eyes are glazed over, you know you are not connecting..." Wesley explained that mid-tour: "I can see by the people's eyes that they find these stories interesting." Getting a favorable response to something a docent said, whether it is a nod or laugh, is a form of positive reinforcement. Gertie commented on how 'reading' the audience came from years of experience, that you: "...see how they respond by their faces and body language. They have a way of telling you. Touring a lot, you begin to pick up on cues..."

The end of the tour is also an opportunity for individuals to share with the docent personal sentiments. On Lawrence's tour, visitors quietly shared with him that they knew the local farm he had referenced on the tour and they spoke about industrialization of nearby land development (Field notes, 3/20/09). At the end of Cheryl's tour, two women approached her to say that they had no idea all of these beautiful paintings were in their backyard and they could not wait to bring family members back (Field notes, 4/6/09). Wesley said that regularly, "People come up and talk to me about what I've spoken about, how they've learned who the artists were, and how much they enjoyed the tour." Similarly, Gertie was told by a longtime museum member who approached her at the tour's conclusion that she "hadn't heard some of the information...presented." Clearly, this tour-goer was focused enough on this and previous learning tours to recognize when new information was being presented.

Echoing Gertie's comments on how beneficial it is for visitors to audibly express that they are paying attention and are involved, Lucille stated:

It's like an audience. You want that feedback. You feel you have failed in some ways if you don't get some kind of a reaction or a question that indicates that they have

been listening. So it is sort of, I've done my job because you have given me something back that I know I've succeeded.

Docents hope to achieve some kind of feedback as it demonstrates that tour-goers are engaged in what is being said.

The second immediate goal docents expressed was a sincere interest in those on their tours having a worthwhile experience. Docents sought to deliver a product that met the expectations of visitors. Tour-goers determined whether the experience was 'worthwhile' to them. As part of this, many were aware of the financial and time commitments visitors made to get to the museum and take a tour and thus felt obligated to meet or exceed to visitors' expectations. Describing the relationship of a tour-goer, Lucille said:

I guess their role is they are buying a product, I hate to say it; it sounds so commercial. But they're here, they've paid good money and so they're expecting something in return. My product I guess for them is information and hopefully they expect a positive experience and hopefully I give that to them.

Shirley also echoed this sentiment, "People have paid money to be, I hate the word 'entertained'... This is a day out; it's something enjoyable so I try to make it an enjoyable experience." Shirley desired to make the time worthwhile for tour-goers from a monetary perspective and time perspective. She continued, "You may work for free but they still paid money to get in here." Likewise, Gertie said, "It's like a show. You are giving them something. I want them to think, 'I would not have enjoyed this trip to the museum if I hadn't had a docent.'" Similarly but with more emphasis on the financial aspect, William explained the economics, "You want them to get value. You don't want them to come out of the place and think, wow; I could have spent that \$10 somewhere else and gotten more." Docents'

appreciation and respect for the time of museum visitors demonstrates that their respect for their role and the museum extends to those whom they take on tours.

Docents sought an immediate reaction from tour-goers about what was being presented and hoped that tour-goers felt that the experience was worthwhile and valuable use of their time and money. Additionally, docents had more substantial goals for their tour-goers involving their behavior.

Longer Term Goals

An outcome docents hoped to achieve for tour-goers in the long term was that information they gave on the tour caused tour-goers to look at art in a new and more connoisseur-like way. If docents were able to provide a lesson that would influence visitors' future behavior by providing them with tools with which to view art, allowing them to see and appreciate art with 'new eyes,' then docents deemed it a worthwhile experience for tour-goers.

Having sufficient influence on tour-goers to change the way they look at art is no small feat. Meeting this outcome was not verbalized by every participant but Cheryl was specific in her hope that after taking her tour, tour-goers will "look at art with a fresh eye." To her, the tour was valuable for visitors if they are able to do this, and in addition, she wants visitors to:

Take away the joy of looking at art and the different types of art... I hope they look to *see* a painting. Not just walk past it, but look at it in depth and have some understanding of how it is composed, the history, the color, the brush work."

To help meet this goal, Cheryl explained to tour-goers works' art historical background, techniques, and different media (Field notes, 4/6/09). Similarly, Michael shared his goals: "I hope they come away with an interest in the artist and who they were...and hopefully some appreciation of what the artist is trying to say." In the same way, Shirley aimed to "get them (tour-goers) to see something that they may have walked past or not notice before" or "look at something differently" as Lucille described.

Wesley took a slightly different approach, appealing to tour-goers' sense of financial value, to see art not just as pleasing to the eye, but as a valuable commodity. Twice he shared what a work of art had sold for (Field notes, 3/21/09) which he thought enhanced what people thought of the paintings:

I think people realize that this stuff is not \$50 art at the corner market. People start seeing the value of art because most of the people who view the art here are not educated art lovers. I try to give them the facts so the art means more than something just hanging on the wall.

Each of these docents, in various ways, hoped to offer visitors the ability to look at art with a new perspective. With the motive of enlightening tour-goers to enhance their viewing experience, docents are 'opening the eyes' of museum visitors.

Finally, docents repeatedly mentioned hoping tour-goers would want to return to the museum where they just visited, but also more comprehensively, to become active museum-goers at other institutions. Fostering this interest in visiting museums is an example of docents hoping to instill in tour-goers a curiosity in culture and the desire to support institutions that preserve objects. Being in the habit of frequenting museums takes practice

and docents wanted to set tour-goers on that path. Cheryl said, “I try to make it fun, alive, bring it alive, so that they’ll come back, not just to this museum, but to the other museums.”

Similar but more specific to returning to their particular museums, Vera recognized the value in tour-goers returning to take another tour in the future, as “there is value to coming back because each docent highlights different things and there is just so much to see there that it almost demands another tour to see what is here.” Gertie stated, “I hope they’ll want to come back and that they love the museum and had a great experience when they’re here.” On her tours, Shirley thinks about “how to make it an inviting place so that people want to come back.” Judith wants tour-goers to know:

That they have a gem right here in their own backyard and to come back again because there are always things changing. I really want to see people come back. This is really a nifty little spot to come back to.

Finally, Kaye recognized that developing the habit of frequenting museums should start early in people’s lives, stated that her “goal is to have people walk out with the idea that a museum is fun and I can go back to another one without feeling intimidated...” Kaye spoke about how she tells children on tours to suggest their parents take them to museum, even if only to eat ice cream in the sculpture garden since the garden is public and she believes it should be frequented more. Making the external and internal space welcoming and comfortable for visitors, docents play the role of stewards of the collection.

Helping facilitate this feeling among visitors was approached by docents from many angles. Some outright encouraged tour-goers to become members of the museum, as William did (Field notes, 3/27/09), and others approached more subtly. Lucille succinctly stated the

outcomes she hoped to achieve by the tour's end: "If I can get someone to want to come back to a museum like this, or come back to this one, then I've been successful."

Achieving any or some of the immediate or more large scale outcomes described above, tour-goers: giving feedback, having a worthwhile experience, seeing art in a new way, and returning to this or another museum is almost dependent on meeting some if not most of the others. These specific outcomes are examples of the deep personal meaning tour giving has on docents as they share objects with strangers and also the significant long-term effect docents can have on both visitors and the institutions they frequent.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the findings based on the observations and interviews performed. The findings surrounding how docents perceive of their role as interpreters were grouped into three overarching categories. The first finding, delivering and individualized and valued tour, came across as docents had little discussing tour nuances and the importance of making a tour worthwhile to tour-goers. Many spoke about ways their tour was different than the next docent's. Also, the dedication museum docents exhibited toward the institutions came across when docents explained their commitment, preparation, etc. to the role. Second, the ways docents threw light upon objects were explained. Third, the factors influencing a docent's perspective or horizon of meaning were examined. Finally, the short and long term goals docents had for both tour-goers and themselves were presented.

Chapter 6

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore docents' perceptions of their interpretive role in museums and determine how those perceptions shape their practice. In addition, the researcher sought to determine how various aspects of the environment, including the audience and the nonformal setting, influenced how docents perceive their interpretive role; how interpretive techniques are used to educate tour-goers; and what assumptions docents made about their audiences and the tour content. When one considers the findings in relation to the existing literature, a number of points warrant further discussion: docents' perception of tour-goers and vice versa, prior teaching experience influenced the docent's practice, constructivism exhibited on tours, docents sought to create a tailored educational interaction, and stories and humor were popular interpretative techniques. Implications for practice and suggestions for future research studies are also discussed in this chapter.

Docents' Perception of Tour-goers and Vice Versa

Repeatedly, docents spoke of how much individual tour-goers impact a tour insofar as what docents say and how much time is spent in front of particular objects. For example, docents listed nonverbal clues tour-goers offered to express their level of interest, stamina, etc. and appraised this feedback. Tour-goers were observed with wandering eyes, yawning, chatting amongst themselves, and shuffling their feet while the docent spoke, meaning tour-goers were getting restless and were ready to move on to the next object, which the docent

did. Some found that visitors enjoyed hearing stories, based on their facial expressions and reaction. Thus, docents told more stories.

How a docent responded to tour-goers' actions was based on what the docent thought the actions he or she observed meant. The physical gestures listed above could be described as symbols of how the tour-goer feels and clues to how the tour is being received by listeners. One way to understand these symbols or gestures is through the lens of symbolic interactionism which recognizes that both the verbal and nonverbal feedback a docent receives impacts his or her perception and behavior. Feedback is given via symbolic gestures and "human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols" (Blumer, 1986, p. 79). This directly relates to what occurred on tours, as a docent's behavior was modified based on feedback offered by tour-goers. The docent is "making some judgment or appraisal of him (the listener)...trying to find out what he has on his mind" (Blumer, 1986, p. 194). With little of the existing research about docents informed by theory, understanding docents' practice by looking at an accepted communications theory these educators practiced, even if unknowingly, helps us understand and appreciate their behavior on tours. The nonverbal aspect of the educator receiving feedback from learners has been seen in other studies in NFE settings (Taylor, 2008, 2006, 2005; Taylor & Neill, 2008) and symbolic interactionism offers a new way to explain the phenomena.

One concern is that since the docent and tour-goer only just met, it is possible that the meaning of a tour-goer's action or remark could be misinterpreted and the docent makes an incorrect reading of the audience from which the rest of the tour is based. While symbolic interactionism offers a framework to understand how a docent's role changes with interaction with others involving ascertaining the meaning of their actions or remarks (Blumer, 1966), it

does not take into account that the docent and tour-goers are meeting for the first time, nor does it provide insight into how best to respond. Considering the newness of the relationship, so much reliance on reading symbols may not be the most accurate detector of people's feelings and thoughts.

Moreover, seasoned docents were able to perceive how tour-goers would react with predictable behavior when docents used certain techniques on tours. For example, Judith, while describing a painting her group was observing, physically worked her way behind tour-goers. As a result, all tour-goers stepped forward, closer to the canvas, without verbal prompting. This was what Judith hoped would happen and it did, seemingly naturally. Also, when Lawrence lowered his voice to emphasize a part in a story he was telling, tour-goers leaned in, and appeared to be listening more intently than before the volume change. A tenet of symbolic interactionism is that people interpret and define another's actions rather than merely react to them. Symbolic interactions are when clues are read, processed, and meanings are inferred. In the examples above, tour-goers' responses seemed more like reactions to docents' action rather than tour-goers interpreting or defining docents' actions. Reactions or reflexes are nearly instantaneous physical responses where behavior is not assessed, therefore, are not symbolic, yet there is such a thing as unconscious motives (Blumer, 1986), thus, it is possible that not all symbolic interactions need be on a conscious level. Technically, the theory would not apply to the behavior described above since it is reactionary and this is significant because reactions do occur, which help build the relationship between tour-goers and docent and lure people closer to the objects. While communicating without the intentional use of symbols is not symbolic (Charon, 1995), tour-goers communicated to participants by yawning, looking in different directions, and shuffling

their feet—all read as symbols of restlessness. These purposeful strategic actions are not able to be understood under this conceptual framework.

Since the communication process is two-way, one also has to wonder about the symbols tour-goers picked up on from docents. All interactions are dynamic and we ought to consider what the learner thinks about the docent's actions. A docent's personality comes across very quickly as he or she is usually the first one to speak and set the tone for a tour. How the docent acts and sounds are symbols to tour-goers about what to expect for the next forty minutes. For example, the docent's tone of voice, degree of bossiness, and reaction to receiving questions, are indicators or symbols to tour-goers that may in fact influence their behavior on the tour, such as standing in the back or deterring them from asking what they perceive as juvenile questions. While not the focus of this study, a tour-goer's reading of a docent's gestures or expressions is an important part of the equation and should be considered as it could reshape the nature of the interaction, especially since the docent typically initiates the conversation.

As discussed in this section, there are many complex ways that tour-goers and docent perceive different things about each other in the galleries, primarily through behavior and the use of symbols, some of which would and would not be considered symbolic, but all drive and shape the interaction between tour-goers and docents as they read the signal each emits. As part of their interpretive role, docents assumed the task of assessing the audience (Taylor & Neill, 2008) from the moment the tour began, as they looked for, read, and interpreted cues or symbols given by tour-goers. The dynamic nature of the communication between docent and tour-goers meant that docents' interpretive role was extended beyond that of just

paintings and sculptures but to each new tour group as they sought to accurately interpret strangers' behavior.

Prior Teaching Experience Influenced the Docent's Practice

The profession of teaching dominated the participants' backgrounds. Before retiring, seven participants taught elementary, middle school, high school, or in the workplace. Another earned a degree in art education. Since eight of the fourteen had training and/or experience as an educator, by their own admission, some of their practices from the formal setting carried over to the nonformal setting. Lucille, Kaye, Judith, Danielle, and Vera spoke of techniques they used in the classroom that worked their way into tours, including what Judith and Danielle called "teacher voice." This can be understood by hermeneutics as educators must realize that their curricular decisions, whether consciously or unconsciously, are influenced by their past (Slattery, et al., 2007).

Interestingly, when participants were asked to consider a perspective beyond their own, that is, how tourgoers view them as docents, almost all participants who were teachers quickly gravitated toward seeing themselves in a teacher-type role. For example, Gertie said that she thinks tour-goers view her as "an authoritative figure and possibly as a teacher." Judith and Danielle felt similarly. Only one non-teacher in the sample, Wesley, said that he viewed the docent as the teacher and on his tour, he was very traditional in his approach. It should be noted that on a museum tour, behaving like a teacher would be more like a favorite teacher would, where stories are told, no notes taken, and with no assessment at the end. Of course, docents, unlike teachers, are volunteers and not held responsible for meeting specific educational objectives or achieving learning outcomes, given the nonformal setting.

Returning to the finding of the former educators using formal teaching techniques in the nonformal setting and feeling that learners perceive them as teachers, it is difficult to know how much of that perception is self-imposed in assuming a familiar role or is real. It is important to consider whether these docents are gravitating to a role most comfortable to them based on their past or if they are truly behaving in the role in which tour-goers put them. This finding could be understood in the framework of symbolic interactionism which has the belief that we act toward others based on the meanings people have others. This is important because under the theory, tour-goers would see docents as teachers and therefore might expect an interaction typically found in a more formal education setting. Docents' responses could be understood through the theory since it believes that one's past influences one's perceptions (Blumer, 1986). Note that non-teachers reported feeling like and being viewed as tour guides. Semantically, 'teacher' and 'tour guide' are different in that one implies instructing, and other leading.

However, there are few other reasons why these docents may have said tour-goers view them as a teacher. First, since each docent program falls under a museum's education department, it is not terribly surprising that some docents see themselves as fulfilling the role of a teacher or educator. This is the department responsible for carrying out the museum's education mission. Equating teachers with delivering education is normal.

Second, the docent putting himself or herself in the shoes of a tour-goer in order to consider his or her perspective was done before by this group. Examples include Gertie being conscious that her elderly group was looking for benches in galleries and choosing objects near seats so her group could rest and Judith opting not to take her wheelchair-bound group to see tiny ink etchings that only one person at a time can view because it would be

“inappropriate.” In these situations, each docent considered the museum-going experience as a visitor. Thus, it is possible that was also done when docents considered how tour-goers view them, though it is unclear if some of the docents who were formerly teachers really placed themselves in the shoes of tour-goers or merely assumed a prior role.

Constructivism Exhibited on Tours

Perhaps surprising given the traditional beliefs educators held about their role, practicing the transmission model of knowledge, many participants were adamant about engaging tour-goers in techniques that espouse constructivism, such as, promoting conversations around objects, hearing tour-goers’ interpretations, and not declaring objects’ meanings on high. Constructivism is a theory that sees learning “as an interpretive, recursive, nonlinear building process by active learners interacting with their surround—the physical and social world” (Fosnot & Perry, 2005, p. 34). The goal of instruction for learners is cognitive development and deep understanding.

The docents who demonstrated constructivist tendencies on their tours allowed tour-goers to experience the art on their own. Meanings were constructed by each individual. Tour-goers were encouraged to draw their own conclusions (Mayer, 2005) about objects they were trying to make sense of, demonstrated by both Gertie and Cheryl who told their groups, “There are no wrong answers.” These docents wanted tour-goers to form their own interpretations about objects based on their individual experiences and backgrounds (Witcomb, 2006). On his tour, Lawrence asked tour-goers only softball or open-ended questions and believed his role was to precipitate a conversation about objects. Creating dialogues with learners was a common technique used by those who espouse constructivism

in order to construct meaning together (Hein, 2006). The theory “has a natural affinity with approaches that are directed toward open-ended inquiry...” (Scheurman, 1998, p. 6) since knowledge is created by individuals not transferred to them by a teacher. In fact, “both hermeneutics and constructivism propose that knowledge is constructed through active interpretations of experience... [and that] knowledge is plural and fluid...” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a).

Beyond encouraging dialogue so individuals could construct their own meaning of objects, decisions docents made about how to build their tours exemplify the epistemology of constructivism. This was also evidenced in Mabel’s decision to give her tour-goers quiet time in an exhibit space to look, so as to let people experience objects for themselves. Similarly, Tammy encouraged visitors to discover things and make their own connection to objects as “there does not need to be an intermediary between them and the work.” Vera made her tours physically interactive, inviting people to touch or pull certain objects to demonstrate their uses, using both their hands and their minds to learn (Hein & Alexander, 1998). She stated that she enjoys hearing what tour-goers say about objects as she learns to “think about things more” based on tour-goers questions and comments, which speak to the constructivist beliefs that knowledge, can be constructed when learners are members of a group and the educator can learn as well. Lawrence and Cheryl recounted that they heard new interpretations by tour-goers for the first time on the days that they were observed. They had asked tour-goers to describe what they thought the meaning of a painting was which could be viewed as a form of working together to solve problems (Scheurman, 1998). That said, this study’s participants were not unconditionally practicing constructivism. For example, storytelling, a technique to transmit information from educator to learners en masse, was regularly

practiced, meaning that participants also valued the transmission model of learning and frequently interspersed it in small doses.

Interestingly, participants' emphasis on hearing and valuing the diverse voices of learners contradicts finding from those studies which found that non-formal educators emphasized the transmission model of learning (Witcomb, 2006). In those studies "epistemologically, the non-formal educators predominately conceptualized knowledge as bounded and finite—something that is transferred" (Taylor, 2005, p. 452) from instructor to learner. There, educators saw themselves predominantly as the keeper of knowledge and released it in appropriate doses to learners (Taylor 2006, 2005; Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004, Taylor & Neill, 2008). Few participants in this study—even the former educators—subscribed to that conception of knowledge.

One possible way to understand the difference in the findings in this study and the others is through the setting. The participants in the other studies who practiced the transmission model were at NFE sites ranging from home improvement centers to state parks. There, results could produce homeowners who could faux finish walls or bird watchers who could identify native flora and fauna. Only one study (Taylor & Neill, 2008) had an art museum as one of its settings and participants from it constituted only a quarter of the total study's participants. These typical NFE experiences encourage development of new skills while the focus in art museums is not as straightforward, nor intended to teach learners how to do something practical or a lesson about preserving the environment. Additionally, at the art museum, there was more perceived subjectivity of content.

Participants' use of open-ended questions and other participatory exercises around the art objects in the galleries speaks to the ambiguity inherent in interpreting art in any context.

Art is not bound and finite rather, meanings of objects can change over time and depend on who is interpreting. As Hooper-Greenhill (2000a) said, the process of constructing meaning in an art museum is “like holding a conversation, no interpretation is every fully completed. There is always more to say, and what is said may always be changed” (p. 23). Docents recognized the dynamic and open-ended nature of their subject and chose to lead people to see, experience, and contemplate art by engaging the public in conversations and encouraging tour-goers’ self-discovery, from which tour-goers could make meaning of the objects.

Docents Sought to Create a Tailored Educational Interaction

With each new group of tour-goers, docents tried to shape their tour so that it was appropriate and fitting to the learners, or create an educational interaction that was suitable for each tour group. By asking questions, telling stories, and engaging in a dialogue with tour-goers, docents strove to forge connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings in objects (National Association of Interpretation, 2008). These were tools in their arsenal of interpretive techniques. Docents practiced personal interpretation (Hems, 2006) by engaging tour-goers in content-related dialogues that aimed to meet the interests of tour-goers. Docents frequently asked if tour-goers had any questions along the tour and would stop to expand upon an object inquired about. This demonstrated flexibility and versatility. Also, Bruder & Ucock (2000) tell us that “the moment of encounter with a work of art implies specifically *interpretive* processes... [which is] an *interactive* accomplishment” (p. 337). That is, they found in conversations about paintings, the visual experience is being verbalized, or “a recursive symbolic relationship between things said and things seen is

established and exhibited” (p. 338) around common reference points. After using softball questions to make sure everyone was on the same page and establishing the fact that the conversation they would all have was going to try to be openly accessible to all tour-goers, docents in this study were good about making the tour personal to listeners with comments that were appropriate for the tour-goers before them.

Asking tour-goers questions about what brought them to the museum and what they see in paintings, and telling humorous stories past audiences have enjoyed, also supports Castle’s (2001) work that docents appealed to “the appetites and emotion” (p. 319) of tourgoers and strove to make tours relevant to each unique audience (Shumays & Leinhardt, 2002) while connecting tour-goers to the objects.

Ongoing communication between docents and tour-goers was sought by the docent. For example, Mabel encouraged tour-goers from a senior center to share their knowledge of reclaimed trench objects from wars past and Kaye asked about tour-goers’ comfort when sitting in wood chairs, which were part of an installation piece. Docents sought to converse with the audience about the topics before them and about what tour-goers were interested in hearing, as Tammy and William did when they checked in with tour-goers to encourage vocalization of their needs. Looking at this behavior through the lens of hermeneutics, one sees illustrations of the framework’s premise, that dialogue and conversation are the foundation of understanding and interpretation (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2007). Docents are providing a tailored educational interaction; they recognize the needs and interests of those on tour and mold what they say to the audience before them. For example, Lucille referenced an antique as being like a Coleman cooler to her young adult audience, a modern reference which may have made the object more relatable. Similarly, Michael referred to regional

landmarks that he knew his group of locals would appreciate. Acting as an interpreter, like Hermes, docents tried to match what they said so it would be understandable to their listeners.

These various examples of docents' efforts to connect tour-goers with the objects on the tour could be explained by docents promoting felt-involvement among the visitors, which is a motivational state achieved when an individual feels personally relevant, important, interested, and physiological aroused in the immediate event or situation (Celsi & Olson, 1988). The attention and involvement of tour-goers in an art museum is significantly influenced by his or her motivational state (Taylor, 2008). Felt-involvement influences the "amount and direction of their (visitors') attention... the cognitive and physical effort they expend during comprehension...the focus of their attention..." (Celsi & Olson, 1988, p. 223). For a tour-goer, this would mean paying attention, keeping up, being engaged, and focused on what the docent is saying and the direction in which the tour is going.

The conceptual framework of hermeneutics helps explain the methods docents used as it offers a way to help understand things from somebody else's point of view, appreciating the cultural and social forces that may have influenced their outlook. For example, time spent at craft and furniture shows speaking with dealers and collectors impacted Vera's perception and appreciation of the artist's work at Museum C. Hermeneutics also recognizes that the interpreter's background effects what is said about objects. For example, Cheryl's experience helping veterans and hearing their stories impacted her description of life for soldiers in the trench art exhibit and Tammy's work as an artist allowed her to speak about creating art with passion and respect for someone who was a fellow artist. Both of these influenced an interpretation given of an objects' meaning. The theory's principles evident on tours were the

interpreter as vessel through which meaning is communicated and dialogue as the foundation of understanding.

Part of the tailored educational interaction docents created involves docent and tour-goers responding to each other and collectively negotiating meaning, which is the starting point of symbolic interactionism (Fine & Beim, 2007). While one on one educational interactions would occur on some tours, they did not instigate a shift in the museum's overall message. Looking at symbolic interactionism and thinking about the issue of collective memory at places that educate about artifacts, which are often cultural symbols, one cannot help but consider how the participants in this study were seemingly unaware of how they rely "on concretized forms of collective memory negotiate(d) with each other" (p. 4). Participants did not question the authority of the docent manual or educators employed by the museum. They did not speak with other docents about alternative meanings of objects. They were not critical around their own negotiation of what something means. Rather, participants were hobbyists, most were retired, and they certainly did not present themselves as empowered to challenge the text in the manual or blaze their own interpretation trail. Of course, given that the average length of time of these people had spent as a docent at their respective museums was over seven years, they self-selected to be representatives of the museum. Perhaps those who were more critical of the establishment and what they were expected to tell tour-goers did not last in the role. Those who promulgated institutional messages did not seem to consider the issue of collective memory.

Stories and Humor were Popular Interpretative Techniques

Through stories, which connected the audience to objects (National Docent Symposium Council, 2001), docents communicated information through a convincing narrative that was “delivered with formal elegance and passion” (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p. 81). Through humor, docents aimed to make the museum visit fun, which almost all participants stated as a goal.

While stories were heard on most tours observed, at Museum D, where objects are displayed in period rooms in an estate rather than modern gallery space, tours truly “aimed to tell us how those objects ‘lived’ and what they meant at the time” (Vallance, 2002, p. 112) as works in ornate period rooms are normally arranged as if someone just left the room (Vallance, 2002). For example, a parlor was decorated for a child’s birthday party with desserts and presents laid out on the table. Lucille and Shirley, docents at Museum D, told many stories and spoke of what weekend guests to the house would experience from the moment they awoke in the guest quarters to how they would be entertained in the evenings in the dining room, music room, parlors, etc. Telling a story rather than giving a formal lecture was chosen and the objects illustrated and supported the narrative created for the exhibit. They held the belief shared by the National Docent Symposium Council (2001), that “looking at exhibits while listening to a story makes visualizing easier” (p. 61) as stories mentally transport tour-goers to a different era.

Storytelling was also used to promote an audience’s understanding of different cultures, times, and places (Haven & Ducey, 2007) and make situations ‘real’ for listeners (Butcher, 2006). Since Museum D offers thematic tours, it is helpful to distil the information, organize it, and carefully construct it into a cohesive, “strong story” (Levy, et al., 2001, p. 4)

that people will enjoy and remember. Docents at all of the other museums also told stories, but it should be noted that stories of all kinds were only for a few (one to four) minutes in length.

Storying the curriculum or weaving facts about art objects into a story format is not a technique that is part of the theory of constructivism as it entails one person transmitting or delivering messages to passive listeners. Widely used by participants in short doses, the content of stories at these museum sties served to open a window into an artist's life or object's meaning. Stories often ended with a small group discussion or with a laugh following a punch line. Unlike a lecture in which a teacher spouts factual information to achieve learning outcomes, a storyteller can work with stories in different ways: walk around them, "wander through them, step into their center, or hover on the edge" (McDrury & Alterio, 2003, p. 35) depending on, among other things, the listener's needs. Docents used many techniques to convey information on their tours and this was one that lapses into a traditional mode of delivery, creating the inability to label docents as full subscribers to the constructivist theory.

The second technique repeatedly seen on tours was docent's use of humor. Humor was used to break the ice at the beginning of a tour, to make people comfortable in the setting, to instigate conversation, and to get tour-goers to laugh or at a minimum, smile. Whether it was teasing the audience about preparing themselves for a quiz or a sarcastic remark about traveling with servants, docents' quips were light and playful. Jokes were typically canned and universally appropriate for tour-goers, regardless of their prior knowledge, frequency at museum, etc. Educators in this and other NFE setting turned to humor (Taylor & Neill, 2008), including the self-deprecating variety (Taylor, 2008, 2006,

2005), to make the event fun. Using humor could be explained as fitting into the docent's goal to establish a rapport with tour-goers (Taylor & Neill, 2008; Wolins, 1990) or to entertain them (Castle, 2001). Good interpretation has been described as "enjoyable and entertaining" (Alexander, 1979, p. 195) and using stories and humor would be examples of effective interpretative techniques in the NFE setting.

Deciding when to tell a story or inject humor in a tour, are impromptu decisions made in the field. Also in the field, docents were observed mediating content and discussed this when interviewed. What was included on a tour, the words used to describe an object, and how it was presented to tour-goers was part of the mediation docents did based on their knowledge of the collection and what they believed was important or relevant for the tour-goers before them.

Revisiting Research Questions

Returning to the three research questions that guided this study, the first is about how docent training, the audience, the nonformal setting, and museum content influence how docents perceive their interpretive role. Taking each aspect separately, beginning with docent training, the mandatory work docents did before being let free with the public was not frequently cited as having influenced how docents perceive their role, yet it certainly shaped how participants viewed their responsibilities and limits. Training established boundaries for what docents could speak about and offered a wealth of art historical information from which they could use to write their tour. Docents were acutely aware of rules that needed to be followed in order to protect the objects and to espouse the messages the institution wanted conveyed. Some participants cited docent training as the place they learned interactive

techniques or where they learned tips for handling certain kinds of audiences. Training was valued by all participants and some stated that they would have liked a longer training period, such as at Museum D.

The audience had a great deal of impact in how docents perceived their role. Participants ‘fed’ off of what they picked up on from tour-goers based on visual clues and what tour-goers stated. Many docents encouraged audience members to be actively engaged on the tour. Not operating in a vacuum, docents based the success of a tour on how their audience responded to them both during the tour and at its conclusion. The nonformal setting caused docents to recognize the fleeting time they had with tour-goers and they used the time to try to educate while creating a worthwhile experience for tour-goers. Balancing the amount of content docents needed or wanted to convey with tour-goers’ interest level was carefully negotiated with the time constraints. At ease in the galleries, docents were comfortable acting as leader of activities and decision maker regarding what would be included in the tour.

The content influences how docents perceive of their interpretive role in that they consider how the story of an object will resonate with tour-goers. While some museums dictate that some objects must be included on each tour, there is a great deal of flexibility in the remainder of objects covered on a tour. Docents tended to choose objects they deemed most accessible to their audience. Also, docents tended to choose objects they liked the most or those about which they knew a great deal.

Turning to the second research question, the interpretive techniques used to educate tour-goers in this study were the use of: group discussion, open-ended questioning, physical interactivity, similes, storytelling, humor, and drama. They were used to actively engage

tour-goers in the works before them by “verbalizing the visual experience” (Bruder & Ucock, 2000, p. 356), and to think about the context and meaning of the objects. Also, some of the techniques docents used made aspects of the object understandable, in a language appropriate for the listeners and fun for the tour-goers.

Finally, docents’ beliefs about the role of a museum as education center impacted their practice in that they strongly believed that the museum had to provide a service to the community in ways that tour-goers found meaningful. The museum needs to “provide a continuing education for the populous” according to Kaye and Michael. Michael sees the role of the museum as “to provide art that people can become knowledgeable of. We provide a major role inside and outside of the community. For example, this museum provides an outlet for people to appreciate... art and receive information they want about the artists.” By being a docent, participants were helping the institution carry out its role. Seeing the museum as a source for learning, docents carried out the educational mission with the learner in mind.

Implications for Practice

This research offers a variety of implications for those who practice adult education, and museum education, and interpretation. Since the study took place in nonformal settings where adults educated other adults about art objects in small groups, it has potential implications for the three fields.

First, performing this study reconnected the field of adult education with museum education, in a personally significant way. Looking at docents as adult educators has increased the respect I have for them and their responsibility to communicate museum messages. Giving voice to the docent by having them as sole participants was important as

few studies examine sets of volunteer adult educators outside of formal settings. Keeping the focus on the group responsible for carrying out the bulk of museums' education mission and hearing their perspective adds to and enriches the ongoing discussion adult educators have in order to better serve learners in all settings.

Second, nonformal education settings are emerging as new arenas for adult education research and educating in them using interpretative techniques could be better understood. This study has suggested that how educators in NFE setting conceive of knowledge may relate to the content at hand. When content is not cut and dry but nuanced as is the case with art objects, perhaps teaching techniques allow for more learner input and self-discovery and less transmission of knowledge. For practitioners, this means releasing traditional teacher-like behavior and adopting more learner-centered constructivist techniques. Museum educators should consider the variety of learning theories in the field of adult education when they design programs.

Hopefully this study has assisted in informing our understanding of how educators teach adults in NFE settings. That said, I would like to see Brennan's (1997) internal model of nonformal education expanded to be more inclusive of settings such as art museums and historic homes where educators are able to evaluate learners' needs, craft messages, and be adept at offering an interpretation that is useful to and appropriate for a variety of visitor types.

Fortunately, the four participating museums in this study have displayed a sincere interest in adult education. One museum inquired about what they can do to better serve adult visitors who have dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Two museums that participated in the study invited me to share my findings with their education staff. These are all positive signs

that museums are interested in improving their education function for adult visitors, while looking at it from the perspective of an adult educator. This is not surprising given the fact that American museums have long sought to distinguish themselves with their educational programming (Schwarzer, 2006). Adults have unique needs and while pedagogy is well understood in museums and other NFE settings, andragogy, is far less.

This study informs museum education in that it explains what significantly impacts tour content, the individual docent's expertise and interests, and what docents assume about their audience (i.e. their reason for visiting, knowledge of art, residence, etc). Findings from this study could help train docents in how to assess their audiences and how it is important that a one size fits all tour not be given, but rather, meeting the learners where they are interest-wise and experience-wise offers a more valuable visit for tour-goers. Teaching docents more than facts about objects and the museum's history, docents should be aware of different kinds of interpretative techniques and how much impact they have on tour-goers' knowledge. Docents should learn the benefits of storytelling, and be warned to keep them brief so that stories do not develop into mini-lectures. Interpretive techniques should be shared and discussed for their benefits and downsides, depending on the object, audience, etc. Related to this, museum educators should stress to prospective docents the need to be able to assess audiences and give a tour that is somewhat tailored to whomever they have before them.

Docent trainers should consider the docent's professional background as it greatly impacts what was said on tours. This study showed a great influence of one's professional life on his or her tour. For docent trainers, this is something to consider, especially with

teachers who may unknowingly lapse into using traditional teaching techniques and need to understand the differences in operating in a nonformal setting.

Overall, the knowledge gained from a docent's career cannot be taught in docent training and can add richness to the tour when objects are presented by someone with extensive background in a related field. One docent's knowledge should be leveraged to help other docents who lack it. Pooling intellectual resources based on docents' education and experience should be utilized as docents bring a wealth of information to the galleries. Also, an individual's comfort level with telling a story and using humor should be considered. Finally, trainers might consider hosting a discussion with docent trainees about volunteers' perceptions of the role, so that the museum can better understand the perspective of its educators. This could help trainers match trainees with more seasoned docents whose viewpoints they would like trainees to hear so that new docents learn how the museum would like educators to act and view as their role.

Those who study interpretation should consider what information this study offers since it looks at interpretation in a non-natural setting, uncovers what facts interpreters decide to share with learners and how they come about making that decision, and explains different kinds of interpretive techniques used on tours. Needless to say, museum docents should be considered as a group of practitioners of interpretation. Not unlike the conservation and preservation message at national parks, docents' work is mission-based. Behavior modification takes the form of making tour-goers frequenters of museums. Docents hope that tour-goers take away a joy of looking at art and an appreciation and interest for objects. Helping visitors make sense of the objects in front of them, the personal interpretation offered at museums offers a great example of a tailored educational interaction. Focusing in

on the interests of the audience, docents practiced interpretation in ways they felt were appropriate for their tour-goers. Perhaps museums could collaborate with the National Park Service, another drop-in learning center, to share teaching techniques and see where their goals overlap. Paid guides and rangers may behave similarly to volunteer museum docents.

While interpretation “aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience...rather than simply to communicate factual information” (Tilden, 1977, p. 8) it would be helpful to look more closely at the information docents give about their first-hand experiences with artists, etc. Docents revealed personal information as an opportunity to build their own credibility with tour-goers. Lawrence and Wesley described having access to the artist, in that they were privy to speaking one on one with the creator of the work being viewed. In a venue such as a gallery, where artists are honored, venerated, and out of reach to the typical pedestrian, a docent sharing his impression of the person in fact, could elevate what tourgoers think of their guide, no longer the standard guide, this person is truly ‘in the know’ with those whose works are being showcased. Museums may want to look at the nature of the messages being conveyed.

Finally, related to the first-knowledge some docents offered, is the issue of openly ‘playing favorites’ with objects. It is typically frowned upon by curators who are not interested in the public learning the likes and dislikes of those disseminating key museum messages. Unable and unwilling to leave their preferences for certain objects at the door, when some docents announced their likes and dislikes—even favorites—bestowing upon a particular object a more positive or negative value than others, tourgoers typically hear why the object has struck a personal chord with the docent. At a minimum, this distinguishes the tour by offering a window into the personality of a specific docent. It can add flavor and

color and draw tourgoers' attention to an object they might not look at twice. Conversely, it rings of uncontrollable docents who are not necessarily representing the museum in a way in which museum would approve. Docents may skip some key important objects in the collection and instead present those they prefer. Curators would likely hope docents view all museum objects as equally great in their own right and keep their preferences to themselves. Overall, recognizing that interpretation occurs in museums in forms such as stories and anecdotes, the conceptual frameworks offered in this study may help shed light on understanding the interpretive practices in other educational settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Performing this research illuminated a number of potential topics for future research studies, most of which involve docents as sole participants. For example, a study could explore interpretation in more depth by looking at the nuances in content that come with museums having diverse audiences. Observing a docent give the same tour to four or five different audiences and examining how the interpretation changed from tour to tour could be quite revealing. Such a study could help us understand what triggers variations in content and different interpretative techniques. Digging into the choices docents make could help us recognize subliminal decisions that educators make about selecting content and have not been aware of or considered. Additionally, perhaps other studies on interpretation will benefit from using the conceptual frameworks used here.

While many docents spoke of the benefits of shadowing experienced docents during their training period, I wonder if revisiting that with all docents, no matter how seasoned, would be beneficial. Docents expressed a desire to continue to update their knowledge and

skills so perhaps asking them to follow their peers could offer sharpening or refreshing of skills and interpretation techniques. Looking at issues around knowledge transfer and communities of learning could be studied.

While a symbolic interactionist perspective was used in the study from the standpoint of how docents negotiate meaning about their interpretive role, this study did not focus on how people negotiate the meaning of objects. Such an examination could be the subject of further research.

Given the finding about docents practicing constructivism, which contradicts results of studies of other educators in NFE settings, more research should be done to understand what adult educators believe is the best way to teach and what they believe about knowledge construction. Doing a similar study with the backdrop of a contemporary art museum which art objects are more difficult to interpret or a poet's home where literary works are discussed and analyzed would be interesting as both locales feature works that are not cut and dry in their meaning, thus opening themselves up to the presentation of multiple interpretations. Seeing how educators choose to present these materials could be of significance.

Also, with so many participants in this study stating that there are things that will only be heard on their tour based on their individual backgrounds, it would be fascinating to study docents coming together to write a manual or guide for future docents. As an exercise in knowledge management, this would allow docents to pool their information and offer more continuity in content for tour-goers. It would also increase the number of things a docent could say about an object and help build institutional memory for the museum as docents retire. The action-research study could follow docents who participated in the knowledge sharing and then see if it impacts their future tours. The process of transferring knowledge

would be examined. All of these possible studies would take place in the museum, as the setting is rich in opportunities to better understand the nonformal educational experience of both the educators and learners.

Finally, turning to museums and the messages they want to convey, and considering the unsupervised nature of docent-led tours, it would be interesting to have museum curators and staffers go on docent-led tours and reflect upon if the museum's messages are being conveyed in the way the institution expects. Since docents in this study did not undergo ongoing evaluation by the museum years after their training ended, it might be helpful for museums to consider checking in on what is occurring on these tours.

Final Reflections

Performing this study impacted me in a number of ways. Valuing docents as volunteers who are committed to ensuring a worthwhile and educational experience for museum-goers should not be taken for granted. When I began this study and told participants that I viewed them as adult educators and they were the sole focus of a doctoral study, they seemed touched and surprised. Most were flattered that I was spending my time learning about a role they perform primarily for enjoyment, fun, and socialization. Generous with their time to their respective museum, docents also were giving with their time to me and eager to help. Their willingness to speak until some became hoarse is testament to their dedication to answer every question.

It takes a unique individual to study a museum's collection so completely that he or she can lead the public on tours. I am humbled by docents' devotion and loyalty to their institutions. As volunteers quietly perform the essential education function of the museum by

providing a tailored educational interaction, I see that museum administrators and museum-goers should more fully appreciate docents and their contribution. I am grateful for the time I spent in the field with them and their willingness to share.

Summary

This chapter looked at how the findings related to the literature, what implications this study can have for those practicing in the fields of adult education, museum education, and interpretation, and suggested future topics of studies related to adult educators in the museum setting. The dynamic relationship between docent and audience, habits of former teachers and how that role may impact their instructional methods, the connection between constructivist techniques and the ambiguity inherent in the content, the interest in creating a tailored educational interaction, and the reoccurrence of stories and humor, were explained. Tensions existing in the findings that contradict, specifically docents projecting a constructivist attitude but still clinging to transmitting information via stories, were discussed. Future studies exploring this topic in more detail and other docent-related questions were proposed.

In conclusion, those who participated in this study contradicted the disparaging comments that have been made about docents over the years. They were hardworking, interested in conveying only factual information, and loyal to the museums. Participants had what Pond (1993) describes a tour guide should have:

Broad-based knowledge about the area they are guiding within, enthusiasm, commitment to life-long learning, empathy and sensitivity for people, flexibility, pride in serving others, and the ability to interpret by painting mental pictures. (p. 93)

The fourteen participants demonstrated an unwavering commitment to: the institution with which they are affiliated, art museums at large, and the groups of strangers before them to whom they interpreted objects. They acted thoughtfully and professionally with the tour-goer at the fore of their mind. Hopefully this study will encourage museum administrators and researchers to more fully understand and appreciate how their loyal volunteer workforce of adult educators view themselves as interpreters responsible for carrying out the educational mission of museums by educating the public about cultural artifacts.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Demographic Questions:

Name: _____
 Female ___ Male ___
 Age. _____
 Race/ethnicity _____
 Name of setting: _____
 Job title: _____
 Years of Experience as Docent: _____
 Desired Pseudonym: _____

Field note Specific Questions

Some questions will evolve based on what was observed and recorded in field notes. The field notes will be used as an interview prompt.

Basic Questions

Interpretation

How would you explain your role as an interpreter?
 How does being the docent effect how you relate to the audience?
 How would you describe the interpretation you give on tours?
 What guides the interpretation that you give?
 How do each of these items influence your interpretation/what you say on each tour?
 - setting
 -mission of museum
 -audience
 -docent manager

Tour content

Would you say that you are given a lot of freedom on your tours, to shape the content and what is said on them?
 Do you have a script? If not, how do you choose what to talk about on each tour?
 Assuming you do not use the exact same words, stories, analogies, etc. on each tour, what influences what you tell?
 How do you incorporate stories in the narrative you give?
 How do you choose which stories to tell and when? Are they from the docent manual?
 What about the audience do you consider when deciding what information you will give and how?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Museum Docents' Understanding of Interpretation

Principal Investigator: Amanda Neill, 30 E. Swedesford Rd., Malvern, PA 19355
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Edward Taylor, Associate Professor, PSU-Harrisburg, 351 Olmsted Bldg, 777 W. Harrisburg Pike, Middletown, PA 17057, 717-948-6364, ewt1@psu.edu

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research is to explore docents' perceptions of their interpretive role in museums and determine how those perceptions shape docents' practice
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to have one of your tours given to an adult audience observed followed by a semi-structured interview. The interviews will be audio-taped recorded. Tapes and text transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the primary investigator's office for seven years have passed since the data was collected, until 12/31/2016 at which time the tapes and text transcripts will be destroyed. _____ I give my permission to be observed and audio taped.
3. **Benefits:** The benefits to you include the opportunity to become aware of what factors shapes the tour you give and what influences what kind of interpretation you give on the tour. This could offer you insight into your practice as an adult educator. The benefits to society include the ability to help train docents in evaluating audience and selecting objects for inclusion on tour and enlighten administrators about how tours vary.
4. **Duration/Time:** This research requires two meetings, the first at the museum while a tour is observed (20-30 min length minimum) and the second for the interview (45-60 min in length). You and the interviewer will establish the place and time for the interview based on a location where you will be comfortable discussing your practice as a docent. The location must be conducive to audio recording.
5. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. Only the researcher will know your identity as pseudonyms will be used in place of identifiable information. Transcripts will be made from the audio recordings and any reference to you will be given code names in the text. The data will be stored and secured in password-protected and encrypted files and all recordings will be destroyed prior to 12/31/2016. Neill and Taylor will be the only people with access to the audio recordings and full transcripts of your interviews. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.
6. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Amanda Neill with questions, complaints, or concerns about this study.

- 7. Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign and date the form below. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE and EMPLOYMENT

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Director of Admissions and Marketing, Holy Family University, DEL, 2002-2004
Adjunct Faculty Member, Rosemont College, Art Department, 2002
Teaching Assistant, University of Pennsylvania, 2001

JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS

Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education
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CONTRIBUTOR

Case Studies and Activities in Adult Education and Human Resource Development by S. Schmidt., 2010

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, 2009, 2007
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Association of Continuing Higher Education, Region V conference, 2003

REVIEW ACTIVITIES

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INVITED PRESENTATION

Winterthur Museum and Country Estate. Museum Education Dept., 2009

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