WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A DOCENT:
NARRATIVES OF ART GALLERY EXPERIENCES

by

LESLEY DUTHIE

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Department of Visual and Performing Arts / Education

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

It is widely acknowledged that without volunteer guides, or docents, most museums and galleries would find it impossible to offer education programmes as they are known today. Docents work in the critical interface between visitors and works of art, yet often they are viewed as being passive, and often ineffective, transmitters of the gallery's educational message. The literature on gallery education emphasizes docent "management", or the methods used to recruit, train, and supervise docents. But gallery staff must consider the docent's beliefs, values, and viewpoints about art, and about education, for improvement of education programmes to occur.

This study describes, and analyzes, the docent's perspective of gallery education programmes, and the extent to which docents are actively engaged in the ongoing process of learning to help others learn. In order to obtain their perspective, six docents in two art galleries were engaged in long, semi-structured, and repeated interviews. These interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Categories derived from the teacher's practical knowledge, such as subject, curriculum, instruction, self, and milieu, were used as a framework to describe and analyze the docent's practical knowledge. It was found that though the docents did indeed hold a coherent body of knowledge that originates in their practice, their theoretical knowledge of art was often an inadequate base on which to build an interpretation of the gallery's exhibitions. Differences were found in the educational goals of the gallery, and between the institution, and the docent's educational values and purposes.

Educators need to be aware of the shifting, complex, and sometimes paradoxical nature of the docent's role. The docent's perspective must be considered in the successful planning and implementation of education programmes.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The role of the docent in art galleries is a paradoxical and conflicting one. Many professionals within the gallery community acknowledge that without the aid of these volunteers it would be impossible to offer education programmes as they are known today. Docents often provide the only human link between these institutions and the public. In American art museums, it is estimated that docents provide the equivalent of two thirds of the staff, giving thousands of hours of unpaid time (Berrill and Fertig, 1978, p.243). As often as their efforts are acknowledged, however, the use of docents for presenting programmes to gallery visitors is frequently questioned.

Identification of the problem

Docents have long been seen by gallery professionals as passive--and often ineffective--conduits between the gallery and the public. Williams (1988), for example, has described docents as "educational multipliers" because they are one means by which the gallery educational "message" is broadcast to many visitors. Docents are not professional educators, and as volunteers, they are not hired, promoted, or supervised as are regular staff members, yet they are required to do a professional job. Their role is an important one, because they may often be the only staff members with whom casual visitors interact.

Research studies in the area of gallery education have focussed on the status inequalities, and philosophical differences, that exist between curators and museum educators, and the resulting contradictory position of docents as volunteer educators in a professional educational organization. Other studies have questioned the theoretical and philosophical bases of the typical tour for school children, and the ineffectiveness of much docent teaching. To the extent that the docent's personal characteristics are considered, they are often seen as
being at odds with the gallery's intentions. Docents are often a homogeneous group, of middle-class, white women of middle age, but the main audience they deal with, because it is drawn from the public school system, tends to be of diverse racial, cultural, and class backgrounds. Recent calls for change in gallery education (Williams, 1988; Wollins, Spire, and Silvermann, 1986; Eisner and Dobbs, 1986) have argued that "excellent" museum education demands a significant level of staff commitment and expertise, which is not sustainable by a "part-time and semi-skilled workforce" (Williams, 1988).

In short, these studies of gallery education have focussed on problems with volunteers from the educators' and institutions' point of view. What has been missing from this discussion is the docents' perspective of their role, as volunteer educators, and as the "first audience" of the gallery's educational programmes. This study will present another perspective of gallery education programmes, by listening to, and learning from, the docents' own stories and views about their work.

Using in-depth interviews with six docents in two art galleries as the basis for research, the study will examine each docent's understanding and application of the institutions' volunteer training programme. The study will explore the extent to which the docent actively works toward understanding the many different forms of art and developing more adequate ways to help others achieve understanding. Gallery educators, in particular, need to understand docents' values and beliefs about art and education and how these are affected by the gallery's philosophy and practices. This study also intends to bring out the salient points from those who have been trained, in order to stimulate new strategies and approaches for docent training in art galleries. It is important to know what satisfactions and frustrations docents find in their work as volunteers, so that the former can be increased, and the latter eased, allowing
them to work more effectively. It is also important to know what aspects of the
docent preparation programme are most useful to them as teachers, and what
they see as the "critical incidents" that form the milestones on the road to
becoming a docent. Finally, it is essential for those who develop exhibitions and
educational programmes to know how adults use these to learn about art.

Significance of Proposed Research

This research will provide gallery educators, curators, and directors with a
deepen understanding of a few docents, who are nonetheless representative of
the larger body of docents. These informants' accounts of their values and beliefs
about art and education, how they came to be a docent, their perceptions of
docent training programmes, the satisfactions and frustrations they find in their
teaching role, and what it is like to learn about art from the gallery's exhibitions
and programmes, should be useful and instructive to gallery professionals and
administrators.

Furthermore, in helping professionals come to understand docents as
learners, this study will offer some conclusions about how, and why some adults
choose to learn about art in galleries. Docents differ from casual visitors in their
close and prolonged exposure to the collections, exhibitions, and staff of the
gallery. However, often the similarity in terms of their background, education,
and non-professional status means that docents can offer information on their
experience as learners that could effect other adult education programmes in the
gallery. Though the study will be limited to galleries, and only learning about
works of art will be considered, educators in other kinds of museums will find
the discussion valuable. The docents' knowledge and values will be analyzed
and implications for practice, and for further research, will be drawn.

In-depth, and repeated, interviews with participants will permit each
docent to reflect upon, elaborate, and reiterate her ideas, revealing a depth and
complexity of meaning that other methods, such as surveys, could not achieve. Long interviews will allow each individual to present her story in a manner which preserves the integrity of her own voice. Preliminary questionnaires filled out by the whole docent group at each gallery will ensure that the six docents who are selected will be representative of the larger group in terms of certain characteristics, such as age, educational and personal background, and number of years as a docent. Interviewing docents who vary significantly in these characteristics will demonstrate how the training programme is received differently by those with dissimilar life experiences. By listening to the docents' stories gallery staff will have an opportunity to develop training programmes which are more responsive to the docents' needs and aspirations. The discussion of the perspectives of this representative group of docents provides a valuable basis of comparison and reflection for educators and others who are interested in teaching and learning in a gallery environment.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, a public art gallery is defined as a non-profit organization which collects, preserves, exhibits, and interprets works of art. It is staffed by professionals, is open to the public on a regular basis, and offers a variety of educational programmes. The Canadian usage of "art gallery" is synonymous with the term "art museum", which is more commonly used in the United States.

The word "docent" is derived from the Latin word "docere" which means, "to teach". A docent is a volunteer member of the gallery staff whose main responsibility is to interact with groups of visitors, usually, but not always, of school children, about the institution, the exhibitions, and individual works of art.
Public programmes is a term which is beginning to gain prominence as an umbrella concept for special events and educational programmes. These may include lectures, concerts, demonstrations, films, workshops, tours, art classes, and interpretive displays and labels, and publications other than catalogues. Public programmes may be intended to make accessible to the public a specific exhibition, aspect of art, or to broaden the visitor’s understanding and appreciation of other art forms, such as music, dance, or poetry. In both the galleries included in this study, education programmes are considered to be a special form of public programme, and therefore the director of public programmes is responsible for education. In other galleries, there is a separate education department, and the department head may be called "Curator of Education", "Director of Education", "Tour Coordinator and Program Specialist", or another term entirely. In this study, the term "gallery educator" will be used to refer to the person responsible for education in galleries in general, but when either staff member in this study are specifically designated, they will be called "director of public programmes".

As docents are almost always women, and as all the docents who took part in this study are women, the female pronouns will be used in order to avoid a cumbersome repetition of both male and female pronouns.

Overview of the Thesis

The remainder of the thesis is organized in the following way. Chapter II will review the literature on gallery education to provide a context for the present study. Chapter III will provide a description of the conduct of the study. Interview summaries of the six docents who participated in the study are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V will discuss and analyze the docent’s practical knowledge, and how that knowledge originates in her experiences.
Chapter VI will offer some conclusions to the study and formulate implications for further research and for gallery educators who are developing education programmes.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The founders of museums in North America disputed the proper relation of their institutions to the public which supported them. Keepers of museums in the first part of the century debated whether museums should exist solely to preserve and exhibit the best of world’s art, or whether the experiences of the visitor had equal claim to importance. In the intervening decades, museum professionals have often done little else than reiterate these original arguments. However, in the last ten years or so, the literature on gallery education has expanded. In 1978 the first volume devoted to gallery education, *The Art Museum as Educator* (Silver and Newsom) was published. This massive text (830 pages) includes descriptions of hundreds of education programmes in art museums throughout the United States. A decade after Silver and Newsom’s work, the National Art Education Association published a collection of essays entitled *Museum Education: History, Theory, and Practice* (Berry and Mayer, 1989). It exemplifies the progress the field has made, as it is intended partly to serve as a basic text for graduate training programmes in gallery education, and is the first of its kind. The philosophical and practical dilemmas posed by using a volunteer, semi-skilled workforce in the crucial role of bringing visitor and art object together has been a preoccupation of writers on gallery education since the beginning of the century. This chapter will review, summarize, and evaluate the most important threads of this discussion from the literature about the role of docents, to create a context for this present study.

An American museum director, Benjamin Ives Gilman, first used the word "docent" in 1907. Gilman maintained that the museum should be involved not only in *gardant* (preserving) and *monstrant* (exhibiting) but in *docent* (teaching) (McCoy, 1988, p.136). Ironically, he used the Latin word "docent" to
avoid connotations with traditional education, and argued that this function was not as important as the first two, stating that, "a museum of science is in essence a school; a museum of art is in essence a temple" (1918, quoted in Zeller, 1989, p.30). Gilman hired the first docents for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, in 1907. The docent was not intended to be a guide, but a companion, who would help adult visitors appreciate the objects of the museum, by helping them grasp the intention of the artist, rather than imparting historical information (Zeller, p.45).

John Cotton Dana, director of the Newark Museum in New Jersey from 1909-1929, developed a vigorous opposition to Gilman's idea of museums. Unlike Gilman, Dana worked hard to make his museum a place where children would be happy to visit.

The children are living with the houses and the furniture and the wallpaper--God help them! The ever-present influence of these will not be overcome by ignoring them and summoning Giotto or Velasquez for ten minutes from the past. (Dobbs, 1971, p.39)

Dana advocated exhibitions of ordinary, hand-made objects, developed a loans collection for the schools, and organized a varied--and very popular--series of public lectures and classes (Dobbs, 1971).

Another innovative and outspoken museum educator was Henry Watson Kent, Secretary of the Metropolitan Museum from 1913-1940. Kent shared Dana's commitment to education for all those who desired it, and he established numerous programmes, including gallery lectures, programs for schools, radio broadcasts for physically handicapped children, Saturday morning story-telling at the museum, and travelling exhibitions. Kent believed that the Metropolitan existed "for the enjoyment, for the study, and for the profit of the people" (Dobbs,
1971, p. 40), and saw education, in the broadest sense of the word, as a means to achieve this.

A third pre-war educator, Thomas Munro, did much to establish gallery education programmes in the diverse forms they take today. Munro maintained that,

the museum is not to be a mere treasure house of works of art which remain inert on the walls and cases, seen only by the privileged few; it is to be an active agency for the use and enjoyment of the whole public.... Instead of waiting idly for the public to discover what is there, it is to reach out into the community, inviting and facilitating visits by young and old—especially by the young, who are especially sensitive to what it offers, and who may never come unless someone leads the way. (1956, p.338)

In his prolific writing, and through three decades of work at the Cleveland Museum of Art, Munro developed many ideas about education in museums that are still fundamental to the field today. Munro argued that

the primary aim in museum/gallery teaching is to help the visitor learn to see, to perceive works of art visually.... As much of the time as possible [should be] spent in undistracted observing. (1956, p.344)

He reduced the importance of art history, and even of creative expression, in his education programmes, though he advocated sketching in the galleries as a way to observe the art more closely. Munro believed in connecting art with other disciplines, such as music, dance, and literature. Though he did not specifically refer to volunteer teachers in his book on art education, many of his ideas have become the basic tenets of docent programmes today.

By mid-century, virtually every art gallery in the United States, and probably Canada, provided docent-led tours, mostly to school children (McCoy,
1988, p.137). During the intense public scrutiny and questioning of social institutions characteristic of the Sixties, museums began to justify their existence more and more in terms of education and outreach programmes, and many education and public programmes departments were established in this decade.

Numerous articles discussing the activities of docents in museums and galleries appeared in museum journals during the Sixties and Seventies. They varied from the ebullient tone of some, like Heine's (1965) article on "The Care and Feeding of Volunteer Staff Members", to another which began, "The ideal in the museum field is to have an adequate, amply paid staff, and not to use volunteers at all" (Reibel, 1974, p.16). This article nevertheless went on to describe how to recruit, train, organize, reward, and deal with uppity volunteers, including the suggestion that volunteers get "used-up" every two or three years and that the Board might be a good place to park these superannuated people (p.21).

Other writers suggest that diverse educational activities should make the gallery into a community centre (Bunning, 1974); describe a number of institutions' recruiting practices (Bay, 1974); publish sample by-laws for volunteer groups (Selby, 1977); and argue for the idea that interviewing prospective volunteers is a crucial aspect of volunteer management (Seidelman, 1965). These articles tend to be based exclusively on the writers' personal views; that is, they are not validated by research, but rather are brief reports of current practices in their own institutions.

The publication in 1978 of Newsom and Silver's massive study *The Art Museum as Educator* marked a new, more professional period of inquiry and reflection in the field of gallery education. The study consists of many case studies of individual programmes in many American art museums, with introductory essays that create a philosophical context. A chapter on "The
Museum Volunteer describes six typical and exemplary docent programmes introduced by an outline of key issues which remain pertinent today. According to Newsom and Silver’s contributors, without volunteers many museums could not open their doors (Berrill and Fertig, 1978, p. 242) and without large numbers of volunteers institutions could not offer "the resounding statistics often cited to document [their] worth to the community" (p.243). Though Berrill and Fertig contend that the docents' main function is to tour school children through the building, they are involved in other activities, such as visits to the community, or creation of new programmes. They bring a warmth and enthusiasm to their tasks which counters institutional inertia and may revive jaded staff members (p.243). The benefits to volunteers include training: "Volunteers are often the museum’s most intensively served audience. In this sense their services do not come free: professional museum staffs are engaged in a continual cycle of educating one museum audience in order to educate another" (p.243). Other, less tangible rewards for volunteers include a chance to meet new people, to be of service to the community, to be involved in a high status activity, and recognition through awards, dinners, and badges and pins. In some instances, volunteer work is a stepping stone to a professional job (p.244).

Berrill and Fertig (1978) describe some of the conflict associated with the docent’s role. Some educators resent the fact that their domain—and not that of curators or conservators—should be the province of non-professionals. Volunteers who are casual or irresponsible, or who use their position to undermine the authority of staff members, or to seek unfair access to the trustees, were also cause for resentment (p.244). Most museums hesitate to introduce a rigorous method of qualitative evaluation of tours, which means that some docents may perform poorly for years, without being corrected (p.244). The docents as a group, being overwhelmingly white, female, and well-to-do, are at
variance with the multi-racial, poor, and inner-city audiences that many museums are now trying to reach (p.244). Museums must confront these conflicts and deal with them in order to improve their educational programmes.

Other writers have questioned the museum's claim that it is a primarily an "educational" institution.

Endorsements of the educational value of museum programs too often have been based upon blind faith or the need to justify public support and tax benefits rather than upon a serious assessment of the educational consequences of museum visits or programmes. (Rawlins, 1978, p.3)

At the heart of this lack of accountability for education lies a philosophical split among museum professionals. Many directors of museums, recalling the ideas of Gilman, argue that the presentation of carefully selected works of art is in itself educative, and no more needs to be done. Sherman E. Lee is a contemporary spokesman for this traditionalist position. Writing in *The Art Museum as Educator* he says, "Merely by existing--by preserving and exhibiting works of art--[the art museum] is educational in the broadest and best sense, though it never utters a sound or prints a word" (Lee, 1978, p.21). As Rawlins (1978) points out, though this approach is adequate for the few visitors who already possess enough knowledge to interpret and enjoy these works, for the majority, it precludes any hope of coming to understand works of art in a meaningful way (p.14). For schools in particular, the group tour is an unsatisfactory form of education. What is needed is more "concentrated" forms of education, encouraging greater cooperation and exchange of information between schools and museums (Rawlins, 1978, p.15).

MacDonnell’s (1978) survey of 32 Canadian art galleries' educational programmes reiterates some of the issues raised in Newsom and Silver's (1978) discussion. She observed that docents are used in galleries mainly to handle the
volumes of tours, which are a useful way to maintain large attendance statistics (p. 77). The training sessions are the chief benefit of the programme for the docents (p.78). This training may produce volunteers who are professional in every way except for title, yet their status is not well recognized. Even though there is an institutional intention to regard them as para-professionals, they may not be treated that way by staff in reality (p.79). Docent recruitment is becoming challenging, as the pool of white, middle-class, middle-aged women who are the typical docents of most galleries' education programmes becomes smaller, and there may also be problems when this homogeneous group works with the variety of students in the public school system (p.80). MacDonnell concludes by referring to the difficulty of maintaining high performance standards, as evaluation tends to be informal, and ongoing, with formal evaluation mistrusted by both educators and docents (p.81).

Non-gallery art educators urge museum professionals to forge alliances with schools and teacher training programmes in universities (Chapman, 1980, pp.22-23); to study child psychology and learning theory (Eisner and Dobbs, 1986); and to work to counter the covert, and explicit, elitist messages that the museum emits (Rawlins, 1978; Johnson, 1981). Curiously, most art educators have remained silent on docent programmes, although docents are largely responsible for carrying out the programmes that teachers are most likely to come in contact with: the "one-shot" gallery tour. Though the parallels between docent education and teacher education are obvious, neither educators responsible for preparing teachers for the schools, nor museum educators have fully exploited the possibilities for collaboration, or for using each other's knowledge bases.

A notable exception is Johnson's study (1981) which examined the behaviour and speech of docents during tours for school children. Johnson
determined that a large part of the content of each tour was drawn from a "pre-constituted stock of knowledge [the docents] took for granted" (p.63). This stock of knowledge was presented to the children through various types of verbal exchanges, in which new ideas were attached to those the children already had. Docents did not "always make clear that the interpretations offered might not be the only ways to typify experience" (p.63). Johnson concludes that if docents are required to help children and adults examine their beliefs about art, the primarily art historical training they receive may not be adequate. She argues that docents may also need education in the sociology of knowledge and cultural anthropology as well.

In their turn, gallery educators publishing in art education literature urge teachers to re-examine their expectations for the "one-shot" gallery visit in particular (Zeller, 1987; Williams, 1985). Newsom (1975) questions the tendency of art museums to present programmes to schools as complete packages. She challenges teachers to initiate programmes themselves, arguing that this is necessary if programmes are to grow into anything worthwhile (p.51). Zeller (1985) maintains that gallery education and school art education have different goals, methods, and results, and that gallery educators should not allow their programmes to become merely extensions of, or supplement to, the schools' curriculum (p.8). He argues that teachers of art should be concerned with, and responsible for, developing "museums literacy"; which means the students' knowledge of, and valuing of, the community's cultural resources, as well as their ability to use them (p.54).

Williams (n.d.) argues in favour of "object-centred learning"; the concept that the primary aim of all museum education must be to bring together people and objects, in "personally significant" interactions (p.12). The major responsibility of educators is to let people know that this process may take time,
effort, and some background knowledge. Williams contends that objects themselves may be more properly viewed as forms of stimulation, rather than communication, so that the role of the observer is to respond rather than to understand the "message" of a given art object (p.13).

In their search for models of education which are better suited to the gallery context than those developed for schools, educators have turned to other fields for ideas. Sollins (1972) inspired a generation of gallery educators with her descriptions of improvisational tours in which games, drama, and movement activities help children respond to art in museums.

Williams (1976) maintains that a careful distinction needs to be made between teaching and touring. According to her, teaching involves more intense, prolonged, and systematic encounters with objects, led by experienced teachers, while tours should be "cool", more superficial, and fleeting interactions, and may be successfully conducted by volunteers. Furthermore, excellent programmes must be based on a "master teacher" concept with less-experienced teachers, or docents, learning from the example of a skillful and experienced teacher (Williams, 1985, p.102-123). In Williams' view, docents are only one form of "educational multiplier", and the key ingredient of excellent education programmes in museums is an excellent model to be copied (p.119). In other words, volunteers alone can never be the backbone of "excellent education".

A number of guides for educators and trainers of docents have been published, mostly directed to less-experienced educators in history or natural science museums. Bradshaw (1973) has produced a brief manual which outlines, presumably for first time educators in smaller institutions, how to recruit, train, manage, and evaluate docents, in general museums. Winkler-Green's (1975) manual for gallery docents focuses on the kinds of dialogues which may be generated amongst students responding to works of art in gallery settings. Many
institutions produce docent-training manuals for their own use. A good example is the Oakland Museum's manual, written by an education professor (Lowery, 1976). It includes sections on questioning techniques, structuring group interactions, and strategies for responding to visitors' comments and questions.

Grinder and McCoy's book (1986) *The Good Guide* was written for docents in all types of museums and historic sites, as well as galleries, and deals particularly with developing story lines for cohesive tours. Another full-length book which deals with the subject of docent training and performance is *Creative Educational Methods for Museums* (Booth, Krockover and Woods, 1982). Though they describe docent training and the best ways to conduct a tour, in detail, neither book discusses any of the conflicts and issues raised by Newsom and Silver (1978), Johnson, (1981), MacDonnell (1978), Cuyler, (1980) or Rawlins, (1978), and outlined above. These include: that docents are used mainly to handle large groups of school children, and thus to bolster attendance statistics; that docents, as volunteers, are not hired, educated, evaluated, and fired if necessary, as are professional staff, yet they are required to perform professional duties; and that they tend to form a rather homogeneous group in contrast to the tremendous variety of students in the public school system.

A survey of 73 American, European, and Canadian art museums (Swan, 1977) reveals that only museums in the United States use volunteer tour guides, the others using a combination of paid guides, classroom teachers, and staff (p.32). Swan discovered that training for volunteers varies enormously. In almost half the museums which used docents, these unpaid "educators" received 30 hours of basic training or less. Instruction for docents is primarily art historical, or based on the institution's own collections, though in some instances, training in communications skills is given, often in the form of a type of internship, with novice docents following experienced ones on their tours.
Evaluation tends to be either informal, ongoing appraisals by each docent of her own tours, or based on questionnaires the visiting teacher filled out after the tour. Some institutions do not evaluate their programmes in any way at all.

Eisner and Dobbs’s (1986) important study, *The Uncertain Profession*, as its title suggests, emphasizes the problems facing educators in many American art museums. Though only a small part of their discussion is concerned with docents per se, it reinforces the issues outlined by Newsom and Silver (1975) and MacDonnell (1978). Eisner and Dobbs place the blame for most of the problems of art museum education on the status inequalities between the activities of, on one hand, collection, exhibition, research, and conservation, and on the other hand, public education. While docents handle the volume of tours, at relatively low cost to the institution, their function creates a quandary for educators and other museum professionals (pp.72-73). They may be less reliable and professional than paid staff, yet they are required to do a professional job, and their presence permits the persistent underfunding of education departments by boards of trustees (p. 73). Eisner and Dobbs conclude with a call for more research on the effects of docent tours on visitors, and a "content analysis of docent discourse in twenty American art museums" (1985, pp.32), a recommendation that probably was suggested by Johnson’s (1981) important study.

Cuyler (1980) examines the formally stated objectives of three Canadian galleries, as explicated by the educator, and the values and philosophies of the docents themselves, and compares them with the docent’s actual behaviour and utterances. She concludes that none of the galleries provide the docents with a clearly articulated educational philosophy, leaving them free to choose their own, with uncertain results for all concerned. For example, the docents’ lack of knowledge of the schools and their curriculum left them uncertain about how
best to draw the students into a discussion, and they often resorted to lecturing
about the art, with the result that the students quickly became bored (p.97).

Other writers (Flanders and Flanders, 1976) argue that docent
performance must be formally evaluated against tour goals, to ensure high-
quality programmes. Docent evaluation should be part of a museum-wide
programme of evaluation, and the docent training itself must also be evaluated.
They offer a complex system of analyzing docents' questions and remarks and
visitors' response to these. Cheff (1984) also argues in favour of an ongoing
programme of evaluation for docents. He argues that docents should be
encouraged to become responsible for their own education, particularly through
the use of personal goal-setting and continuous self-evaluation, with the docent
coordinator acting as "an agent for change, a catalyst for learning" (p.6) rather
than as an authority figure and dispenser of knowledge. According to Cheff, this
method builds a sense of personal involvement, trust, self-confidence, and
energy in each docent (p.9).

Implications for the present study

Although the body of rigourous and careful research on gallery education
remains very small, there has been considerable progress made in the last ten
years, away from the kind of anecdotal "opinion pieces" of the 1960s and early
1970s. The most searching studies of gallery education examine the
philosophical and organizational conflict among museum professionals, and
particularly between curators and directors, and educators, and examine the
history of the field, and the questionable philosophical foundations of some
programmes. The literature describes as inappropriate some of the methods or
utterances of some docents on tours, and suggests that training programmes may
not be thorough enough, or are inappropriately focussed on art history. Some
writers discuss the major philosophical and practical issues underlying docent
recruitment, training, and evaluation. What has not been considered is the
docent's perspective on gallery education programmes. Their perspective might
aid in the assessment and improvement of both docent management and the
work they perform. How and what do docents learn from each other? How do
their previous experiences conflict, or complement the gallery’s intentions? How
do they use the training provided them by the gallery as they become docents?
As gallery education continues to be scrutinized by gallery professionals,
trustees, and those interested in art programmes in schools, the philosophy and
practice of using unpaid non-professionals in the vital role of introducing visitors
to works of art will be increasingly questioned. It is crucial that gallery
educators understand their audiences, and the docents who will be responsible
for implementing the educational programmes they develop.
CHAPTER III
CONDUCT OF THE STUDY

The intent of the study was to describe and analyze several docents’ perspectives of gallery education programmes, so as to offer new understanding to gallery staff members responsible for these programmes. The study took the form of long, unstructured interviews with each of six docents. In order to include a variety of perspectives, participants were selected who had different ages, educational backgrounds, and years of experience as a docent. Transcripts from the interviews were analyzed to determine the docents’ understanding of their work, the training they had received at the gallery, and their beliefs about art and education. Implications were drawn for the practice of gallery education, and for further research in the field, based on the topics described by the docents as being important to them.

Selection of Galleries

Two galleries were selected as sites for the study, based on my knowledge of their education programmes and of the size, location, and the character of the galleries. Though situated in the same geographic region, these galleries offered a contrasting institutional context for the study. The first is a major gallery in a large urban centre. It has a large docent programme that has existed for over thirty years, although the current Director of Public Programmes has only been in her position for three years. The second gallery is a much smaller institution in a suburban community arts centre. The Director of Public Programmes has been in her position for over ten years, and the docent programme had been operating for several years before that. The differences between educators and institutions offered an interesting diversity of situations.
Contact with Educators

I sought initial support for the study directly from each director of public programmes. After they had agreed to take part formal permission was requested from the directors of their institutions.

Selection of participants

At each gallery, I visited the docent group during one of their regular meetings to explain the nature and purpose of the study, and to invite those interested to participate. A very short questionnaire was distributed to everyone to fill out immediately, and those who wished to participate were asked to sign their names. Those docents who did not attend this meeting were not considered for inclusion in the study.

The questionnaire (included in Appendix A) was used to select docents. It requested the docents to give their birth-date and birthplace, educational background, year of joining the docent group, and to relate how they came to be a docent. In order to have as representative a selection as possible, I chose a number of possible candidates on the diversity of their responses to these questions. I then phoned these docents to set up appointments. Most people readily agreed to participate, but if they refused another docent from the same institution was contacted. In all, six docents were interviewed, three from each gallery.

Interviews

Each long, semi-structured interview lasted between two to three hours, and I met with each docent twice. Written consent was first obtained from each docent (see Appendix B). I used a detailed interview protocol which was developed from my experience as a gallery educator, and from the review of the literature. As Malinowski has observed, "preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of the
scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies" (1922, p.8, in Hawke, 1980, p.8). In every case but one, the interviews were conducted in the respondent's home, and they took the form of a social visit. In order to preserve the conversation-like quality of the interviews I did not refer to the interview protocol while with the participants. The protocol was used to delineate the kinds of areas I wished to address with the docents, rather than to determine exactly what we would talk about. [The interview protocol is included in Appendix C.]

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The first interview transcript was compared to the interview protocol to see which questions had been omitted, or which areas of discussion needed clarification or elaboration. The second interview was used to extend, confirm, or refine points raised in the first discussion.

Analysis of Transcripts

The procedure described by McCracken (1988) was used to analyze the transcripts. They were examined for the purpose of extracting the categories the docents used to understand their "life-world". Of particular interest were utterances that revealed the respondent's assumptions or beliefs about a particular situation. The analysis took the form of a circular process. As categories from each transcript were discovered, they were checked against the other transcripts, until an exhaustive list of themes or topics was produced. The relative emphasis placed on each theme or topic by individual docents was assessed. Themes which existed in several interviews were noted.

The transcripts were then reduced to approximately one tenth their original length by selecting passages which were representative of the ideas about their work emphasized by each docent, and found to be relevant when compared with the literature on gallery education. These key passages were
then linked by the researcher's observations, to provide a sensible narrative, but one which preserved the integrity, flow, and emphasis of the respondent. These summaries correspond to the concept of a "core narrative", developed by Mischler (1986) from Labov's (1967) theory of textual analysis (p.103). Mischler's analysis and interpretation of the narrative responses contained within an interview are based on the theory that "telling stories is one of the significant ways that individuals construct and express meaning" (p.67).

Mischler's (1986, based on Labov, 1972; Labov and Waletsky, 1967) analysis, examines each narrative in terms of its constituent parts—Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Result or Resolution, and Coda. The fundamental unit of a narrative, the Complicating Action, is "a distinctive type of recapitulation of experience that preserves the temporal ordering of events in the real world" (p.83). The Abstract is the narrator's summary of the story; the Orientation identifies the time, place, and characters, the Resolution states the result of the action; and the Coda returns the speaker to the present situation (p.80). The Evaluation is the key part, as it indicates "the point of the narrative, its raison d'être, why it was told, and what the narrator is getting at (Labov, 1972b, p.366, in Mischler, p.80).

Analysis of the transcripts of docent interviews, then, was based on the assumption that often the literal meaning of what the docents said rested on a kind of underlying narrative structure that conveyed another level of meaning. Constituent parts of the narratives were examined to arrive at the "point" of their stories. Mischler's theory suggests that the episodes the docents recounted expressed the general values of the docent "culture" as well as their claim for personal identity (p.104).

Mischler (1986) has cautioned that confidentiality may have the effect of decontextualizing the words of the participants, by turning them into members
of an anonymous mass, and in effect depriving them of their own "voices" (p.125). The purpose of presenting the "core narratives" of the interviews, rather than a summary of the common themes found in all interviews, is an attempt to preserve the individual character of each docent, and to lessen the need to discuss their experiences apart from their personal contexts. However, as confidentiality was a provision for taking part in the study, docents, staff members, and the galleries were given fictitious names.

Finally, Elbaz' (1981) conceptualization of a teacher's practical knowledge was used as a framework to analyze the body of knowledge the docents held about their work, and how this knowledge is shaped by their values and purposes. Elbaz argues for a view of teachers as autonomous agents whose knowledge is not passively accumulated from other disciplines, but is a coherent body of knowledge actively held, and used to give shape to their practice. This practical knowledge is structured as rules, principles of practice, and as metaphorical images. Core narratives of the interviews with docents are presented in Chapter IV. These narratives were searched for the rules, principles, and images, which structured the practical knowledge of docents. Chapter V describes Elbaz' conceptualization of practical knowledge, and applies it to the docents' knowledge. Considering the core narratives in terms of the knowledge the docents hold, and how they use it in their practice, permits a richer, and more precise, description of the docents' perspective of gallery education programmes.
CHAPTER IV
INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

This chapter presents summaries of interviews with six docents at two different galleries. The interview for each docent has been reduced to about one tenth of its original length to produce a "core narrative" (Mischler, 1986, p.103). Passages from each transcript were selected which were representative of the ideas about their work emphasized by each docent. Additional comments have been added where necessary to link the passages into a coherent flow of ideas and to introduce the various themes.

Profiles of the Monroe Art Gallery and the Bridgetown Art Gallery

The Monroe Art Gallery (MAG) is a large gallery in a major urban centre, with a significant collection of historical and contemporary fine art. The exhibition programmes include permanent installations drawn from its collections of European, Canadian, and regional art, and temporary exhibitions which emphasize all media, including video, in contemporary Canadian and international art. The Gallery has a very active programme of lectures, concerts, school programmes, and workshops for families.

The docent programme at the MAG has existed for thirty years, usually under the direction of a staff member with responsibility for education programmes, although this leadership has been intermittent within the last three years. Recently, there have been several changes in senior staff positions. The appointment of a new gallery director three years ago has also meant new curatorial staff, and a new head of public programmes, within a newly-defined department. Education now falls within the jurisdiction of the public programmes department. Other staff in the education department have also changed, and a volunteer coordinator was hired on a temporary contract for six
months. For the last year, the docent training programme for new volunteers has been managed by an experienced docent from another gallery, under the direction of the new public programmes director.

These changes have meant considerable disruption in the docent programme and many long-term docents have resigned. However, there is a stream of new, enthusiastic docents moving into the programme, which retains its vitality.

The Bridgetown Art Gallery (BAG) is a much smaller gallery in a rapidly-growing suburban community. It has a small permanent collection and is dedicated to presenting the work of emerging, lesser-known, contemporary, local and regional artists. The head of public programmes, who is also the gallery educator, has been in her current position for over ten years. The director and one of the two curators have been with the Gallery for two years. A number of the docents have been in the programme for many years, and there is a constant renewal of the group, as new people join, and experienced docents drop out for more education, jobs, or other interests, keeping the numbers approximately steady.

The Gallery is part of a community arts centre, which includes a theatre and classroom spaces, and is itself located in a major park in the community. The Gallery consists of a main space which is climatically controlled, and an auxiliary gallery in the theatre lobby. The main gallery features historical and contemporary exhibitions. The theatre gallery features a mixed range of exhibitions which include shows by local community groups. Also in this area is an exhibition area for children's art work. All three exhibition areas are curated by Gallery staff, while the classroom spaces, as well as some programmes in the theatre, and a range of school programmes are coordinated by the director of public programmes.
The Monroe Art Gallery Docents

**Interview Summary—Grace.** Grace has been a docent at the Monroe Art Gallery for over twenty years. This long tenure gives her a special relationship with the Gallery, as she says, "It becomes your life. People look at you and think, 'Grace Brown, Art Gallery'" (G-1, p.19). She insists that she has been at the Monroe Art Gallery too long. The recent changes in the education programmes brought about by new staff and departmental structure discomfort her, but she also acknowledges that "we can't stay the same way forever" (G-1, p.7). However, it would be hard for her to relinquish the camaraderie that she has enjoyed, being in an exciting environment where "you see all the breakthroughs in art," (G-1, p.8) and her unshakeable belief in the value of the tour programme.

Grace has complaints about the way docent briefing sessions are managed, but in spite of all discouragement she says "it will be a very funny feeling if I don't go back in the Fall" (G-1, p.19). For Grace, giving a tour has become so easy that she is stymied when she tries to explain how it is done. It is much easier for her to talk about her discontent with the Gallery and the critical issue of "how are they going to keep us happy" (G-1, p.31). Her dissatisfaction with the present situation is continually measured against an earlier period when "an absolutely marvellous woman looked after the docents [and] just made the programme an absolute delight" (G-1, p.8), and "every Monday morning was a revelation" (G-1, p.9). Although Grace admits that comparing the current situation with the past is "such a stupid thing to do", she goes on to say, "she was so fantastic that it's hard to forget her" (G-1, p.24). Grace's feeling that she has been at the Gallery too long, is exacerbated by her irritation with the "system", the organization of the docent programme.

For one reason and another it's dissipating and ... new people coming in which I think is marvellous, but I just feel that I'm stale. I mean I've been there for a long time, and ... I used to think every Monday morning, "Oh
great, I’m going to the Gallery," now I’m thinking "grrrr". So that’s time to move on. (G-1, p.8)

The earlier group spirit that was such an important part of the programme is no longer there.

We’ve got a different age group, we’ve got a lot of younger, which is good, younger people, although I don’t know…. It’s just not the same… we formed this really neat relationship, and … I don’t, in looking around that group, at the new ones, I don’t think that’s there anymore. (G-2, pp.38-39)

Although she enjoys the contact with children, she thinks this too has changed in that it is harder to relate to them as she gets older.

I think they respond much more to a younger person…. We’ve had some of the older docents, .. but unless they have an absolutely fabulous personality, the kids really get turned off…. It’s just as you get older you don’t connect in the same way with the young people. (G-1, pp.19-20)

Although Grace argues that the changes could be “the best thing that ever happened to the Art Gallery,” she reiterates her concerns about the programme.

Why throw the baby out with the bath water? If this system worked, then why don’t they try and just carry on with that system? Because it obviously worked and I don’t think you gain a great deal by trying a lot of different methods when you have found one that seems to have been so successful. (G-2, p.56)

She is also frustrated by the department head’s perceptions of the docents.

I don’t think Diane understands what we all were, or are…. I think she thinks we’re just sort of, a lot of women who haven’t got anything else to do. I don’t know. (G-2, p.40)

Grace compares these feelings and perceptions with a sort of golden age at the Art Gallery when being a docent,

was the creme de la creme of things to do…. And I’m not meaning that in a snobby way. I’m just saying that … people knew that you had to work hard, that you didn’t just go down there and wishy-wash your way through. (G-1, p.32)

This "wonderful period" was largely the responsibility of one woman who was the director of education for ten years. She came after a long period when "the Gallery was in a state of flux… [and] there was always a great deal of unrest
amongst the staff," (G-1, p.16) and the docents received little help or support from them.

There were times when we felt we knew more than the people in the education department [laughing]. And we would just carry on any way, in spite of them [laughing].... There was never the feeling that they really felt you were of any value. You were sort of there ... you performed a service but it wasn't really all that necessary. And I think we all just hung in because we felt it was important. (G-1 p.8)

Grace jokingly refers to the director of education that arrived at this time as the "Messiah".

This person really covered all facets, we had the art history, and we had tour preparation and tour methods. She assigned us projects which .. [made us] all groan, but boy they were good projects because they really made you research and study, and do all of those things which a lot of us hadn't done for years and years and years. And mind you we've had to do that this year too, but there was a dedication that we all felt with her, that we didn't want to let her down. (G-1, p.11)

The crucial difference was having one staff person whose main concern was the docents, so that although the current head of public programmes is "a brilliant, admirable woman" (G-1 p.12), her many responsibilities impinge on the time she is able to spend with the docents. "It's not her fault, it's just that there is something .. missing, and I don't know what it is" (G-2, p.46). Part of the answer is that the group has necessarily become more autonomous, an unwelcome change.

Maybe this is .. better... people will have to do their own research, and we'll have to spend more time being aware of what changes have come and .. going to the library and looking it up. But that's the other complaint, although we're willing to give a certain amount of time, we just, we aren't willing to devote an entire five days a week, .. we are not paid staff. (G-1, p.28)

Grace thinks that the staff believe the docents want to be spoon-fed, an idea she argues against vehemently. It is more the group feeling, and the desire to "be nourished, to feel that I've had a continuing education" (G-2, p.30) that is important. For Grace, this is the central issue facing the docent programme, and
is of such overriding importance that she wonders at times if the programme will continue at all.

I don’t know what the answer is. I think they’ve got to find the appropriate person willing to devote his or her time to docent education. And not just the training of new docents, but ways to keep the current docents informed and stimulated. (G-2, p.30)

Exhibition briefings are the key to this continuing education. This means considerable time spent with either a curator or artist.

I think that we should be given a little more specialized help in that anyone can read a catalogue, but I think we need that little extra just to take us that one step further if we’re going to be given the responsibility of conveying information to the public. (G-1, p.37)

She resents the fact that visiting curators or artists are no longer scheduled to work with the docents for two hours; instead the docents are expected to attend evening lectures for the public.

We need constant education, we need to be kept reminded, really, of what ever happened at that particular time in the world, reminded of just the history of that particular painting. You know you tend to forget, you get stale. You need new information. (G-1, p.22)

Grace emphasizes that docents should not teach the public, and especially school children, about art history or give too many facts.

I just would never discuss the history of painting per se, except on a very, very superficial level, because you can’t begin to, it’s really just to visually make them aware that two dimensional surfaces can be many things. (G-2, p.9)

Most of the information the docents receive is not passed on during a tour. Rather it is the sense of personal enrichment and growth for the docents that is essential.

It makes sense, then, that Grace is not enthusiastic about lectures or briefings by visiting educators who are invited to address the docent group. She acknowledges that it is her long experience with children that makes her impatient with these sessions.

I don’t think I have found any of it terribly informative or terribly helpful. Because I think they are all things that happen spontaneously and
intuitively, that you sort of figure out for yourself, if you have ever had anything to do with kids... It's very much from experience how you learn to cope. (G-2, p.12-13)

Grace's concept of docenting is a straightforward one: a tour for children is an introduction to the Gallery, with a twofold purpose.

I think it is very important that they realize that this is a public art gallery which belongs to them as citizens of Monroe and that it's their only opportunity to see original works of art that haven't been reproduced either on a slide or in a book. They're seeing... the originals and very often, they're really wowed—they really "ooh and aah," And to me that's, if you can get one "ooh and aah," often they'll say, "Oh gosh, I really want to come back" and ... they are really excited and I don't think they get that sort of excitement by looking at slides in the classroom. (G-2, p.18)

The situation for adults is a little different, because "they probably aren't as flexible as children.... [sometimes] they can't stand anything they see on the walls" (G-2, p.19). If this is the case, she does not attempt to change anyone's mind, because "all you can do is hope to make them a little more willing to look and think before they make a decision" (G-2, p.20). This can be a challenging and interesting process for the docent.

That's fun, that part I love. I really do enjoy having a group in front of an Abstract Expressionist painting and watching them finally appreciate it.... to see that they are honestly realizing that there is some thought that went in to what the artist is doing. (G-2 p.8)

As she considers her own future as a docent, Grace is also aware the volunteer group is changing in responses to changes in the larger society.

I think it's going to get harder, because an awful lot of people are working. The sort of social strata that they perhaps drew a lot of these girls from, that say started when I did, say between the age of 32 or 34, a lot of these girls are working, and I think a lot of these volunteers are getting harder and harder to find.... well obviously more women are in the work force. They're not looking for something to do to fill in, not fill in their time, but perhaps give them something to think about other than the laundry. (G-2, p.30)

Although she has so many reservations about the direction of the programme, Grace is reluctant to take the final step, and actually resign. If she does, she will probably not leave the Gallery entirely, but will join a band of
Iris’ two years as a docent at the Gallery have been both frustrating and satisfying. She is enthusiastic about the possibilities of teaching children about art in a gallery setting, and frustrated by the lack of organization she has encountered in the docent programme. However, a pilot project involving docent visits to intermediate classrooms to prepare students for a trip to the Gallery has engaged her interest and provided enough rewards that she intends to continue, and even has plans to branch out into English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.

I just got my degree in art history, and I thought, "Oh, goody, shiny new art history degree, maybe I can do something with it." I was feeling very philanthropic I guess, or something, so I applied, but the response was a little slow in coming and I was getting a little twitchy because weeks went by and finally I phoned and they said, "Oh, no, there’s going to be a docent programme starting the first of October", so I started but really they weren’t organized. (l-1, p.2)

The new head of public programmes had joined the department the year before, when the new gallery director was appointed, and so the training programme was in a state of disarray. Iris’ background made her impatient with the training that she received, which emphasized docents researching works of
art in an exhibition, and then making presentations of the material to the whole group.

Well I would say it's just busy work but I also sense that a lot of the docents are there because they want to get an education about art, they feel that they're giving, and this is part of their getting. I don't think it's particularly fun to have to go and do a lot of research on something, if you don't have to... I just don't want to spend my time that way. I don't think my job is to educate other docents. I prefer to spend my time learning how to educate, or learning how to communicate something about art to people. (I-1, pp.33-34)

Another difficulty was that the numbers of new docents dwindled rapidly in the spring, leaving Iris without the comradeship and opportunity to learn from each other that docents value so highly.

In my year we were asked to turn around and do a tour, a simulated tour, before we had ever seen a tour. And I think, we were a little bit reticent about approaching one of the senior docents, saying, "Can I follow you around?" Now, I ultimately did that, because by April, I was getting pretty frustrated, attending these docent sessions since October.... I really wanted to get out there and do something. (I-2, p.2)

This initial period also added to the apprehension of giving a tour.

The longer the time was extended, the more that one became nervous. It seemed to me, anyway, because when you first start the programme you... probably have an idea that maybe it's quite easy which it isn't. But the more training, or the more talking you hear, the more difficult it begins to sound, and then once you really start getting into it it's not that bad after all. (I-1, p.5)

After spending months on researching and making presentations to other docents, she began to take tours almost immediately.

They were ready to pounce on me as the docent corps began to dwindle after Easter and they will take anybody.... I really didn't know what I was doing, and I did it. And nobody seemed to assess or evaluate that. I might have done irreparable damage [laughing]. (I-2, p.3)

Iris' interest in education sets her apart from the other docents, who tend to see the school tours as an introduction to the Gallery, rather than as an extension of student's classroom instruction in art.

I find this general tour format just a little frustrating. I think many of them, many of those women are very kind, hospitable women, and they look upon their role as being part hostess, welcoming people, and giving
them an overview of what is inside the Gallery. I think they do that aspect of tour-guiding very well. (I-1, p.14)

Iris has doubts about the value of such an approach, however.

I think it would be in the best interests of the school children to have something more specific than a general tour, but I think there are two ways of looking at it. Sometimes I think both the teachers and the Gallery both look at it as if any exposure to the Gallery is worthwhile, but I think often it's just an outing, and unless there is preparation and follow-up, on the part of the teacher, I don't see that it's great educational value to go into the Gallery except just to be exposed to a gallery, like don't touch, you know, all these little things, and "ooh and aah," but I don't think they learn very much. (I-1, p.13)

She points out the differences between a tour that is "just an outing" and one that serves a more significant educational function, ideally as part of a larger unit of classroom work. But her vision of how a visit to the Gallery could become more significant educationally is tempered by pragmatism.

It's hard for an elementary school teacher who's doing everything in the classroom.... They would like to get rid of the burden of art appreciation.... So I guess in that sense when they bring elementary kids into the Gallery... for a general tour they probably think that the kids are getting plenty and probably they are. Maybe I'm a little too idealistic, I don't know. I think they can get more. It would be nice to see it happen. But I honestly don't think it is going to, now. (I-2, pp.9-10)

The art education courses she has done, and her own reading and thinking, have provided her with a framework for looking at art with children, and the confidence to trust her ideas.

Well, I think over the past year I've certainly developed a little format for myself to look at art.... I mean, you have to start describing what you see, and then gradually becoming a little more familiar with what you see, before you let your emotions take over.... First, try and describe it, and then start analyzing how it's made, ... whether the artist exaggerates or whether it's real, ... good old principles, elements and principles of design, kids get quite familiar with when they are making art in school. Line, shape, colour, texture, and then working on how the artist puts it all together, composition, exaggeration or focus, a particular focus, and then ... I like to start working [with] the idea of what is the artist telling us.... And that's what I define as looking skills. (I-1, pp.19-20)

She sees this process as reinforcing what classroom teachers are trying to teach their students about art, but concedes that this approach does not suit adults. For both groups, communicating about art [is]
assessing your audience and pitching the tour to *them*. I think school children should interact with the paintings, pictures. I don't think adults wish to tour a gallery that way. I think .. they are quite satisfied with anecdotal information. (I-2, p.4)

But what a docent does is influenced not only by the needs and interests of adult visitors and school groups, but by art as subject for study.

Well, ... I think of the docent role as art appreciation. And there is studio art and there is art history, but I think of art history as putting art in a historical context, which is often the way many tours, professional tours in galleries are conducted.... I would say, they are usually an art history lecture.... But I think, art appreciation is different. You are looking at how it's done and why.... I think with children, because ... they are going back to school and doing art, I think, that is probably the emphasis that should happen. (I-2, p.31)

Iris' knowledge of classroom teaching in art, and her interest in bridging the gap between the Gallery and the schools means that she is often frustrated by the Gallery's organization of the education programmes, and the way she is treated as a volunteer. At one point she was leading drop-in tours for casual visitors.

Sometimes they would forget to put out the little stand with the announcement, which I found very irritating, because I felt a little abused. You know as a volunteer, I thought they could at least consider that I, that my time was important too. (I-1, p.8)

She also objects to the language used to refer to the volunteers.

I don't like the term, I don't like "docent," and I don't like "Junior" and I don't like "Senior." I think docent is a word that just invites, well because it's not really an English word.... It comes from "docere", Latin, anyway, and I just find it a little affected, and I think that is not what we want to suggest. We want to communicate with people, we don't want to set ourselves on this little pedestal, and the term just .. bothers me.... [And] I felt as if last year, when I was a "Junior" docent, I felt as if maybe I was in grade two. [laughing] We're all grown women for heaven sakes and this terminology just doesn't fit--it's ridiculous. (I-1, p.30)

Another grievance was a section of the Gallery membership newsletter which

is entitled "the Gallery and the kids" and it talks about the new workshops and the new programmes that are being developed for children in the Gallery and there is not one word about what the docents have done with children. Here was just an opportunity to say and this is just on, these
new programmes are just reinforcing the years of docent programming so as I said, I was hurt... It made me angry. (I-1, pp.45-46)

Despite these frustrations, the experience of giving tours has been a positive one. After her first few tours, she had a sudden realization:

At that point I realized this isn't difficult, if you are interested in asking people, to listen to them as well, and tell them what they want to hear.... And a couple of tours later, I realized, you can't make everybody happy, ... you can't capture everybody all the time, no matter what.... In any audience that anyone meets there will always be two or three mentally on the fringe. (I-1, p 28)

Another turning point came after a teacher commented on her skill as a docent, and added that her ready smile was very nice.

Oh, I was having fun, so that part was easy. But I think, then I realized that I could have fun and the kids would be smiling too, and involved... asking for more. (I-1, p.28-29)

Though talking to the children comes easily for Iris, making the tour a success in educational terms is a challenge.

I think it is a difficult thing, it's very difficult to do it well. And what's really surprised me at the Gallery...is that they have the professionals dealing with the drop-in tours, and they have the non-professionals, the docents, dealing with the thousands of school children that come in. To me, this is the wrong way of doing it.... Now, I would say from my experience probably the easiest tours to do are the adult tours, because all they want is anecdotal art history, really, where it takes a different set of skills to get some rapport going with children, or teenagers, now I think they're probably the most difficult, [laughing], most challenging. (I-1, p.37)

Her idea of herself as a docent is informed by the idea of getting people to interact with the art work.

I am really not a teacher.... Not so much teacher, no I guess, I am a guide. But I guess I have to say teacher in a sense, because I really feel committed to getting an audience to look at various aspects of a piece of art. So I guess that is teaching. (I-2, p.30)

For Iris, her colleagues have not been as useful or supportive as other docents in this study reported. This may be because the handful of people who began docent training when she did has dwindled to just a few, and the other docents seem to be too busy. After a tour, for example,
I would really just love to unload, and say, you know, "How did it work with you? and did you notice that this group was particularly difficult?" or ... ask one of the more senior people I work with, ...'I have a problem, help me solve it" but they've all vanished [laugh]... And even if it's just a release of our own feelings, we may not solve problems, but I feel it [would be] useful, whereas I've felt disappointed that I'm not doing that with my particular shift group. Again, if it were my shift, I think I'd make sure that I spent ten minutes after. (I-1, p.57)

As important as having colleagues to troubleshoot with, is celebration and confirmation of a job well done.

After having a group of children that I felt really well prepared [for] when they came in, and tremendously responsive in the Gallery, I felt a high... [laughter] You know it's such a let down just to get in the car and go home. I really wanted to share that experience. (I-1, p.59)

For Iris, learning to be a docent has meant learning to communicate with people about art, something that was entirely lacking in her undergraduate degree in art history. She is not particularly interested in learning about the Gallery's exhibitions. If she needs information in order to conduct a tour, she prefers to do the research herself, or listen to the curator or artist.

[However] the curators just tend to do the non-participatory type of talk. I heard a talk by a visiting curator... and it was very entertaining. Period. And it wasn’t his business to be there and tell us how to deal with it like a bunch of school children. That was not his problem. And it was entertaining, but as far as turning it around and using it, it wasn’t particularly useful, but I guess it forced me to research a little better.... If the artists are there, all the better, the real thing, the real person talking about the art.... But I really don’t think it is particularly valuable as far as us using it [goes]. (I-2, p.21-24)

Iris has managed to cope with the frustrations she has encountered as a docent by becoming involved in a pilot project in which docents visit an intermediate classroom to introduce students to the idea of looking at landscape painting. The following week, the students return to the Gallery for a tour of an exhibition which includes many landscapes. Iris sees this as an opportunity to offer more than a regular gallery tour, and it is particularly satisfying because she and two other volunteers developed the programme themselves. The response from teachers and students has been "tremendously supportive and
complimentary" (I-1, p.21), and the head of public programmes has been equally enthusiastic. Iris feels the Gallery is moving in a positive direction.

I am sure, in a couple of years there will be more and more programmes, as long as Diane is around. Because she feels that's what it's there for, it's a public place. So it's loosening, it's opening up. (I-2, p.36)

Her own involvement will continue into the foreseeable future.

Oh I am enjoying it now. And yes, it is challenging. And as long as I find it challenging and I also feel good about what I do. Giving, and that's fine. But we'll see. (I-2, p.27)

Interview Summary--Susan. Susan's search for something to be involved in once her children are all in school brought her to the Monroe Art Gallery. She has a BFA and has worked in art-related fields, although her main occupation is nursing, and so her background and her interest in children make the Gallery's docent programme a natural volunteer commitment for her. As she says, "I've really hit the nail on the head, I really feel like it is fun" (S-1, p.2). Susan's confidence in her own abilities and the training the Art Gallery has given her have made her one year in the docent programme a stimulating and enjoyable time, and she anticipates being involved there for several years. A few negative experiences, with a difficult group of children, and minor confrontations with the docent trainer and another docent have not marred this very positive experience.

Although she is certain that she will return to working in the art field eventually, Susan views being a docent as an ideal situation.

I was looking for something outside of the home, when my youngest was in preschool last year and I'm thinking, once my kids all get into school, I don't want to be a house lady. I spent most of my time around the home when they were young, but I want something for myself and I want to be able to go out of the home and be doing something. And I suppose, in a way going to the Art Gallery, well I know it was, was a step toward getting back into the art field. (S-1, p.40)

Though she has articulated this long-term goal for herself, her current
situation as a docent is ideally suited to her interests. She says,

I can see being involved for a number of years.... Even if I had something else going I would try to keep fitting it in because there is so much to learn there, you know. And it’s free. I don’t have to pay for a course. It is all there, waiting for you to absorb as much as you want. (S-1, p.53)

Susan’s goal of re-entering the art field is also fueled by her determination not to return to nursing as a career.

You go and see people with cancer dying and you are dealing with incredible car accidents, where people are maimed and mangled, and I did that for so many years. I don’t want to do that anymore. It made me feel depressed and I want to see the happier side of life. (S-1, p.43)

For Susan, the Gallery environment, and her involvement in it, offer an opportunity to do something "really positive".

When I walk into the Gallery, I get this flutter, almost like you are in love, I just feel like it. It sounds crazy, but I do, I just really feel, I feel really good. That is something that has been stifled in me since I’ve had kids. And I am looking for an outlet. (S-1, p.1)

The experience is not entirely one of elation as she has had some conflicts with the training coordinator, a more experienced docent, and has felt the need to stand up for herself.

I remember making comments to .. [her] in front of other people, saying, "oh no, come on, you know, that’s not quite that serious" or "we don’t have to really do that, do we?" And I think .. it kind of brought down her role as an authoritarian in respect to me.... I probably have the idea I could be a leader as well, and I suppose that was really what I was showing her, that I am not going to be pushed around, that I would certainly accept and take in what ... [she said], but don’t step on me, you know. (S-1, p.31-32)

Overall, however, she has enjoyed working with the docent group, finding the discussions with other people especially valuable.

Everybody was keen to try and understand it [a particularly difficult exhibition] and be able to explain to other people what was trying to be, or what was being said or the attempt of the artists’ expression. But we probably all came from different angles to understand it. It’s like, nobody has the same ideas, even if you give them one subject, they don’t express it the same way and they don’t feel it the same way. They don’t understand it the same way. But its interesting because everybody comes to understand and be able to explain something. (S-1, p.16)
Researching and learning on her own is also very important.

Funnily enough I found, the more I researched and got into the exhibits they had, the more I liked them.... I think, each exhibit I try and look for what there is in it. And what the person, the artist, is trying to say, or what they’re are trying to express, and appreciating it for what it is. (S-1, p.45-46)

Learning from other staff members, particularly the head of public programmes is another valued aspect of the programme.

She is just .. very kindly, I don’t know, she just does it right. She manages the group and she gets a response from people that is honest. She gets the action she wants and it is nice to see it. It is always nice to follow her around and see how she does it. Trying to figure out how she manages people and how she calmly makes comments, to bring on something else. I am sure that takes practice. To have a certain understanding of people. (S-1, p.35)

Responses from teachers can also be highly gratifying.

The teacher actually came with my kindergarten group and she thought it was a great tour, and I felt really pumped up. I thought that was great, because I’d really enjoyed it. (S-2, p.26)

Gathering in a small group to talk over their experiences has been a particularly valuable learning experience for the new docents as in the larger group there is tendency for discussions about each other’s tours to become filled with "slightly extreme positives", but Susan acknowledges that "most people have a hard time giving objective comments" (S-1, p.7).

What happened last year when we first started doing tours, [was] there was a group of three or four of us that hung around and watched each other, and we .. went back and had a cup of tea afterwards, and talked over what we’d done and what we could improve on and it was, that was really valid too, so you got a kind of reward or a, a conclusion, personally, to what you had done, which was satisfying. (S-2, p.27)

According to Susan, the general idea behind the Gallery’s tour programme is,

to bring the public into the Gallery and make it a more comfortable space, and make people feel that it wasn’t this austere building with ... formalities about it. It was made to feel more like a library or something, quite comfortable to be in. (S-1, p.8)
The lack of a more specific mandate from the gallery does worry her, as choosing what she wants to focus on or talk about is "quite satisfying, rather than being given specifics you didn't really agree with or feel strongly about" (S-1, p.8). A personal belief that children should not think art is boring motivates her and she has a clear idea about her own role as a docent:

I'd like to be seen as a person who would make art enjoyable, make it fun, especially for kids, and make it not seem so formal and outside of their everyday life. There is art everywhere. It's all a matter of looking. (S-1, p.18)

Being a parent has been more directly useful than her education as an artist in learning to be a docent.

I know how children are and their attention span and what they, how much they can tolerate and what they are likely to do, and that kind of stuff. So I can anticipate what they need, having done birthday parties for the last nine years [laugh]. Children helped me to be able to deal with being a docent--having had children. (S-1, p.14)

Susan is also confident about her ability to deal with, and learn from unforeseen situations. After a difficult time with a group of students who behaved very badly, she discovered,

how awful they can be and how rude. And I learned that you step on kids the first minute and you show them that ... you don't accept that behaviour and that you won't tolerate it. When I had a second group from the same school that same day, I practised with that and it worked much better. So I myself learned how to deal with these kids. (S-1, p.9)

Susan's experience as a parent, her education and work experience in art, and in public speaking, and working in other organizations, have given her a great deal of confidence, although she has only been in the programme for one year. Despite discouragement from a more experienced docent, for example, she persisted in developing her own format for a tour.

I thought, considering my children and the children I know, they would be bored silly [with her tour plan].... And so I decided, the only thing I could do was use their bodies, what they had with them. And so, when we went through the [landscape] exhibit, every three or four paintings I made them play the trees, be the trees, you know, line up really tight and try to have the light come through, or be waving trees or towering trees [and I asked] the teacher to squeeze through them and look between and
they had a laugh. And it was great, it broke it up and they got a sense of what .. [the] images were all about. (S-1, p.9)

The desire to make children aware that the Gallery *can* be an exciting place makes their interests the obvious starting point in planning a tour.

My first feeling is what age group am I dealing with and what will they be interested in?... I choose things [to talk about] that I very much like, that I feel I understand quite well and that I feel say something.... And how I go about organizing my thoughts--I actually write down a series of areas in the Gallery and I come up with a theme, ... and then I would choose the areas of the Gallery and the particular paintings ... and what I would say. (S-2, pp.1-2)

She elaborates further on this idea:

[What is important is] repeating the same points, through various aspects of the art that you show them, then drawing it together in a conclusion. Trying to keep a continual thread through the whole thing, so that there is a continuity and then pulling it together at the end, relating everything back to the beginning and running through it again. I organize it on, on a .. piece of paper and I've got it all figured out. (S-2, p.24)

Susan sees the docent programme as a perfect situation in which to learn for the time being, and as a stepping stone to other opportunities. Above all, she is optimistic about her own ability to use the experience to move to the next stage in her life.

It's my strength, I think, of character that will lead me to what I want. And if you like something--you have to make your life, don't you?--it's only you that will determine really which direction to go and not to go so I guess I'll keep my ears open and find something. (S-1, p.43-44)

**The Bridgetown Art Gallery Docents**

**Interview Summary-Lise.** Lise has been at the Bridgetown Art Gallery for five years and for her the process of becoming a docent has been a long and strenuous one, although she has enjoyed it very much. She explains that she has had no formal training in art, and is a self-taught painter and calligrapher. At first, she was extremely nervous about conducting tours, and admits that it is only in the last year that she has had any confidence in herself, but now even the idea of having one of her tours evaluated is not threatening. Lise finds most of the art exhibited in the Gallery not to her liking, and she copes with this
predicament by working only with children in the early elementary grades. They are so enthusiastic about coming to the Gallery, and present so few behaviour problems, that the tours are delightful. Still, she sometimes thinks of quitting, and perhaps becoming a volunteer at the hospital, but the collegiality of the docent group is a powerful incentive to stay.

For Lise, the substantial rewards of being involved in the docent programme are balanced against the difficulties and frustrations of having to look at and talk about art that she dislikes.

Well, ... I don't care for the exhibitions they have here. There is only about one in maybe five ... that I really care for. And it's very hard to relate to the children if you don't. You know, you have to kind of get into it, but seeing as I'm staying for little children, it's not quite so bad. It's easier ... if the exhibition's ... abstract art, if it is very colourful, very beautiful. Then you've got the theme [of] colour, or colour and shape and size, and the little kids they, they just love that, and the teachers like that too, to emphasize colour. And, oh ... it's a nice group, I like to work with them, and you know, we have a nice time. I guess that's one of the reasons why I stay and I intend to come back this year, so I'm not completely bogged down yet. (L-2, p.1)

Lise has won ribbons in local painting competitions, which she enters each year. She is proud of her success with painting, and with calligraphy, which she taught herself to do from books in the library. She grew up in a isolated rural area during the Depression, a combination of circumstances that prevented her from finishing high school. Although she loved to draw and paint as a child, after Lise began her family there was little time to pursue her own interests. She is quick to point out that she never went to art school, so what she learned, she learned on her own, and the docent training programme has been a new and stimulating experience for her.

I never took art training of any description. So it's kind of opened my eyes to lots of, opened a field you might say, to a lot of art I would likely never have seen otherwise. (L-2, p.4)
Lise volunteered to work at the Gallery because she thought it would be an interesting place, but she thought she would be helping with clerical tasks, or something similar.

I was kind of taken aback when they said, "You are going to take school groups through the Art Gallery." I thought "Oh no!" and I was absolutely terrified. I think I was one of their worst—I think I was scared to be on my own. It's only in the last year or so that I've kind of had confidence in myself. (L-1, p.14)

The realization that she could give a good tour came only after nearly four years of being in the docent programme. During these years she followed the more experienced docents on their tours, helping when she could, and attending the annual training sessions for new docents whenever possible.

I feel more confident being a docent now. It all of a sudden hit me, that I felt quite relaxed and I could go on and be a docent.... take a tour on my own, and not give two hoots whether somebody was with me or not. They're there, and if they want to come with me, sure, great. (L-2, p.20-21)

Lise's confidence in being a docent now extends to her willingness to teach the newer, less experienced docents. The docents are accustomed to working in pairs, and to watching each other's tours from the very beginning, so this is not entirely surprising.

I always try to let the person in training take over part of the tour as well. It's good for them, you know, as well as keeping the discipline. Some of the teachers are very, very good and others are quite slack. Like the fellow we had one day, who kept wandering off, and every time he wandered off, half the class went with him. We had a terrible time keeping the group all together. That's a big job. Knowing that children, you have to have their attention. (L-1, p.7)

Her own difficulties in learning how to give effective tours means that she is sometimes amazed by the ease with which some of the newer docents begin touring. Lise attributes this to their education, their age, and their courage.

[There are two new docents] who took no training to speak of.... [and they] just jumped in.... That makes the rest of us kind of humble [laughing].... We have several that belong to the docent art group, and they're former teachers or lecturers or something like that. And someone like Trudy and I who have never ever taken any training at all. We had to just kind of stumble along. (L-1, p.6)
As well, the younger women seem to learn faster than she did.

It hasn’t been that many years that they’ve been out of school themselves, whereas with us [the older docents] it’s kind of, a whole new learning, and so .. that’s why I’d just as soon [work with the young children]. I can put myself in the category with my grandchildren easier than I can with the [older] kids. (L-2, p.17)

She goes on to explain why the younger children are easier for her to handle:

I prefer the younger children, mostly because they’re so enthusiastic and so bubbly about coming to the Art Gallery whereas when you get the older group—I’ve gone on tours with the older group but ... it’s quite different, because, especially when they get around [grades] five, six, and seven it seems like... they’re scared to say something in case they say something goofy and the rest of the kids laugh at them. They’re quite self-conscious of what they’re saying and then you always have a few in the older kids that do not want to be there.... So I find the little children much more enthusiastic than the older ones, but then again like I say, I don’t take the older groups. (L-1, pp.15)

Although she is comfortable with the children now, the contemporary work the Gallery usually exhibits continues to baffle her:

I don’t care that much for installations.... Now this is my own private, .. my own idea, [my] personal opinion, but--to me art work is art work. It belongs in pictures and sculptures perhaps, but a lot of these installations are like .... I guess it’s alright, I guess there’s a certain amount of art attached to it. But it isn’t really my idea of art. In fact, I’m not really all that excited about abstract art, although I can appreciate it once it’s explained. You know it’s more, it’s a case of the artist’s thoughts, and feelings, and emotions, more than anything else and in stead of putting it down in an ordinary picture, they put it down more according to how they’re feeling at the particular time.... Some of the abstract art has got beautiful colours, in it, but then there’s others that make you wonder [laughing]. (L-1, pp.19)

Yet she admires the knowledge of the curators very much and regularly attends the Sunday public talks they or the artists who are exhibiting give, as well as the docent briefing sessions. She finds the explanations of each new exhibition very interesting.

Like I say, even a picture you can stand and shake your head about, by the time the curator gets finished explaining it, or the artist tells you what they were thinking of at the time, you can kind of see sense where you didn’t really see anything there before. (L-2, p.53)
These explanations, however, still leave her at a loss when she tries to understand why the Gallery persists in showing art that she does not like, and ignoring the works that she admires so much.

I prefer, I like a nice landscape or a nice picture of animals or something like that. You don't see that unless its as work coming from you know [an amateur art] group. (L-1 p.52)

In an effort to describe what she looks for in a work of art, Lise explains an exhibition of photographs of South America in the following way:

Each picture seemed to have a little bit of a history to it, like. They were taken high up in the Andes and [in], apparently, the lost city of the Incas, and at one time my aunt travelled all over there, and so I found it kind of interesting because I related it back to what I remember her telling about the tour. (L-1, p.21)

The Gallery's physical arrangement as part of a community arts centre allows Lise to cope with the conflict between her own ideas about what is good art, and the Gallery's exhibition policy. With the young children, she can focus her tours on the children's gallery, and an exhibition space used mainly for community arts groups. Both are located in a lobby adjacent to the main exhibition area. This latter space, which primarily shows the work of young, contemporary artists, then becomes of secondary importance to Lise's tours.

I take them all for a walk, so they can get an idea of how big the Gallery is, and sometimes there are huge big pictures and they are all absolutely amazed, you know. They have never seen anything like that before. (L-2, p.18-19)

Lise can thus limit the time she spends discussing the contemporary pieces she finds so difficult. It seems that the difficulties and benefits of being a docent are just about evenly matched for Lise. She particularly enjoys the collegiality of the group, the interactions with children, and some of the activities of the docent training.

We've also had different workshops and exercises. One workshop... they gave everybody two big pieces of cardboard, a bunch of wire and silver paper, and we're supposed to make something out of this. A sculpture or something [laughing]. So that was fun. We all made one, and then one of
the ladies, she takes pictures to put in ... a picture diary of the docents, and she took pictures after.... It's lots of laughs you know. (L-1, p.29)

Weighed against this fun is the commitment of time, which sometimes "gets out of hand". But I find a lot of the docents are working too, some of them, part-time work and they don't all find it easy either. Volunteering is very good to a certain point, and next thing you find, you've run out of time you don't have enough time for all your other activities and volunteer work as well. (L-1, p.50)

For now, though, the programme suits Lise's interests. Unless something intervenes, such as a move to be closer to her grandchildren, she intends to continue for at least another year.

Interview Summary—Barbara. Barbara knew from an early age that she would grow up to work with art, like her mother, who was the curator of a state-supported commercial art gallery, in the Eastern European city where they lived. Barbara visited the gallery daily on her way home from school and was used to looking at and thinking about art, and it was always assumed by her family that she would study art at university. Her master's degree in art history would seem to make her uniquely well-qualified to work as a docent, yet the challenge of communicating with children about contemporary art draws on a different set of skills and another kind of knowledge, something for which her graduate research into European architecture did not prepare her. Her difficulty in speaking English is a continual frustration, yet she is determined to learn as much as she can. She is a keen observer of her fellow docents, and of the gallery's policies and methods.

Barbara describes an incident that occurred when she was a little girl, when she saw a work of art in her mother's gallery, made by an artist who had simply crushed an umbrella and fixed it to a canvas. Barbara was intrigued by this, but could not understand why it was in the gallery, and her mother, trained as an historian of traditional European art, could not explain it to her satisfaction.
This incident created a sense of curiosity—and an uneasiness—about the forms that art takes that led Barbara to a master’s degree in art history and it perhaps explains the fascination she feels for her work at the Bridgetown Art Gallery.

I was always very interested why, I was very interested to know how it was done. I was most interested about [the] artist and his art, this connection, why are you doing this, and why are you choosing those materials, those forms, and what would you like to tell us through your art? This kind of thing, but sometimes ... with contemporary art I thought and I am thinking still, [that] it’s fake, it’s not true.... Some people are doing this because it looks nice, or because the colours are right, but ... [there’s] nothing behind [it]. So it was always very interesting to me to find out [if] it’s real, or [if] it’s not, and it was, I think, ... the reason I chose to study [the] history of art, because I felt it maybe would give some answers, you know, about processes and about those people, too. (B-1, pp.2-3)

Her experiences in the rigidly-structured, academic degree programme in an Eastern European university did not answer this question for her, and nor did it prepare her to teach. Her first experience in a high school art history class was, as she recalls, "a disaster".

There you are, you have your slides and you are talking about Gothic Cathedrals, who cares?.... Maybe if I had those techniques I have now, and if I knew how to do it, like I now know, I would make it interesting. But because they were not interested, I couldn’t do anything. (B-1, pp.5-6)

Barbara emigrated to Canada with her family, and became aware of the Bridgetown Art Gallery while searching for activities for her young daughter. She became a docent two years ago, thinking that as her English was so poor she might only be able to help the other docents with research or supplies for their tours, but the encouragement of the head of public programmes has enabled her to tackle more and more of the responsibility of giving a tour as her language proficiency grows. Having a young daughter in elementary school has helped her learn the idiomatic expressions children use, and the support of other docents has been important too.

Balanced against the ongoing frustration of speaking in an unfamiliar language is her desire to make sure the children get the most out of a tour.
It's always, ... I find myself [wanting the] children to learn a lot, but it's not the case, and it shouldn't be the case.... I understand, but it's difficult for me to accept, [that] the major thing is to let them know that there is a place like the Bridgetown Art Gallery, and this place is interesting, and there are a lot of different things in this place, and they should come back there with their parents. Not to teach them some special things but to get them involved and interested, and it's the policy and I think the policy is very clever, especially in Bridgetown. (B-1, pp.14-15)

Barbara enthusiastically supports the policy of making the gallery tours an enjoyable experience for children, yet she cannot help feeling sometimes that the children should be given more.

[This] is what most of the docents know, that they shouldn't be teachers there. [The] experience should be enjoyable and funny, because this is the way people will be back. Adults will be back for education, but children won't. They will be back for more fun. So .. always, I'm always depressed after each show, because, "I should have said this, and maybe they will remember this," and then I'm in the meeting and I know that they are right, ... and it shouldn't be this very, very structured way. (B-1, p.16)

Barbara is aware that the gallery and its programmes do not exist in isolation, but as part of a larger society where people are often uninterested in the fine arts, or intimidated by the atmosphere of an institution. One of the most important things the docents can do, then, is to help the visitors feel comfortable in the Gallery environment.

I think one of the things which we are coping [with] all the time and it's not [in] Bridgetown only, but adults are somehow afraid of going to [the] gallery, because they don't have [any] knowledge, and they think, especially [with] modern, very modern art, .. they think that if they don't have the knowledge, they shouldn't go, because they won't understand. And one of the things we would like to try to talk with children about is, you don't need to have knowledge. You need to have knowledge if ... it's your job to create art, or to write about art, but art is done by people for people, for everybody, so don't be afraid. Come, and go, and sit down and look, and think, and share the ideas, and no idea is wrong, because there is no good and bad. (B-2, pp.12)

For Barbara, working with children in the Gallery is crucial, because if the children of Bridgetown have not one, but several, good experiences in the gallery, then they will be more likely to return, and to support the arts as adults.

I think of course it is for children now too to have fun, and to see things, and to have [a] nice treat, but somehow we are working for [the] future,
We hope that these children that have a connection with the art gallery will be coming back. (B-1, p.13)

As her limitations in the English language have prevented her taking over tours completely on her own, Barbara has had many opportunities to be a keen and knowledgeable observer of other docents at work. She recognizes that this is important for all the docents, not just herself.

So we are always learning from each other, and we are always following after each other's tour. You can go along and watch, and help or not, but be there and look. And people have so many ideas, and so many different approaches to things, [that] meetings are very fascinating sometimes, because [we] brainstorm [ideas], or after [being guided through the show], ... we are sitting with a cup of coffee, and [we ask], "what can we do with the show?" "What would you do?" "What would you plan to do?" (B-1, p.20)

These experiences of observing and working with other docents have allowed Barbara to formulate some clear ideas about what a good docent is like.

First, you have to have knowledge and you have to have more information than you give.... It should look like you are talking so very easily about this because you have so much more.... Children trust you more if they think you are very knowledgeable.... Second, you have to be a little bit like the teacher [be] patient [and] understanding, because sometimes children do misbehave... so you have to like children, you have to like to work with children, you have to know children.... You have to be aware of different ages and different stages of development.... A sense of humour is important too, because there are some funny situations and it's nice if docents can play off it, and make things even funnier, or laugh with children, to make them feel you know, that they are important, and they are making very interesting discoveries, and to make it fun and exciting.... You should be an energetic person with your body, because body language is important and [then] you are making the impression that you are in charge, that you can handle the situation, that you are not afraid of anybody or anything.... You have to be moving all the time, with your subject... they have to be, you know, on the track all the time. You have to take them by the hand and go with them all the way. (B-3, pp.12-13)

She contrasts this ideal with another docent she observed, who is very nice, and very knowledgeable, but too slow... she is talking slow, and she is thinking while she is talking. It's not that she doesn't know, but she's looking in the picture, and it seems that she's not sure, but then nobody's sure, and nobody's sure it's really worth watching [laughing]. (B-3, p.13)
It is evident to Barbara that knowledge about art is not enough to become a docent, that understanding children is also very important, and this comes only with experience. Her experience as a parent, watching not only her daughter, but her daughter's friends and classmates, is an invaluable source of knowledge about children.

I think children are changing too, and most of [the] ladies are pretty old. Not old, I would say, but most of [the] ladies have [had] their children some time ago, and now they have their grandchildren.... Their children are grown, grown-ups, so they have different problems, and [a] different level of discussion, and their grandchildren are two or three or five, and not the same. I think it's better for those of us who have children in the same age, as... [those] we are touring, because, it's easier to relate, it's easier to predict, what [their] response will be with the picture. But it's experience of course. (B-2, p.11)

Her empathy with children also extends to handicapped children, who are now integrated into regular classrooms in Bridgetown school district. A few trying experiences, where the docents found themselves unexpectedly asked to cope with several children with multiple handicaps, led Barbara to ask the head of public programmes for a session with an expert in Special Education. This session has been very useful to the docents, though there are still sometimes occasions when the teaching assistants wander off and leave their children unattended, causing considerable disruption as the docents are torn between their responsibilities to the whole class, and these few students who need extra attention. Despite the difficulties the special-needs children pose, Barbara is committed to the idea of including them in the gallery's tours. She spoke to one student as she greeted the class at the door:

I asked him, "What's your name," and I told him, "my name's Barbara," and "what grade are you from?" I knew it, but it was just to make conversation, to know how the children are, and he said to me, "I am in grade one, but I am in normal school." It was [snaps fingers]. So I think it is good to integrate those people, but we have to be prepared. (B-1, pp.22)
Barbara’s understanding of how to be a docent involves more than having a warm and friendly manner and considerable knowledge of art. It extends to an understanding of the needs and behaviour of children of different ages.

You can expect children to concentrate, you can expect children to participate in . . . [the] exercises you are doing, which are appropriate, for this age, and for this subject, and you can expect that they share [their] ideas, and . . . listen to you and be with you all the time. (B-3, p.38)

But her understanding of children also makes her very sympathetic to their concerns.

Sometimes children have such strange ideas about the same subject, very different, and it’s beautiful and it’s nice, it’s not wrong, and it’s not right, but still you have to discuss it, and not to judge.... I don’t think children ever should be judged.

Barbara describes a tour as being like a pyramid, with the main concept or conclusion at the top, which the children arrive at themselves, supported by the carefully-planned questions of the docent, who helps them in the ascent.

The thing I learned is you have to ... make them be part of the process of going somewhere, because then they get excited, and then they are interested. To be there with them and help them on the way with this, I think it is just like parenting, to be with your child, and help him grow up, be there for him and with him, but not on him [laughing]. (B-2, p.36)

Barbara also has a strong sense of how relations between the gallery staff and the docent group function. The activities of the docents are supported by the head of public programmes, but not directed by her.

Mary tries to . . . [make] everything very simple ... and very difficult in the beginning. "Look you will have to do this," and [she] is very [fierce] and very strict .... "You can’t count on me. If you are sick and you have a tour tomorrow, you have to find someone to fill for you. I won’t be there, it has to be another docent. At least you have to call everyone on the list and you have to find someone." So she is with us . . . as an advisor, but she is not responsible for us. She has a good group, but we are adults and we are on our own. She tries to give us [the] most knowledge we need, and [the] most background we need, in the beginning. She never told us it would be easy, and it would be pleasant and it would be all honey and sugar--No!--but it’s rewarding and it’s interesting and it’s challenging. If somebody survives, not really survives [laughing] but decides after this intensive training, in the beginning that [this] is [the] thing that he or she would like to do it--it’s rewarding. So this is the selection. (B-2, pp.31-32)
It is the personal qualities of Mary, in part, that allow and encourage each docent to learn and to work effectively.

I think she is a very good educator.... She is very strict, she is very clear, [about] what she would like us to do, [and] what is her responsibility to us. She is to provide all those things and this information, and whatever we need.... I think she is very interested herself, in new things with education and art education and she is always sharing with us any news and we have people to talk to us, ... on this professional level, about children's psychology, about [their] level of ability ... all those things. So she tries to make it serious for us, to have those things from good sources. (B-2, p.33)

The seriousness with which the docent's work is regarded also extends to the other gallery staff.

I think the key is we are a very important part of this and it's not only saying, "oh you are so important" but ah! nobody really cares about us and nobody— you know. We have this feeling that if we won't be there that they couldn't operate without [us], because there won't be anybody else to guide the children, .... [We have] the feeling that our questions are important, that we are taken seriously as part of the Gallery. We are not staff, but we are taken seriously as part of the Gallery. But you see now it's very rewarding too, and we always try to ... learn something, which is somehow connected with things we do, [and] it's rewarding. (B-2, pp.32-34)

The exhibitions the Gallery chooses to exhibit sometimes pose great challenges for the docents, something that Barbara clearly finds part of the rewards of the programme. One exhibition, for example, included a painting which was a graphic depiction of the artist's own vasectomy, and how to deal with this became an important issue as the docents were concerned about frightening the children. The same exhibition included a nude image of Christ hanging on the Cross, painted on a piece of fabric designed to look like a shroud. The docents are aware that certain groups in the community, as well as parents and teachers, may be adamantly opposed to children seeing certain subjects, and they must be taken into consideration. Finally, of course, their own sense of what is moral or sacred may make some things difficult to talk about. The exhibition mentioned above, for instance, created a very interesting interchange of ideas within the docent group.
We had this problem with ourselves, [so] first we had to discuss what kind of censorship ... should [there] be? Should [there] be any censorship or not? Should the Gallery show everything it wants to show? But should this Gallery, which is not [a privately] owned Gallery, it's the municipality gallery, shall we show this, to the public, because then school boards will have problems, and [the] municipality could have problems, because parents will be angry, so what is the level of censorship we should have in this type of gallery? Because this gallery [is] mostly supported by [a] population, like normal people from the street, like children, and youngsters, so [should] the art in this kind of gallery .. be censored in different way than....? You know, those kinds of things.... It was the reason [we had] to talk a little bit about [the] philosophy of art [and] about the freedom of art. (B-2, pp.18-19)

Sometimes, of course, the most difficult exhibitions yield the richest responses, by presenting issues that the children are well aware of in any case. Barbara describes one such exhibition:

We thought that it would be difficult to handle.... They were big, big pictures, of people, who were in situations with a lot of violence. The violence was shown in this picture, but more by colours and by atmosphere, not by blood or guts, or... But some of these pictures were really very depressing, and really very unpleasant... and we didn’t know how children would react, and how to approach the subject. The artist told us that ... the reason she made those pictures was because she's aware of violence around her in the world, and it was her way to cope with it.... It’s a way of coping by herself, and it’s her way of communicating—she communicates to other people that [these] are important issues, and the cruelty of this was especially made as provocation to others to express their feelings and their self, and may be think things over. And we tried to ask children ... what did they think of this, and why it was done? And it was beautiful, because nobody ever thought that this person is cruel by herself, and that ... she likes to paint [these] sadistic subjects.

But I think children are aware, because maybe of the media, of the atmosphere in Canada, that there [is] a lot of cruelty around the world and it’s wrong. And it was very, very interesting, this exhibition, because they noticed immediately why it was done this way, what she wanted to tell us, and it was [a] very, very great success, from this point of view. (B-2, pp.7-8)

Barbara is compassionate about the sensitivity of children, partly because of a horrifying experience she had as a child, of being taken with her classmates to see a film which depicted all the hideous reality of war. She is aware that such experiences can have a terrible impact on children, and that the educational motives of the adults responsible can be seriously misguided. Her experiences in growing up in Eastern Europe, where the terrible lessons of history are much
more consciously transmitted to children have given her a different perspective, which she realizes that people in Canada may not share, because our society is much more stable.

The most important lesson, I realize, [is] that in some circumstances even very nice people can change and it’s dangerous, and it’s the reason we should work on our character, our rules, that we should [work] somehow on our personality, not to be involved ... against our will... You have to prepare your character and everything you’ve got inside, to be somehow immune, because you don’t know what is ahead. (B-2, p.22-23)

It is obvious that Barbara takes the exhibitions and programmes at the Gallery very seriously. Yet her final words return to an earlier theme: that each tour should be an enjoyable experience for the children. As part of her continuing education as a docent, she explains, she needs to learn more playful approaches to help the children interact with the works of art:

I think it is important for [children] of a certain age to [have] more games, or more projects, ... during the tour.... There are [a] hundred things you can do even with small props, ... like pieces of rope. But I haven’t mastered it. So I have to work on this more. (B-3, p.17)

**Interview Summary—Monica.** Monica moved to Bridgetown and had been living there for several months before realizing that the town had an art gallery. A notice in the paper calling for new docents caught her attention, and as she describes it,

I took the address, very discreetly, and I thought I’d go and have a look and see where it is before I get excited, I thought it would be a shack in the middle of a field somewhere and [then when I saw it] I was so impressed. (M-1, p.10)

Monica did not want her new friends to be the professional friends of her husband, but a group of people she could relate to because of mutual interests, so working as a docent seemed a perfect opportunity to meet new people. Monica has had a lifelong interest in art, and is eager to learn more about the contemporary artists of the local area. As well, a deep affection for children makes the programme an obvious choice for her. Although she works part time, she considers herself retired and enjoys the freedom being a volunteer gives her.
The nice part about being a docent is that it is something you chose, something that you wanted to do, for whatever reason, in my case, after retiring... I thought it was time to do things that I always enjoyed but I never had time to do.... When you work you have to arrange your professional life first, and then all your personal life and everything else around it. (M-2, p.15)

She feels a deep commitment to her work as a docent, and yet appreciates the advantages of being a volunteer.

If [being a docent] was a job, a bread-winning job, I wouldn’t be more dedicated, but I like my responsibility. I commit myself to attend every meeting. I try not to miss any. However, if I'm going to be on holiday next week, I can go. I don't have to ask, "May I have two weeks off?" (M-1, p.40)

Though all of the docents are dedicated and determined to do as well as they can, their status as volunteers has important consequences for the dynamics of the group.

It is a very well organized group where nobody ever upstages anybody and there [are] no power trips there.... Everybody had, or still has, some career. We all have a wealth of knowledge of our own in other fields. So nobody is there to say, "well, ... here is who I am".... It's a great thing, because being on [a] volunteer basis ... we are not building a career, we are not there to get to the top. And so we are doing it ... for self-satisfaction, self-fulfillment. (M-2, p.44)

Monica has had no formal training in art, although she is an enthusiastic photographer, so the education that she has received at the Gallery has been an important source of satisfaction. An especially interesting aspect of the docent programme is the chance to meet the artists whose work is exhibited.

The artists as a whole are very down to earth, easy-going people who are more than happy to share with you.... They are at a stage in their career where the more they talk the better a chance they have to be known, you know, if we communicate what a fantastic artist they are. (M-2, p.8-9)

The curators too have been approachable and informative.

Like I [started] only this year, and yet they ... always say, "Hi, Monica, how are you today?" I think the Gallery being small and being more of a local flavour, it's certainly like a big family.... The curators are wonderful, really generous. (M-2, p.10)

Learning from the docents has been equally important, and equally rewarding.
Every two weeks at our meeting we talk about our tours... and I certainly find that [a] very interesting and an educative part of [the] discussion, because I pick [up] ideas.... You take notes and I think we complement each other, I mean, some of us have ideas and when we share them all, then I think we develop a very interesting package for future tours. (M-2, p.8)

Although Monica has only been with the docents for the past year, she has already given numerous tours, owing partly to her own confidence with children, as well as her ability to learn quickly. But she also acknowledges the support of the more experienced docents.

I can say without a qualm [that] there is no way that I could have done it without my peers allowing me to tag along, and they don’t feel threatened.... Everybody is always happy to help out... I could not have done it, [by myself] because I felt so green. (M-2, p.13)

Another major source of fulfillment for Monica is talking to children about the art work.

Of course, the kids. That’s why we are doing it. To have contact with them, to see their little faces and excitement. And when they come back and they have seen you before, they are so happy because they think that you are somebody very special. (M-2, p.43)

As Monica’s confidence grows, she is less concerned about planning every moment of the tour, and more at ease with following the interests of the children.

I allow more time for the children to talk, rather than .. [for] me, trying to get them to know a lot of things.... I just let it go as it goes, so that if we touch a topic where the [kids] ask a lot of questions... I don’t look at my watch and say, "Gee, I should hurry up." I’d rather do one part in depth rather than to touch all the topics. (M-2, p.12)

The programme at the Bridgetown Art Gallery is organized so that each docent chooses which tours she wants to give, based on her own schedule, and on the age group and background of the class, which allows each person to specialize at a certain grade level if she wishes to.

I find it very difficult to interest a four or five year old [in] an art exhibit, for an hour. I relate better with kids I can talk with, and they can ask me pertinent questions. (M-1, p.19)

In the upper elementary grades in Bridgetown school district, there are art specialists to take all the classes. There is a well-defined programme for the year
which begins in September with colour, and progresses through line, and texture, ending up with emotion and feeling at the end of the school year. The docents are familiar with this sequence of themes, and they contact the teacher by phone before the tour to determine if their tour plans are appropriate. This gives Monica a feeling of confidence in her tours. Through repeated visits, the docents and the teachers have a chance to get to know each other over the course of the year.

I feel good at this point because at the end of the year I have met many of the teachers. I know the ones that are genuinely interested in the kids learning, and have made the effort to come, and are interested in what’s happening and they get to know us too, and it’s nice too, because if they like you they say the same in reverse: “The docent is there because she wants to be there.” There’s good rapport. (M-1, p.25)

Overall, the entire experience has been so positive that Monica is willing to continue as a docent indefinitely.

It’s been a very enlightening experience in many ways for me. And a very satisfying one and a very fulfilling one.... When I came, I told Mary [the department head] that I would come for one year. I thought, I may be a total failure and it may not be what I really want. But it’s been ... really nice. I’ve learned a lot, I’ve seen things that I thought I would not have seen. I’ve seen every single exhibit of the Gallery this year, ... and I visit on a first class basis because I get the artist and the curator to explain to me. So I mean, what else could I ask for .. in an art field? (M-2, pp.42-43)

SUMMARY

This chapter has presented interview summaries with six docents, in the form of "core narratives" which preserve the integrity, emphasis, and character of each docent’s "voice". Chapter V will describe Elbaz (1981) conceptualization and categories of the teacher’s practical knowledge, as a theoretical framework for identifying, understanding, and analyzing, the docent’s practical knowledge.
The literature on gallery education has paid scant attention to the role of docents in delivering education programmes. More emphasis has been placed on docent "management", and the methods which are used to recruit, train, and supervise docents. They have been viewed as passive agents who receive information from the gallery staff, and then pass it along to others. In Williams' (1985) terms docents are one form of "educational multiplier", in that they make it possible for a few education staff to reach many visitors. In the literature where the docent's background, education, and personal knowledge are considered, these characteristics are often considered difficulties to be overcome.

Docents as a group, being overwhelmingly white, female, and well-to-do, are at variance with the multi-racial, poor, and inner-city audiences that many museums are now trying to reach. (Berrill and Fertig, 1978, p.244)

Though the docents' work is acknowledged as being crucial to the success of the gallery, the docents' perspective of the education programmes in which they are involved has been overlooked. In many respects, this lack of recognition for the docents' own understanding of their work recalls the same omission in research on teachers.

It is apparent that teachers are ultimately the people whose task it is to translate theoretical notions into practice and that classroom events are the "embodiments of the curriculum" (Westbury, 1977). But there is an unwillingness to view the work done by teachers as the complex activity that it is. (Elbaz, 1981, p.43)

A growing number of researchers (Elbaz, 1981; Clandinin, 1986; Helgadottir, 1989) in education have contended that the widely-held view of
teachers as (usually) defective instruments for transmitting the curriculum has serious limitations.

Research on teaching... frequently views teachers in a fragmented way, in terms of isolated characteristics and from a negative stance. This tends to reinforce the view of the teacher as an instrument; she is a cog in the educational machine, and one which often seems to fall below the quality-controlled standards of the whole. (Elbaz, p.45)

Elbaz argues for a view of the teacher as an "autonomous agent [whose] knowledge is something dynamic, held in an active relationship to practice and used to give shape to that practice" (p.48). Furthermore, this knowledge originates in the teacher's experiences and is shaped by her values and purposes. In this chapter, Elbaz' conception of practical knowledge is applied to this study of the docent's perspective of gallery education programmes.

A brief summary of the most important features of Elbaz' (1981) conception of practical knowledge follows.

**The Conception of Practical Knowledge**

Elbaz argues that because teachers may have few opportunities to reflect upon or analyze their own knowledge, it usually remains unarticulated (p.47). However, it is revealed in practice, and with prompting may be shared verbally with the researcher.

The teacher's practical knowledge is not a compendium of practical advice from other fields, but rather a body of knowledge oriented to a particular practical context. (Elbaz, 1981, p.53)
The Content of Practical Knowledge

The teacher's knowledge is practical in that it is oriented towards action, and it is drawn from many sources as teachers confront a variety of situations, tasks, and problems.

Most obviously, teachers have knowledge of the subject matter, and knowledge of the curriculum... [They also] have knowledge, derived from practice, of instructional routines, classroom management, student needs, and the like... Teachers have self-knowledge and they work toward personally meaningful goals... Finally, a teacher's knowledge is based on, and shaped by, a variety of interactions with others in their environment. (p.47)

Elbaz characterizes these five areas as knowledge of subject, curriculum, instruction, the milieu of schooling, and self (p.48).

Orientations of Practical Knowledge

Elbaz (1981) argues that these content areas are not adequate in themselves to describe the extent of a teacher's knowledge. A teacher's knowledge is dynamic in that it not only arises from practice, but is held actively to give shape to that practice. How the knowledge is being held, and how it is used, become crucial features of the teacher's knowledge (p.48). Elbaz calls these features orientations of practical knowledge. They are significant because they permit a finer and more thorough examination of the shifting, detailed, and complex world of a teacher's practice. Elbaz identifies the five orientations of knowledge as: situational, social, theoretical, personal, and experiential (p.49).

Situational orientation refers to the notion that a teacher's knowledge is directed toward innumerable practical situations. Social constraints shape a teacher's knowledge, but teachers also actively use their knowledge to structure their social world. This is the social orientation. Theoretical orientation refers to the
understanding of theory which underlies and pervades a teacher’s practice. Personal orientation refers to the personal meaning and rewards that teachers work toward in their work. Finally, experiential orientation (derived mainly from Schutz and Luckmann, 1974) ties together certain aspects of the teacher’s experience, particularly their perspective of time, of the spontaneity with which they work, and of their "tension of consciousness", their level of attentiveness and the number of things to which they attend.

The Structure of Practical Knowledge

The third major aspect of this conception is the structure of practical knowledge. According to Elbaz (1981), practical knowledge can be held in three different ways, (1) as rules, which are brief, clear statements of what to do or how to do it; (2) as principles, which are more general ideas, derived from reflection on past experience, and which often include reasons; and (3) as images, which are metaphoric statements, based on remembered experience but also conditioned by the teacher’s values and purposes (p.49).

The Docent’s Practical Knowledge

This section applies Elbaz’ (1981) conception of practical knowledge in this study of the docent’s perspective of their work. The content of the docent’s practical knowledge corresponds with the five categories outlined by Elbaz (1981). These five categories are knowledge of subject matter, instruction, curriculum, milieu, and self. Since the gallery context from which these are derived is different from that of the schools, these categories are slightly different.
The Content of the Docent’s Practical Knowledge

It is evident that docents hold and use knowledge in a variety of ways, and that this knowledge is oriented toward action. First, docents have knowledge of art, and their knowledge is directed toward their teaching, though they may be less well informed than curators, or other experts. For example, they have a general knowledge of art history, of the nature, scope, and content of the gallery’s collections, and of specific works of art on display. For example, when an exhibit of contemporary photographs related to the work of the French Impressionists was shown at the Bridgetown Gallery, Monica did some research on the work of Monet. She developed an introduction to the exhibition based on the story of Monet’s discovery of the house at Giverny, how he developed the gardens over many years, how he built the famous little bridge, and how he continued to paint in the same gardens for over thirty years. She also used her own experiences with photography as a basis for leading children into a discussion of technique. She asked the children to examine the various effects of double exposures, the different uses of the tripod, and the expressive qualities of out-of-focus photographs, and she demonstrated how all these were done. Both art historical and technical knowledge about the making of art were used as a foundation for her work with this exhibition.

Second, docents hold knowledge about instructional techniques and procedures for touring visitors, paralleling the teacher’s understanding of instruction, though their knowledge will be uniquely suited to the gallery context. At the Bridgetown Art Gallery (BAG), for example, the docents work with materials, such as swatches of coloured fabric, or different types of wire, to lead children into an understanding of how colour, or line, are used in particular works of art (B-3, p.18-19). As well, they are constantly inventing new uses for these materials as new exhibitions call for a different ordering of their
knowledge. Susan maintained that it was important to organize the tour on a definite theme, and then to choose the art works that would best support that theme. She tried to repeat the same points in different ways throughout the tour, and then to conclude by relating everything back to what she said at the beginning, in a way that was suited to the age group of the children involved. (S-2, p.24)

Third, docents know that the gallery has an agenda for each tour, and the programme in general, and that there are things about each exhibition that they should transmit to visitors. They also know that teachers have expectations, and they themselves have particular knowledge or interests that they wish to convey to the children. This amorphous collection of intentions approximates Elbaz' category of "curriculum". Iris, in particular, was aware of the contradictions these varied purposes posed for the docents. She was frustrated by the docents and teachers who seemed to think that any exposure to art in the gallery would somehow benefit the children. For her, only a tour that was part of a larger unit of schoolwork planned by the teacher could have real educational value.

Fourth, docents hold knowledge about the gallery milieu. They have an understanding of the social environment of the docent group, of their relations with gallery staff, and visiting teachers and students, and they also know how the gallery relates to schools and the larger community. This is the category of the social. An exhibition of painting at the BAG, which contained controversial subject matter of a religious and sexual nature, that might have been offensive to groups or individuals in the community, provoked intense discussion amongst the docents, about censorship, and the proper role of the gallery to the community (B-2, p.18-19).

Fifth, docents have an understanding of themselves as teachers and learners, the responsibility they have in their work, and the meaning and
satisfactions they derive from their activity as docents. They seek out information about art work that they find of particular interest, and they work to increase the satisfaction they find in their activities as docents. This is the category of knowledge of self.

The Orientations of the Docent's Practical Knowledge

Although docents clearly hold knowledge that is structured in various ways, as images, rules, and principles, examination of the interviews indicates that knowledge was held mainly in the form of principles. These principles vary considerably from docent to docent.

Clandinin (1986) demonstrates the importance that emotion and moral valuing have on images (pp.135-137). She draws on Dewey's idea of emotion as the "moving and cementing force" in an experience.

The moral dimension emerges from the experiences in which [the image] has its origin and in the person's judgement of that experience.... The experiences [are] emotional ones and this emotion is carried forward as part of the "image". (p.139)

Because principles are the way in which images are given more specific form, they too are imbued with emotion and morality. Consider, for example, Barbara's image of a tour as a pyramid (B-2, p.38-39), which the children climb by means of the docent's questions, to reach a conclusion of their own at the top. In this image, teaching is viewed as being like parenting, in that the docent should be with the children, and there for them, but not on them; and nor, it seems, should docents carry the children to the top. Their own effort makes the climb worthwhile. Barbara's idea of learning as an exciting adventure, as a process of discovery, is vividly revealed in this image. Her love of children, her reflexive understanding of her own rigidly orthodox education, and her sense of what all these things should be are drawn together in a single potent image. The
image then becomes the source for innumerable principles about how tours, and
the many interactions which make up a tour, should transpire. It also serves as a
way to judge the value of a particular tour, by articulating a set of standards.
These standards are unique to Barbara, because they are based on her
experiences. They are used by her as a way to judge her own practice.

The following sections discuss the various ways principles were held
within the orientations outlined above. Occasionally, reference will be made to
the images that relate to these principles.

Situational orientation

This orientation included principles for giving a tour, from planning
content with the teachers before hand, to greeting children at the door, moving
them around the gallery smoothly, dealing with misbehaviour if necessary, and
working harmoniously with other docents. Docents knew how to stimulate
discussions by asking the right sorts of questions, eliciting responses from the
quiet children and keeping the "yappy ones quieter" (G-2, p.5).

Elbaz (1981) points out that "each unique situation encountered by the
teacher may call forth a new ordering of her knowledge and a different way of
using it" (p.54). Depending on the given situation, a docent would use her
knowledge differently. For example, Susan felt at one point that she needed to
assert herself with the volunteer coordinator.

I made a couple of comments that made it clear that [the docent
programme] is for our enjoyment and for other people's enjoyment and....
it wasn't that serious that we couldn't have a laugh.... It kind of brought
down her role as an authoritarian with respect to me. I suppose that was
really what I was showing her, that I am certainly not going to be pushed
around .. I would certainly take in and accept what [she said] but don't
step on me. (S-1, pp.31-32)

At another time, she was faced with a group of unruly adolescents, and at
first was at a loss as to how to deal with them.

I am not used to the differences between children and how awful they can
be, and how rude. And I learned that you step on them the first minute

...
and you show them ... that you don’t accept that behaviour and you won’t tolerate it .... So I myself learned how to deal with these kids. (SD-1, p.9)

The content of her knowledge was the same in that it was concerned with how to deal with conflicts between herself and others, but the situations were different, and so the knowledge she held was used in different ways.

Social orientation

Of particular importance to every docent interviewed was her experience within the docent group; the Gallery environment as a place to work, with special reference to her status as a volunteer; her relations with teachers; and also her knowledge of the wider community in which the gallery was situated. Although social conditions sometimes constrained the docents’ knowledge, they each actively worked to structure their own environment.

**Docent Group Support.** Each docent spoke of the importance of the docent group as a social situation in which to work. They sought advice, encouragement, information, role-modelling, commiseration when things went badly, and affirmation of a job well done, from each other. They looked to other docents for feedback on the relative success of their tours, something that may have been particularly important as in neither gallery was evaluation of tours a regular part of the docent programme. This support was especially important for the newer docents, who learned “how to be a docent” from watching the experienced ones. As a docent with one year’s experience said,

> Next year I hope to be a little more secure in what I do. And by that I mean, when we have a new exhibit, I always go on another docent’s tour before I give my tour.... I just want to make sure that I have the right idea about doing the right things... I feel I need all the help I can get from somebody... so I use all the tools available to me and that is [to] watch somebody else’s tour and to plagiarize to a certain extent. (M-2, p.45)

If this feeling of support for the docent’s work was not available, it was felt as a painful lack.

> [After a tour] I would really love to unload and say... how did it work with you? And did you notice that this group was particularly
difficult?.... We may not solve any problems, but I feel it's useful .. [and] I've felt disappointed that I'm not doing that with my particular shift group. (I-1, p.57)

The docent group also provided an important source of friendship and belongingness for many women. For Monica, the group was a source of friends with similar interests. She had recently moved to the community and did not want her friends to be the wives of professional friends of her husband (M-1, p.9). Susan had slightly different reasons for valuing the docent group as place where she could meet people with similar interests:

It is nice to have that contact with adults in a position where you are learning, and exchanging ideas and it's on a different level .. [than] what you normally have with other mothers, .. [who] are from all kinds of backgrounds and the only commonalty is children. (S-1, p.37)

Though Susan did have conversations about her children with other docents who were mothers, it was important that intellectual interests were also shared.

Social events involving the docent group were also seen as very important. These involved trips to other galleries and museums, lunches at restaurants, and seasonal celebrations, such as Christmas parties, and annual picnics at the end of the school year.

The Image of the "Big Family". Monica, at the Bridgetown Art Gallery, held an image of the Gallery social milieu as a "big family". For her, the friendliness and support of the docent group, where there were "no power trips" (M-1, p.44), extended to include the gallery staff, the exhibiting artists, and the visitors. As she describes it, when she joined the gallery they all "open their hearts to you" (M-2, p.28). Both staff members and artists were "very down to earth" people (M-1, p.8). There were no "prima donnas" amongst the artists she had met, rather, because the gallery was a local one, the artists were people who "could be our neighbours" (M-1, p.18). The curators too were "wonderful, [and] really generous" (M-1, p.10). The image of the "big family" did not only provide
a way for her to describe the "wonderful feelings" of the group, it also guided her activities. For example, when she needed a second docent to help with an especially large class, Monica insisted that she not be present as a "discipline figure" (M-2, p.13). Instead, the two women planned to do the tour together. Finally, the image of the family guides her attitudes toward the children on tours, and how she believes they perceive her:

Of course, the kids. That's why we are doing it. To have contact with them, [to] see their little faces and the excitement. And when they come back and they have seen you before, they are so happy, because they think that you are somebody very special. (M-2, p.44)

**Docents as Volunteers.** Each docent described, in various ways, an awareness of her status as a volunteer within the gallery organization. For some, the docent programme was seen as a relief from the competition and pressures of career building:

Nobody ever upstages anybody and there is no power trip there.... Everybody has had, or still has, some career. We all have a wealth of knowledge of our own in other fields. So nobody is there to say, well, you know, here is who I am. Everybody is the same.... It's a great thing, because being on the volunteer basis,... we are not building a career, we are not there to get to the top. And so we are doing it... for self-satisfaction, self-fulfillment. (M-2 p.44)

Susan looked on the programme as an opportunity to receive a "free education", as well as a possible "way back into the art field" (S-1, p.40). None of the respondents expressed any regret about not receiving remuneration. Iris did, however, indicate some bitterness about being unappreciated as a volunteer, when few visitors showed up for her drop-in tours.

Sometimes they would forget to put out the little stand with the announcement, which I found very irritating, because I felt a little abused. You know, as a volunteer, I thought they could at least consider that ... my time was important too. (I-1, p.8)

She also, however, recognized her own power within the gallery, in that she, unlike a paid staff member, could easily withdraw from an unrewarding situation.
I was angry, actually, and I finally did just blow up. I said, "I'm not going to do this, this is crazy...." I'm a volunteer, I guess they really tread softly with volunteers, because there are a lot of volunteer hours put in at the Gallery. (I-1, p.9)

Interestingly, none of the perquisites that galleries often list as benefits of their docent programme, such as free admission, invitations to openings, discounts in the shop, and so forth, were mentioned by any of the respondents as being important to them.

Grace reported that the docents saw themselves as somehow more important than other gallery volunteers, "because we were more educated". The docents worked directly with the exhibitions whereas the other volunteers worked in the gift shop, or raised funds for the women's auxiliary with events such as bridge parties. This suggests that there was a hierarchy of status amongst the volunteers in that gallery. The gallery too seemed to recognize this, since they acted to block the docents' annual Christmas party, in favour of a celebration for all the volunteers together. Grace resented this, and she and many other docents reacted by spontaneously boycotting the event (G-2, p.41).

**Docents and Teachers.** Another issue of some importance to the docents was their relation to teachers. Teachers were acknowledged as being an important source of information about the curriculum the class was following, and about the children as a group. However, on occasion teachers could be difficult. There are a number of ways of understanding the relation between teacher and docent. Monica encouraged teachers to intervene at any moment during a tour, and she saw herself as being an "instrument" to help the teacher with her curriculum goals. She worked mostly with tours brought to the gallery by art specialists and saw herself and the teacher as holding different, but complementary, knowledge (M-1, p.26). The best situations between docent and teacher involved gestures of mutual respect, tact, and generosity. On one occasion, Susan brought the teacher into a tour of landscape painting by asking
the children to pretend to be the trees, while the teacher squeezed between them and looked through, like the sunlight (S-1, p.9).

However, difficulties could arise if teachers were reluctant to relinquish control of the class to the docent

Some teachers are impossible, and some teachers are in the middle of things.... When I want to talk about something, I have these questions leading to something.... I don’t want to make the point by talking, I want the children to make the conclusion by themselves, and my questions are helpful, [and] they are somehow structured.... [And if] the teacher is asking questions with a different direction.. it is sometimes very unpleasant and .. very unhelpful.... It’s difficult to deal with the teacher because we can’t [say] "please go away!" (B-2 p.27)

It appears that the docent is only able to assume control of the class if the teacher is willing to yield it. The docents understand that this is necessary to conduct a successful tour, and yet it required considerable firmness and tact on the part of a docent to insist that this is the proper relation, unless she was experienced and confident enough to assert herself. Thus, the docent’s knowledge in these circumstances could be constrained by the actions of the teacher.

The Gallery as Social Environment. A number of docents had an understanding of the social context in which the gallery was situated, although in some instances the content of this knowledge should be challenged. Two changes within the school system of particular importance to the docents are discussed here.

The first is the mainstreaming of handicapped children into regular classrooms, and the second is the increasing numbers of English as a Second Language (ESL) students and classes. In Bridgetown, the docents were coping with these changes, particularly the mainstreaming of handicapped children into regular classrooms, and they recognized the impact this would have on their work. Two particular sources of frustration were described. The first occurred when teachers brought children with disabilities to the Gallery as part of a class,
without informing the docent. In the second instance, the teacher’s aides abandoned their charges without any notice, leaving the docent to cope with, for example, several hearing impaired children in wheelchairs, as well as all the other children. At the BAG, the docents requested speakers to conduct special workshops for them on working with children with disabilities. They expressed a willingness to learn how to do this, but they insisted that they needed more cooperation from the teacher, and especially information about the class before they arrived at the Gallery.

The concept of ESL classes visiting the galleries was also a change in the social environment of the galleries of which the docents were aware. At the Monroe Art Gallery, the docents knew they would be expected to work with ESL classes in the future. For Iris, this development was an exciting one, as she had had a positive experience with one class.

We were a little concerned before we (began) because we thought, art communicates, but can we communicate that art communicates [laughing] but then we realized afterwards that dealing with art is a tremendous entry into ESL students because the art itself can communicate when they can’t.... it was a good experience for all of us. It opens up tremendous possibilities for ESL classes. (I-1, pp.21-22)

For another Monroe docent, Susan, the issue was,

how do we speak to these kids when they don’t speak English? It was never relating to the culture that was shown... The situation wasn’t really there, we were touring Canadian culture. (S-2, p.11)

Although the response to the idea of ESL was generally positive, it does seem that the docent’s concept of Second Language Education needs examination. The idea that "Canadian culture" is a mono-culture, and that art gallery has a unique claim to representing this culture is an assumption that must be challenged.

Docents as Visitor Advocates. In some ways the docents represent the most active, responsive audience that galleries have, and in some instances they may act as advocates for other visitors. For example, Iris had planned to conduct
a short introduction to the theme of landscape in a space that had a large papier maché sculpture of a penis hanging from the ceiling. She protested to a staff member that this would be distracting, and in any case, inappropriate for the grade five group she would be working with. She believed the Gallery staff resisted her wish to change locations because they thought she was being prudish, an idea she argued against vehemently:

But there is stuff here [in the gallery] that is frank and quite explicit sexually, which isn’t a problem for people who are historians, and I don’t know if sophisticated is the right word, people that are really into art. That’s not a problem, but we have to be sensitive to our audience.... I don’t think you can just quickly say, “Oh, this is art,” and expect people to come off the street or out of the schools and accept that. (1-2, p.32)

Thus, a docent might actively seek to effect the knowledge orientation of a staff member, as well as to receive knowledge from them. The relation between staff and docents is ideally a dialectic one, with each group seeking to influence the other.

**Theoretical orientation**

This orientation must account for a theory of art, and a theory of education, in so far as tours are considered educational enterprises. Each docent articulated a conception of what a tour should be, and a conception of what art was. In the main, the docents adapt the knowledge of art and education that they receive from the gallery to fit the theoretical orientation that they held originally. If there was a discrepancy between what the gallery held to be art, or knowledge about art, and what the docent held, the tendency was for her to adapt the new knowledge to fit the original conception, rather than to change the conception. Thus, the theoretical knowledge that docents within the same gallery held was often widely divergent. Even docents with many years of experience within the gallery seemed resistant to changing their original ways of thinking about art and about education. It is this body of theoretical knowledge that must be examined, by docents, and by gallery educators.
The Gallery Tour as an Educational Experience. It was possible to discern several general themes in the kinds of things docents said about why tours exist, or what they achieved. The first was that a tour of the gallery was an introduction to the institution, that should give the visitors a good feeling about the place, and encourage them to come back. The second was that a tour should help visitors to appreciate the art that they encountered. This sense of the word "appreciation" had two components, enjoyment and understanding. The docents maintained that visitors should be helped to enjoy the experience of looking, and should be encouraged to find things that they found particularly enjoyable, and they should come to understand how and why art is made. A tour should not attempt to teach art history, or too much about the artist's life. There was general agreement that visitors, especially children, were not there so much to learn, especially in the formal sense, as to respond to the art work.

Grace argued that the most important function of a tour was to bring children to the realization that this gallery is a public art gallery which belongs to them as citizens of Monroe and that it's their only opportunity to see original works of art. (G-2, p.18)

For her, a gallery tour, and the works of art in the Gallery in general, are set apart from the lived experience of the students. The tour is an experience which is valuable mainly for its uniqueness, "a once in a lifetime [experience],.... something they've never culturally touched before" (G-2, p.16). Her idea of art, and of the gallery's role in exhibiting art, needs to be questioned for several reasons. The large metropolitan area in which the Monroe Art Gallery is situated contains many museums, commercial galleries, crafts shops, non-profit arts organizations, works of public sculpture, historical and contemporary architecture, and so forth. Students of many different cultures may already have a very rich background with diverse forms of art and craft. The idea that only a
large, publicly-supported art gallery has original works of art is an elitist, as well as a culturally-blind notion of art. It works against an idea that is widely promoted within art education—that art is part of everyday life, and can be found in an infinite number of forms not included in the fine arts tradition. Mason, for example, has inveighed against a notion of "cultural heritage as ... a universally valued archive of stable treasures" (1988, p.73).

One docent used this more inclusive idea of art in her tours. Susan told the children that art is all around us, and that art is mainly a matter of looking. Others, for example Barbara, encouraged the children to think of themselves as artists, because "everybody can make art" (B-2, p.15). Also at the BAG, Monica reported that one of the best aspects of the gallery's exhibitions were that they were made by young, local artists, an idea to which the children responded with great enthusiasm.

They are always fascinated that these people are local. It's not somebody who's been dead for three hundred years ... It could be my next door neighbour.... With the kind of art that we present it's kind of enticing to them, because it's here. (M-2, p.18)

Galleries, and their tours to school children, can either promote the idea that art is remote, inaccessible, and something to be approached with awe, or they can work to establish the reverse—that art is everywhere, that almost anyone can be an artist, that "you don't need to have knowledge, and no idea is wrong" (B-2, p.12).

In summary, the docents held two contradictory ideas about what tours should be. One is that a tour is an introduction to the Gallery, which helps visitors to feel comfortable in this unfamiliar environment, and that they must be encouraged to return. The other idea is that individual art works are important, and that visitors should learn to look carefully at works of art, and to understand them through a process of examination, reflection, and discussion, which goes beyond an initial emotional response. Docents believed that this objective was
not necessarily one that school art programmes addressed. To some extent they believed it was more consequential than curriculum goals that schools might have. This process of looking takes some time for each work of art, of course, and it also takes some experience to be able to do independently, hence the need for a docent. The existence of these two conceptions reveals a discrepancy in the docents’ theoretical knowledge, but it also reflects a conflict in the aims of the gallery, and in the frequently unarticulated goals of the teacher. This dichotomy will be discussed further.

**The docent’s theoretical knowledge of art.** Another lacuna in the docents’ theoretical framework is that they hold a conception of art that does not adequately encompass the kinds of exhibits they are expected to talk about. Again, they were often acutely aware of this discrepancy, and their own discomfort.

Monica found the content of one painting exhibition deeply disturbing, in both content and style, and could not come to terms with talking about the paintings, despite considerable information from the gallery staff.

> It was very difficult to assimilate, to see [this exhibit]. You have to see it again, but you don’t know if you wanted to see it because you liked it .. or because there is something there that you didn’t understand.... I found the whole exhibit was tainted by an aura of ugliness, and depression, and heaviness.... There is nothing pretty in [anything] he does. (M-1, p.47)

She went back to see the exhibition three times, once accompanied by her husband, who also found the exhibition, "gruesome, depressing, [and] ugly". She was at a loss to explain why the paintings might be valuable, except as a "vehicle [for the artist] to express himself. He is not painting to have something nice to put .. [over] the fireplace." (M-2, p.48).

Monica acknowledged that her response was a personal one, coloured by her own past experiences, particularly seeing so much suffering and death in her years as a nurse.
I want to see the nice, bright, happy side of life. I don't want to think about death, and dying, and heartache. Maybe that's what made me go back, not because I liked it so much, but because of that. (M-2, p.49)

Despite her repeated attempts to understand this exhibition, and her obviously powerful emotional response to the work, she could not help feeling that it was somehow "horrible". There was no way for her to reconcile the differences between this artist's work, and her own understanding of what art should be all about.

An artist obviously is someone who expresses .. [himself] with whatever medium he is gifted with, an artist creates according his viewpoint. It has to be, he can't create something that he doesn't feel. But to me .. an artist should be somebody who creates beauty. (M-1, p.50)

When the kind of art work being exhibited conflicted with the knowledge that each person had about what art could or should be, and this conflict was not resolved, then the docent usually coped with the situation by avoiding that exhibition. Hence, Iris's statement that "video is not anything that a docent should have to be involved with anyway because it's a self-guided type of tour" (I-2, p.18). Since the docents were free to choose what they wanted to talk about, this effectively sidestepped their dilemma. However, it does mean that visitors on tours may receive a kind of expurgated version of the gallery's exhibitions, with the most difficult or newest forms of art omitted, even though it may be exactly these exhibitions that the casual visitor most needs help in understanding.

Since the docent's ideas about art seem resistant to change, deeply personal, and may be held in contradiction to the gallery's own policies, docent education programmes should deal more directly with the docents' theoretical orientation toward art.

**Personal orientation**

Personal orientation refers to the role of purpose and meaning in shaping perception. It also deals with the sense of responsibility that each docent feels
about her work. It is particularly important to understand this aspect of a docent's experience as they, as volunteers, are largely motivated by feelings of personal satisfaction. Docents use their knowledge to enable themselves to work in personally meaningful ways, and what is most rewarding for each docent will be reflected in her orientation to other kinds of knowledge.

This form of knowledge is intricately bound up with a docent's previous life experiences. For example, Iris, who had completed education courses, believed tours could not be of educational value unless the teacher had planned preparatory and follow-up sessions for the class. The experience of giving a "general" tour was deeply frustrating for her. It was only when she embarked on a project in which the gallery tour was one part of a larger unit of work for the children that she was satisfied with her efforts. It was only then that the docent programme met her requirements of allowing her to "give". In contrast, Grace argued that what she wanted from the gallery was "some nourishment, some information, a continuing education" (G-2, p.30). She thought that the current briefings to each exhibition were "crummy" and that the docents needed more time with the curator or artist to understand the art work better (G-1, p.37). Iris believed that the group did not need that much information, since they were "never asked very penetrating questions" (I-1, p.38). What mattered for Iris was help in learning how to communicate, whereas Grace was very impatient with that idea. Thus, the personal orientation of each woman influenced not only how they used knowledge they already held, but how they perceived new information.

Susan articulated this personal orientation most clearly. For her, even walking into the gallery was an intensely felt experience of elation, a flutter in her stomach, "like you're in love" (S-1, p.2). For Susan, what was important was that children "find the pleasures, what .. [they] personally like, and where .."
[they] can enjoy art" (S-2, p.50). Her main goal was that children should not see the gallery, and art in general, as "something boring". Thus she worked to involve the children as much as possible, having them act out parts of a painting, referring to art outside the gallery, and using the typical interests of a specific grade level as a way to introduce an exhibition to them. For Susan, it was important that the structure of the programme allowed her to pursue her own interests, rather than insisting on an approach she did not agree with. It was her interests, and the interests of the children she talked to, which determined what knowledge was most valuable.

**Experiential Orientation**

The experiential orientation deals with how the docent's knowledge is related to her experiences. This orientation contains several categories of experiencing that are interwoven with the personal and situational orientations. The main categories of experiencing examined here are the time and spatial perspectives of docents, the spontaneity with which they work, and their "tension of consciousness", the number of different aspects of a situation to which they attend.

**Time perspective.** The docent's perspective of time has several facets. First, activity as a docent must be seen within the context of a docent's life history. Susan had worked full-time until her children were born, and now that the youngest was entering kindergarten there was time for her own interests, as she did not want to be just a "houselady". It was also time to think about resuming her professional career. Therefore, being a docent was fitted around the major events of her personal life.

For Lise, raising children had meant that her interest in art had "got sidetracked" (L-1, p.3). She had waited until they were adults before pursuing her own activities. The docent programme was valuable because it "keeps you
busy with something to do. It seems like the more you have the more you get done. You have to get up in the morning and get cracking" (L-1, p.37). This was a benefit of the programme, but sometimes volunteering could get out of hand and take up too much time, as at the end of the school year when many docents were travelling, and then it could drive out the time left for other things (L-1, p.50). For Lise, balancing the demands of too much or too little time was an important aspect of being a docent.

Second, there is the time-span of a docent's career within the gallery. At both galleries, initial training usually lasts several months, before the new docent is inducted into the larger group. At the MAG, for the first year she is considered a "Junior Docent". Although she may be taking tours, it is not until the second year that she joins the "Senior Docent" group. Some docents remain with the gallery for many years. Others may leave after a shorter time, or move on to other areas of volunteering within the gallery.

Third, there is a rhythm of docent activity within a given year, which echoes the school year. Training of new docents in each gallery typically begins in the Fall, and the year ends in May or June, giving the docents the summer off. Docents are also aware that at a given grade level, children are more mature in the spring than they are at the beginning of the school year, and this must be considered when planning a tour.

Fourth, the time within an individual tour must be managed carefully. If the tour moves too slowly, the visitors will become bored and restless. If it is too fast-paced, then they will not have a chance to respond to the art work. Each docent must not take up more than her allotted time in a given space or exhibition area, as another group will probably be waiting its turn. The docents are well aware of the time constraints within which they work, and admit that this is one aspect of being a docent that can take considerable time to master.
Spatial perspective. Moving large groups of visitors around a strange, and often intimidating, environment, which may contain objects of great fragility, or objects that are dangerous to children, such as sculptures with protruding nails, requires much forethought. Thus the spatial awareness of each docent is crucially important. Though the exhibition areas may seem large, they are often cramped when filled with groups of lively children. At the MAG, the sheer "volume of air" (S-2, p.4) can be intimidating to children. It is difficult to move children past an appealing exhibition to look at the one intended for study, yet if the docent permits this diversion, then the tour can disintegrate into a fast walk past countless art works. If a class has come to see an exhibition of one artist's work, then the docents who are leading each group within the class must carefully synchronize their movements about the exhibition area, and this precludes a chronological approach. Thus, the docent's knowledge of the space in which she has to work determines, in part, the kinds of experiences the children will have of a given exhibition or art works.

Spontaneity. A number of docents viewed flexibility, or the ability to respond to unforeseen situations, as a key to being a successful docent. Although thorough preparation and careful planning were important, they emphasized that last minute changes, such as tour groups arriving late, works of art or entire exhibitions altered without prior notice, and interruptions in the form of other activities taking place in the same area, could interfere with a docent's plans, and she should be able to deal with this. Other things that might interfere were a group that arrived exhausted after walking long distances visiting other attractions, teachers interrupting with their own agendas, or children behaving in unpredictable ways. The need to control a tour through careful planning was balanced against the need for flexibility. Spontaneous happenings, especially
humourous ones, were seen as opportunities to deepen rapport with the children, as well as being enjoyable in themselves.

The confidence to be truly spontaneous was one of the chief results of having more experience for Monica. For example, when a junior high school group arrived to see an exhibition of contemporary musical instruments, she admitted her ignorance of music to them, and invited them to tell her what they knew. Then she used their enthusiastic responses to encourage them to look more closely at the instruments as sculptural objects, as well as music-producing ones (M-1, p.24).

I will prepare for more than I can give ... [then] I just let it go as it goes, so that if we touch [a] topic where the [children] ask a lot of questions ... I don’t look at my watch and say, "Gee, I should hurry up because I’ve got all that [to cover]...." I’d rather do one part in depth .. than touch all the areas]. (M-2, p.12)

Perhaps because they are not tied to a prescribed curriculum or a script, docents are able to explore this dimension of teaching.

**Tension of consciousness.** This refers to the level of attentiveness and the number of features of a situation that a docent attends to. The docents attended to a number of dichotomies in their work. There was the tension between the viewpoint of the visitor, who might be unfamiliar with looking at works of art, and the necessary skills to understand many, especially contemporary, pieces. Other tensions have been described, for example, the amount of time needed to respond to a work of art versus the amount of time a visitor may be willing to give. There is the pull between the docent’s own preferences for certain styles or media, and the work the gallery is exhibiting. There is the tension between what the visitor may expect of the gallery, and of the tour, versus the message the gallery would like the docent to promote. Even the architecture may become a source of tension.

None of us intend .. to be rigid and imposing and cold and authoritarian in here. It’s just the way the building is, the architecture of the building
and the way it had to be constructed to serve the purposes of being a good gallery and having the right humidity and light. And that's the way it is. We'll enjoy it for what it is and yet try to feel relaxed in it (S-1, p.51).

One of the most significant sources of tension is the contradiction between what Williams (1988) calls the elitist and the democratic goals of the gallery.

On the one hand we collect only the best, determined by a legitimate aristocracy of experts.... At the same time, we are democratic in our public responsibilities and open to all citizens. (p.16)

This conflict is nowhere more evident than on a tour of casual visitors or school children. In some respects, the docents work in the critical interface between the visitor and the work of art. More than gallery staff, they are responsible for introducing inexperienced visitors--children on school tours, and the casual adult visitor--to the institution and its exhibitions. They have a critical appreciation of the importance of this task, and the challenges it presents:

Grace: Sometimes you get a group that right off the bat they've decided they hate [the artist] and so then you realize there is no point in flogging a dead horse, you might as well move onto something else. It really upsets them.
Interviewer: So you're not out to change anyone's mind?
Grace: Oh, lord, no, no, you couldn't possibly. All you can do is hope to make them a little more willing to look and think before they make a decision. (G-1, p.20)

SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined the five different content areas of a docent's knowledge. Docents have knowledge of their subject, art, and of a form of "curriculum", a cluster of intentions for a tour, that guide their practice. They have knowledge of instructional techniques, of themselves, and the milieu of the gallery. These content areas do not adequately describe the extent of the docent's knowledge. The orientation of their knowledge must also be considered. Five different orientations were discussed. These were the situational, social, theoretical, personal, and experiential orientations. Although these were presented as if they were separate, in reality they are held as a single body of knowledge, with considerable areas of overlap. Because docents learn largely
from experience, their knowledge is pervaded with emotional and moral valuing.

Chapter VI will draw out some of the implications of this analysis of the docent's practical knowledge, for practice the practice of gallery education, and for further research in the field.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to make a contribution to the field of gallery education by describing and analyzing the docent's perspective of gallery education programmes. Gallery staff, and other educators, may now more fully understand the complexity of the docents' role, and the nature of the knowledge they hold and use to give shape to their practice. Chapter V presented a discussion and analysis of the docent's practical knowledge. This final chapter will draw some conclusions from the preceding discussion, and will offer some implications for practice, and for further research.

Summary of the Study

This was a study of six docents' perspectives of gallery education programmes. These six docents were selected because they represented the larger group of docents at two galleries, in terms of characteristics such as age, educational background, and length of time employed as a docent. Summaries of these interviews were presented in a form which preserved the integrity, emphasis, and character of each respondent's "voice". The content categories, orientations, and structures used to describe the teacher's practical knowledge were used as a framework within which the docent's practical knowledge was analyzed.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this analysis of the docent's practical knowledge.

Conclusions

1) The docent group functions as an important social system.

All the docents in this study emphasized the importance of the docent group to their work. They sought from each other advice, encouragement, information, role-modelling, commiseration when things went badly, and
affirmation of a job well done. Staff members, whether curators or educators, were seen as advisors, or sources of knowledge about art, but it was from each other that the docents learned "how to be a docent". The docent group was also important as a social group, which provided a source of friendships with people with similar intellectual interests. Furthermore, the docents' status as volunteers was seen as a positive aspect of the programme, as they did not have the pressures of a professional role, but had many of the benefits, including challenging work, a continuing education, and associations with interesting and thoughtful people.

The docent group was, in some ways, an autonomous one. That is, the docent culture was transmitted from the experienced docents to the novices, regardless of the presence, or absence, of an educator.

2) Docents work for personal satisfaction.

It is important to understand the role that purpose and meaning have in shaping the docents' perception of their work, because, as volunteers, they are largely motivated by feelings of satisfaction. Docents use their knowledge to enable themselves to work in personally meaningful ways, and this is reflected in their orientation to other kinds of knowledge. For some docents, the continuing education in art provided by the gallery was seen as a key element in their satisfaction with the programme, whereas others looked primarily for help in learning how to communicate. What was considered satisfactory education for one group was deeply frustrating for the other, and this shaped the way they perceived new knowledge offered by the gallery. One gallery's purposes for the tour programme were so broad that it encompassed the most diverse and sometime contradictory purposes of the docents. This did cause frustration for some of the docents, however the larger question is whether such a diverse
collection of purposes can provide an appropriate rationale on which to develop education programmes.

3) The docent's role is a paradoxical one.

The experiential orientation encompassed a number of categories of experiencing. Some of the more important ones were the time and spatial perspectives of docents, the spontaneity with which they worked, and their "tension of consciousness", the number of different aspects of a situation to which they attend. For example, the docents were aware that many of the works of art they were helping visitors to understand were sophisticated and required much time to understand, yet frequently visitors expected to spend only a few minutes in front of each work. While visitors, especially children, were intimidated by the severity of the architecture, the presence of uniformed guards, and the generally formal atmosphere of the building, the docents were responsible for making the gallery seem a welcoming, comfortable, and interesting place. Frequently, unexpected events, such as a group arriving late, works of art changing without notice, or disruptive behaviour, could affect their careful plans for a tour. Works of art could be fragile, or even dangerous, and these physical difficulties could be compounded if several groups were visiting the same exhibition at the same time. The docents worked hard to develop the flexibility required to cope with these situations, and they recognized that the ability to be spontaneous was a product of long experience.

Docents worked in the crucial role of bringing together visitors and works of art. They attempted to implement the democratic goals of the public programmes of the gallery and to explain the "elitist" ones of collection and exhibition of the best art. As non-professionals, they were very well aware of the difficulties that many visitors have with some forms of art. In several instances,
they sought to act as advocates of the visitor to the gallery staff, representing community concerns about the controversial content of some art work.

4) Because the docents’ knowledge is oriented toward action, their theoretical knowledge may be inadequately developed.

The docents’ theoretical knowledge of art was sometimes inadequate to interpret the exhibitions. It was apparent in the interviews that the docents tended to adapt the knowledge about art they received from the gallery to fit the theoretical understanding of art they had originally. If there was a discrepancy, they tended to avoid situations that called for them to use the new knowledge. Though this resolved their dilemma, it is a solution which causes further problems in that tours groups may receive a kind of expurgated version of the gallery’s exhibitions, with the most difficult or newest forms of art omitted, even though it may be these forms, in particular, that the inexperienced visitor most needs help in understanding. The docent’s ideas about art are deeply personal and therefore resistant to change, but if they are held in contradiction to the gallery’s policies, docent education programmes may need to confront them more directly.

The docents’ theoretical understanding of education could also be contradictory. On one hand, some docents maintained that a tour was an introduction to the institution, as a welcoming, interesting place which belongs to all citizens. On the other hand, docents attempted to teach visitors how to look at individual works of art, sometimes tried to link the gallery visit to the curriculum content of school art programmes, or to teach about concepts such as colour theory. The goals of the programme often seemed to rest on a loose collection of intentions which were derived from the docent’s own interest in particular art works, the teacher’s wishes for the tour, the general mandate from the gallery, as well as the specific thesis on which an exhibition was designed.
Again, it is questionable whether education programmes are well served by such a diverse set of purposes.

5) Research on teacher's thinking is a rich source of theory for gallery educators who are educating docents.

This study has applied a theory of the teacher's practical knowledge to this study of the docent's perspective of gallery education. The content categories, orientations, and structures found in the teacher's practical knowledge, when applied to the docents' perspective of education programmes, has permitted a richer and more thorough description of the docents' knowledge. This suggests that research on teacher education is a valuable source of theory for gallery educators.

Implications for practice

The conclusions outlined above suggest some implications for practice, and for further research.

1) The apprenticeship system could be a more effective form of docent education.

Most galleries (Jones, 1977) use some form of apprenticeship system, in which new docents follow, observe, and later on assist, experienced ones. Where this occurs, it encourages a continuous exchange of knowledge between docents, especially when they are given time and encouragement to explore their ideas during meetings. It was apparent from the interviews that part of the reason for not including evaluations as part of the docents' education was a fear of alienating them, and some docents did describe insensitive attempts at evaluation of their tours. Nevertheless, if galleries are committed to developing education programmes of high caliber, evaluation should be part of that process. As formal evaluations were not conducted at either gallery, some kind of peer review could be derived from the informal observations that docents make of
each others' work already. At the least, beginning docents could be encouraged
to draw up a list of criteria for a "good tour" after observing several experienced
docents. This list of criteria could form the basis of ongoing self-evaluation, as
part of their induction into the established docent group.

This present study of the docent's practical knowledge might form the
basis for reflection and discussion on the docent's own experience. Discussion
groups for this purpose need not be led by the gallery educator. The description
of a docent's practical knowledge could be part of a docent training manual, and
small groups of docents, with varying amounts of experience, could use it as a
stimulus for discussion periodically throughout the year.

Gallery educators should explore the literature on teacher education, and
particularly on teacher thinking, as a source of theory, and of practical ideas.
Some of this research could be presented to the docents to aid them in
understanding their own process of becoming teachers. In order to provide a
model of critical reflection and inquiry gallery educators should demonstrate
that they too are working to extend their own practical knowledge. In this way
the educational team of an institution, working either as professionals or
volunteers, may become involved in a true collaboration of continuous learning
and finding ways to help others to learn.

2) Docents should be encouraged to develop a more adequate theoretical
understanding of art, and of education.

Because the docents' knowledge is oriented towards practical situations,
their understanding of theory may rest largely on unquestioned assumptions
about art, and about education. This body of theory may create difficulties, for
themselves, and for the gallery's programmes. The docents' practical
knowledge, and the theories which underlie it, must be examined in order for
them to achieve satisfaction in their work, and to ensure that gallery education
programmes are of high quality. Furthermore, gallery staff cannot assume that presenting information about current exhibitions is enough to challenge these underlying ideas about art, for the docents, or for visitors. If the docents, with their "insider's" access to exhibitions, and information from curators, educators, and artists, find it difficult to understand new forms of art, how much more difficult must it be for the casual visitor?

Teacher educators have observed that inexperienced teachers are preoccupied with classroom situations in the immediate future. Theoretical considerations do not concern them until they have been teaching for some time. The conclusions outlined above suggest that this may be true for docents also. After they have been working for some time, and have less need to focus on immediate "survival", docents are more able to observe, and reflect upon, the visitors' responses, and their own teaching. They may be able to gather instances where discrepancies occur between what they aspire to do, and their actual tour. These discrepancies, and the reflections they provoke, could be the basis for an examination of their own theoretical understanding of art, and of education. This might be in the form of a secondary intensive training session, after a year's experience of leading tours. It is essential that docents be provided with opportunities to reflect on their practice, and to develop theoretical knowledge.

This is not to say that docents are solely responsible for the contradictions that may be discovered in their work. Educators (and other gallery staff) need to examine the sometimes conflicting goals of their institutions, and to develop clear mandates for public programmes. Most studies of gallery education programmes conclude by suggesting that galleries should work more closely with the schools. This one is no different. Teachers must understand what galleries are, and what they do, so that they can use them more effectively as resources for their classes. Gallery educators need to understand art education
in the schools as a precondition for developing programmes for children. Gallery programmes should neither be merely extensions of school art education, nor should they be developed without reference to the goals of the curriculum.

**Implications for further research**

This study of the docents’ perspective of gallery education programmes suggests some avenues for further research. This study has indicated that the docents’ knowledge is shaped by their values and purposes. Further research could explore the differences in knowledge and behaviour of exemplary docents, as recognized by their peers, by teachers or by gallery educators. What do exemplary docents do or say on tours that makes them so successful? How do good docents cope with the complex, sometimes conflicting situations inherent in their role? What kinds of theoretical knowledge do they hold about art and education?

This study has emphasized the role of purpose and meaning in shaping the knowledge of docents, because, as volunteers, they are largely motivated by feelings of satisfaction. This indicates that there may be such a thing as "goodness of fit" between institutional goals, values, and purposes, those of the docent, and of the visitor, especially of teachers and children on school tours. Another study could explore the relations between teachers and docents, and particularly the kinds of expectations that teachers have of gallery tours.

Finally, further research is necessary to determine how, and what, people learn on tours, so extending the material collected by researchers such as Johnson (1981). Many of the docents interviewed in this study emphasized that they did not intend to convey information about art to the visitor, but rather to facilitate an interaction between the visitor and the art work. Their goal was to help the visitor to respond to works of art. Research is needed to determine the difference for visitors between viewing exhibitions on their own, or with the aid of a
docent. Educators need to understand what forms of interaction between docent and visitor hinders this process of responding to art work, and what forms of interaction support it.
REFERENCES


Please describe your educational background:


Please sign here to indicate your willingness to be contacted for an interview:
APPENDIX C

What is it like to be a docent?—Interview Protocol

1) Birthdate and place
2) Places of residence from birth until present
3) Ethnic background of parents
4) Occupation and educational background of parents
5) Educational background of respondent
6) Occupational background of respondent
7) Marital status and history
8) Children-ages and gender
9) Any other art-related activities. Do you make art?
10) Did you visit art galleries or museums as a child?
11) Would you describe these visits?
12) How did you come to decide to volunteer in a gallery? Why did you choose this gallery?
13) How long have you worked here? Could you describe the process of becoming a docent?
14) Could you describe the first tour you gave?
15) Could you describe your most recent tour? How did you arrange with the Gallery to give this particular tour? How did you decide which exhibition or work of art to talk about? How did you decide content and format? How do you greet the group at the door? How did you lead them through the exhibition? What are some of the different kinds of tours you might give? What are some of the typical questions of kinds of information you give out during a tour? How do you know when you’ve given a good tour (what kind of evidence do you use)?
16) What is a typical docent training session like? What have been the most interesting (useful, rewarding) aspects of the docent training programme? What is the relationship between the docents like? How do you interact?
17) What is the most important thing you need to know in order to be a good docent?
18) What are the most important things to convey to a group of visitors?
19) How do you interact with teachers or others who accompany groups to the gallery?
20) Are there any frustrations or difficulties in being a docent? What are some of these?
21) What are some of the differences between being an experienced docent and a novice?
22) Can you think of any turning points or ‘milestones’ in the process of becoming a docent? What were they?
23) How has your way of giving a tour changed over time?
24) What kinds of visitors (age groups etc.) do you enjoy working with the most? Are there visitors you do not enjoy working with?
25) What are some of the differences in working with visitors of varying ages? What other differences between groups are there?
26) What is it like to work with special needs groups, older people, different cultural groups, etc.?
27) Do you have other responsibilities as a docent?
28) In the last year, what have been the most memorable exhibitions or works of art that you have seen? Why?
29) In the last year, what have been the most enjoyable or interesting exhibitions to talk about with visitors?
30) Have there been any exhibitions or works of art that you haven't liked to talk about or learn about?
31) What have you learned about art from visiting artists?
32) What programmes or aspects of programmes have you learned the most from? In what other ways do you learn about art?
33) Have there been things that have been difficult for you to learn?
34) If for some reason, you could not continue to be a docent, would you take another volunteer position? What do you think it would be?
35) Could you describe the kinds of interactions you have with the educator here? What kinds of experiences have you had with the curators or other staff?
36) What are "working conditions" like here? If you could change some aspect of your job, what would you change?
37) What does a docent give the gallery, and vice versa?
38) What did you want to get out of being a docent when you began? Do you think you have realized these aims? Have your goals changed over time?
39) Do you have any ideas about what you would like to learn or do in your role as a docent in the future?