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Master of Fine Arts Thesis
Museum Exhibition Planning and Design
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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
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acknowledgements

‘Be strong and courageous...be strong and very courageous.’

I read those words the morning that I woke for my defense, and I think that they reflect the kinds of heartening support that I have received every step of the way as I have worked on my thesis. I have been blessed to be surrounded by a whole host of people who have helped me to make it through the process. Even the thought of having tried to do this alone seems absurd.

So **thank you** to:

my committee members and thesis advisors, who were wise and encouraging and generous with their ideas;

my parents, who thought that going to an art school sounded really exciting;

my classmates, for making me laugh every single time we sat down together. I would not have wanted to go through this with a different group of people;

my sister, who is my role model;

and **Jeremy**, who has been unfailingly patient in waiting for me to finish, even though he did not want to be.

table of contents

Abstract

Introduction—Thesis Goals and Intentions

- 1 Premise for thesis
- 2 Goals for thesis

Part One—defining the problem

Chapter One—why live interpretation in exhibitions?

- 5 A brief overview of live interpretation
- 6 Types of live interpretation
- 9 Potentials of live interpretation and the exhibition experience
- 11 Opportunities for Cognitive Experiences
- 19 Opportunities for Social Experiences
- 24 Opportunities for emotional and physical Engagement

Chapter Two—the development process in practice

- 35 Three case studies and four key practices
- 38 The development process and important points of discussion
- 38 Before program/exhibition development begins
- 40 The exhibition development/design phases
- 43 Factors to consider when deciding on types of interpretation
- 44 Considerations for specific types of exhibitions

Part Two—the solution

Exhibition-based live interpretation packet

- 1 Using this resource
- 3 Development discussion guides
- 9 Additional Resources

Addendums

Glossary

Bibliographic Sources



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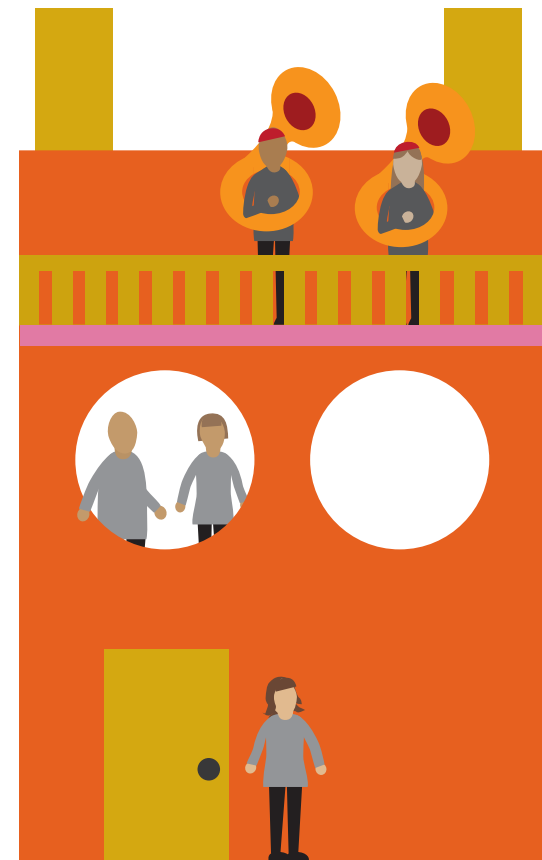
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Abstract

This thesis explores exhibition-based live interpretation, with the understanding that the live and installed components of an exhibition are mutually influential to the experiences of museum visitors. To help build a constructive understanding of this idea and to promote useful dialogue between parties involved in program planning and design, this thesis attempts to outline the history of live interpretation, the various types of live interpretation now practiced in museums, and the potential experiential outcomes of this form of museum interpretation. It also sets up a framework of discussion for the museum planning processes as they impact both live interpretation and exhibition.



introduction—thesis goals and intentions

Every time an art museum chooses to show a piece of artwork, or a history museum displays an artifact, or a science museum presents a phenomena, the institution is at the same time creating the context in which their visitors must try to make sense of what they are being shown. Museums choose what objects will be displayed, how they will be displayed, what additional information will be presented to the visitor, and how the visitor will receive that information. This crafted context for visitor engagement is commonly known as an exhibition.

Many museums and cultural institutions that exhibit also choose to deploy live interpreters in some manner.¹ Exhibition-based live interpretation “is conversation, guided interaction, or any communication that enriches the visitor experience by making meaningful connections between the messages and collections of our institution and the intellectual and emotional world of the visitor.”² Live interpreters can take the form of tour guides, explainers, actors, lecturers, question answerers, demonstrators, or a number of other roles where museum staff or volunteers work specifically to engage the public in an exhibition space. They can be distinguished from other types of museum educators because their programming, instead of primarily functioning independently, is meant to be encountered within the exhibition context.

Museum exhibitions are multidimensional pursuits with both high costs and high expectations. Their production is typically a lengthy and intricate interdisciplinary process, because exhibitions are made up of discrete parts that are ultimately experienced in relationship with each other. Each individual element, whether it is an artifact or a

theatrical presentation, will potentially fashion the context in which visitors will understand and interact with another part of the exhibition. The planners of exhibitions and other museum staff are therefore charged with facilitating a cohesive experience that will guide visitors toward the types of meaningful experiences that are signified by the exhibition’s mission and goals as well as supporting the institution’s overall mission.

Because interpretation is experienced within the context of an exhibition, there is an inherent and close connection between the work of a live interpreter and both the space and content of the exhibition. Context is significant to experience. This means that the work of a live interpreter is directed and impacted by the setting in which they are working. But also that the integration of live interpreters can significantly reshape a visitor’s experience of an exhibition overall.

In the succeeding chapters, the influential nature of exhibition-based live interpretation will be made appreciable by examining its many forms, its potentials both positive and negative, as well as real-world implications of its planning. This information is meant to inform and encourage further dialogue between the groups responsible for a museum’s public programming. It is only the beginning look at a broad swath of highly impactful museum programming, which deserves invested attention.

1. Wetterlund, Kris and Scott Sayre, Art Museum Education Programs Survey Report, 2003, 15 August 2008 <<http://www.museum-ed.org/content/view/63/53/>>

2. Cunningham, Mary Kay, The Interpreters Training Manual for Museums, Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2004.



Goals for thesis

...to help advance an appreciation in museum staff of the intimate relationship between live interpretation and installed exhibition and to begin developing an understanding of how the two will support each other.

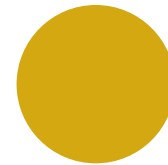
...to research and document the potential positive experiential outcomes as well as the challenges of implementing live interpretation within an exhibition and how they might best be integrated or mitigated respectively.

...to develop an understanding of how the investment of resources into exhibition-based live interpretation will affect its outcomes.

...to create a methodology or approach for development teams thinking about live interpretation and museum exhibitions.

Part One

chapter one—why live interpretation in exhibitions?



a brief overview of live interpretation

Freeman Tilden, considered by many to be the father of modern interpretation, wrote that interpretation is “an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”³ Although it had existed for much longer, live interpretation, as a concept, was being formalized by the National Park Service around the time that Tilden wrote his book Interpreting our Heritage (1957). In it Tilden named six principals for effective interpretation, which are still considered insightful and important to the field. Paraphrased,⁴ he proposed that...

- 1) Interpretation should relate what is being displayed to something relevant to the visitor.
- 2) Interpretation is revelation based information, but information is not itself interpretation.
- 3) Interpretation is an art that combines many arts.
- 4) The chief aim of interpretation is provocation, not instruction.
- 5) Interpretation should present a whole rather than a part.
- 6) Interpretation addressed to children should be fundamentally different than if addressed to adults—not just a simplified version.

In these six principals Tilden created some of the first guidelines for public interaction in museum and cultural institutions. The historical function of museums may have been to house collections, but “interpretation is the single most basic purpose of an exhibit.”⁵ Interpretation has become the heart of the museum’s public face.

Part of the challenge of good interpretive planning is in choosing an effective technique; but as was aptly put by the AAM Standing Professional Committee on Education, “there is no single way to fulfill a museum’s educational mission.”⁶ There are many delivery methods for exhibition interpretation, of which live interpretation is only one.⁷ And even live interpretation is not a single homogenous group.

When Tilden wrote Interpreting Our Heritage he had



Science Museum of Minnesota. Saint Paul, MN. Photo by Science Museum of Minnesota.

in mind the National Park Service and sites of historical and ecological importance. Today, exhibition based live interpretation is practiced in many different types of cultural institutions—museums, aquariums, historic sites, and botanic gardens—and under a multitude of different names.

3. Harpers Ferry Center, “Wayside Exhibit Design,” National Park Service, 16 Jan. 2007. 17 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.nps.gov/hfc/products/waysides/way-process-design.htm>>.

4. “Freeman Tilden: father of heritage interpretation,” Heritage Destination Consulting, 2009, 17 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.heritagedestination.com/freeman-tilden.aspx>>.

5. Lisa C Roberts in, Durbin, Gail, Ed. Developing museum exhibitions for life long learning, The stationary Office, Pub: London. 1996.

6. Fortescue, Ann, Et al, Excellence in Practice: museum education principles and standards, Washington DC: AAM Standing Professional Committee on Education 2002, 2005 revised 6.

7. Harpers Ferry Center, Planning for Interpretation and Visitor Experience, Harpers Ferry, WV: National Park Service, 1998. 15 August 2008 <<http://www.nps.gov/hfc/products/ip.htm>>.

Types of live interpretation

There are a great variety of live interpreters employed in institutions today. Their work is defined, not necessarily by the types of programs that they produce, but, because those programs are always encountered by guests in the context of an exhibition. Interpreters tend to be heavily involved in museum learning, and frequently work under the auspices of education departments. But they are not synonymous with museum educators. A substantial portion of facilitated educative museum programming falls outside the scope of live interpretation, either because it is not related to an exhibition, or because the audience who experiences it will not see the exhibition.

Books and articles have been written to discuss many forms of exhibition-based live interpretation, and give specific advice about each modality.⁸ But recognizing that there

are many different types of live programming is where one begins to understand the range of needs and what goes into planning for them. Some forms are nearly ubiquitous. A survey by Museum-Ed found that 97.65% of art museums questioned had group tours of some sort.⁹ Another survey looking at all types of museums puts the number at about 88%.¹⁰ Other forms are currently less common, but because the field is growing and evolving this may change.

The classification of live interpreters is difficult because of the diversity and fluid nature of the field. Categories can fit ponderously and divisions may seem arbitrary. Even the terms used vary from institution to institution. But to understand the current scope of live interpretation, it helps to begin with broad characteristics that can be seen in varying degrees in many interpretive programs (see Figure A).



Museum de Toulouse. Toulouse France. Photo by museumdetoulouse.

8. See,

Levy, Barbara, Sandra Lloyd, and Susan Schreiber, Great Tours: thematic tours and guide training for historic sites, Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira, 2001;

Bridal, Tessa, Exploring Museum Theatre, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004;

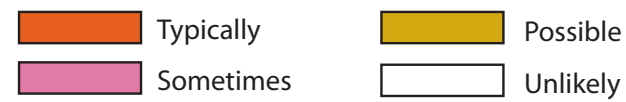
and, Sachatello-Sawyer, Bonnie, et al, Adult Museum Programs: designing meaningful experiences, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2002.

9. Wetterlund.

10. Sachatello-Sawyer 26.

[figure a] characteristics of live interpretation

	Characteristics						
	Narrative/ Storytelling	Fact-Sharing	Demonstration	Dialogue w/ visitor	Facilitate Visitor Interactivity	Group Facilitation	Guide Through a Space
Costumed Interpreter	Typically	Typically	Typically	Typically	Typically	Typically	Typically
Animals and Stories	Typically	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Possible	Unlikely
Pop-up Theater	Typically	Possible	Possible	Sometimes	Sometimes	Possible	Possible
Puppet Theater	Typically	Possible	Possible	Possible	Possible	Possible	Unlikely
Staged Play	Typically	Possible	Possible	Possible	Possible	Possible	Unlikely
Living Diorama	Typically	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Typically	Typically	Possible
Mime	Typically	Unlikely	Sometimes	Unlikely	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
Question Desk	Sometimes	Typically	Unlikely	Typically	Sometimes	Unlikely	Unlikely
Traditional Gallery Tour	Sometimes	Typically	Possible	Sometimes	Unlikely	Possible	Typically
Gallery Talk	Sometimes	Typically	Possible	Possible	Unlikely	Possible	Sometimes
Expert Panel	Sometimes	Typically	Sometimes	Possible	Unlikely	Possible	Unlikely
Staged Lecture	Sometimes	Typically	Sometimes	Possible	Unlikely	Possible	Unlikely
Live Animal Show	Sometimes	Typically	Sometimes	Possible	Possible	Possible	Unlikely
Dance Performance	Sometimes	Unlikely	Typically	Possible	Possible	Unlikely	Unlikely
Live Music	Sometimes	Unlikely	Typically	Unlikely	Possible	Unlikely	Unlikely
Artifact Care	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Sometimes	Unlikely	Unlikely	Unlikely
Crafting of an Object	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Sometimes	Sometimes	Possible	Unlikely
Device Demonstration	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Unlikely
Interactive Tour	Sometimes	Typically	Sometimes	Typically	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically
Talking Circle/ Forum	Sometimes	Sometimes	Unlikely	Typically	Sometimes	Typically	Unlikely
Undercover Roamer	Sometimes	Sometimes	Unlikely	Typically	Possible	Sometimes	Unlikely
Cart Interpreter	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Typically	Sometimes	Unlikely
Installed Exhibit Interpreter	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Typically	Sometimes	Sometimes
Art table	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Typically	Sometimes	Unlikely
Pocket Prop	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Typically	Sometimes	Sometimes
Pretting Tank	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Typically	Possible	Unlikely
Workshop	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Typically	Sometimes	Unlikely
Guided Activity	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Typically	Typically	Sometimes	Possible



In this case, live interpretation is broken down by shared characteristics. There are certainly other traits that could be charted, but these are several of the most common that can still be used to distinguish programming apart from each other.

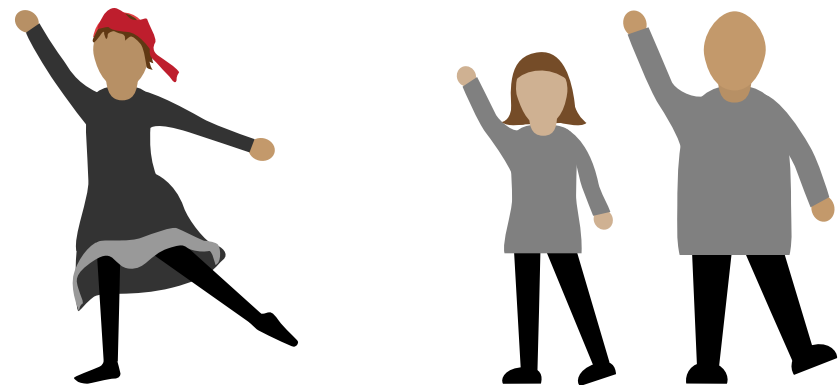
Narrative and storytelling, because it is so central to how human beings think and communicate, creeps into almost every form of live interpretation and is focal to a handful. A highly narrative interpretation could be an acted drama. On the other end, a story could be just a quick anecdote during a workshop.

Fact-telling and the sharing of information can make up a substantial part of many forms of live interpretation, such as in lectures or presentations. The **demonstration** of a skill or action by a live interpreter is also practiced widely, either as a major component or a small part of a program.

Question answering is something that happens in a small degree in many different forms of live interpretation. But programs that are more heavily driven by dialogue with visitors commonly offer some of the least formal and most flexible learning situations. Although they are not necessarily linked, it is also seen quite frequently in situations where the interpreter will also **facilitate visitor interactivity** by guiding them through a process or some other action.

Less frequently inherent to an activity, but still commonly occurring, live interpreters may also act as **group facilitators**. In doing so, they act as a link between guests and encouraging them to interact and engage with one and other, either in conversation or in shared activities.

As previously mentioned, tours are some of the most commonly occurring forms of live interpretation. Acting as a **guide through a space** is not as widespread in other forms of live interpretation, but still can and does occur.



potentials of live interpretation and the exhibition experience

When discussing the potentials of live interpretation in exhibitions, there are both intended positive outcomes and unwelcome challenges. Therefore, it is important for the museum to consider what they would like to achieve as well as the pitfalls they might have to face with the implementation of programming.

The positive outcomes of live interpretation are potentially numerous and often intimately tied to the specific context—the educational goals, content, and design criteria—of the exhibition involved. But when employed in the appropriate circumstances, there are some benefits that can be seen in many types of museums and institutions. John Falk and Lynn Dierking write, “the few studies conducted with casual visitors suggest that staff and volunteers positively influence the experience, particularly when they are skilled interpreters, helping to facilitate and make the experience meaningful for visitors.”¹¹ Live interpreters may be able to help guests get the most out of their time spent at a museum.

Characteristically, live interpreters can be anything that a human being is: engaging, excited, interesting, and inspirational; or boring, confusing, awkward, and even wrong. Discouraging stories exist of interpreters making up information because they did not know an answer, or speaking as if reciting a dissertation. For the most part, what museums can do to combat this type of challenge is to choose talented interpreters and train them well. There are best practices guides for museum programming that include things like training staff and volunteers how to ask appropriate questions, or designing programming to be age appropriate. Obviously, these are all things that will

have a major impact on the quality of experience that visitors get out of their interactions with live interpreters and are well worth considering. Just as live interpretation is not a magic fix for exhibitions with major failings, no amount of preplanning and coordination between departments can salvage a live program that has serious internal flaws.

But like anything else, live interpretation is best fitted to certain circumstances and can be made more constructive with appropriate crafting of the situation. It can be a powerful tool. But in order to take advantage, museum planners must understand what the potentials are.

Like exhibitions, the explicit goals of live interpretation are most often educational or cognitive in nature. But learning specific facts is not the only goal of museum guests; therefore, both exhibitions and live interpretation can and should speak to some of their other wants and needs. “Strangers, Guests or Clients”, a paper written by Zahava Doering and based on research conducted by the Smithsonian’s Institutional Studies Office, summarizes what the Institute believes are the different types of experiences that museum visitors find satisfying. Besides a cognitive or learning experience, these would include things such as a social experience. Visitors will inevitably have preferences about the types of experiences they have, and may not be satisfied with their time at a museum if they do not find something that accommodates them. Doering says that rather than solely supporting just one goal (such as teaching facts), the role of the exhibition is in “facilitating the varied interpretive activities of visitors and encouraging dialogue and negotiation among those different views.”¹³

11. Falk, John, and Dierking, Lynn, Learning from Museums: visitor experiences and the making of meaning, Walnut Creek, CA.: Altamira, 2000, 106-7.

12. Doering, Zahava, Institutional Studies Office. Strangers, Guests or Clients: visitors experiences in museums. Washington DC: Smithsonian, 1999, 3 March 2009 <www.si.edu/opanda/Reports/Earlier/Strangers.pdf>.

13. Doering 8.

Because visitors may be looking for different things, the ideal interpretive method would somehow allow for every visitor to find their ideal experience, every time, in the most deep and meaningful way possible. And indeed, some forms of interpretation are more conducive than others at encouraging certain types of meaningful experiences. But nothing will promote them all, all of the time. In fact, Doering goes on to say that some of these experiences will typically only happen at the exclusion of others.

Exhibition-based live interpretation has the potential to provide a variety of diverse experiential opportunities. It is inherent in the nature of having living people in an exhibition that makes live interpreters accommodating as models and as facilitators of experiences. As a whole, live interpretation probably has the most obvious opportunities for meaningful cognitive and social experiences, where cognitive experiences are driven by ideas and information and social experiences involve individuals as part of a group. But while it will never provide everything at the same time, interpretive programming has been shown to be quite diverse and should not be thought of as limited to just these two.

Along with opportunities for cognitive and social experiences, the following sections will also discuss how live interpretation can encourage guests into a deeper engagement with an exhibition, both physically and emotionally. These opportunities for emotional and physical engagement are important in and of themselves. But they also have an essential role as precursors to other types of experiences, since meaningful experiences of any type are probably impossible in museums without first becoming engaged.

Opportunities for Cognitive Experiences

Cognitively live interpretation in an exhibition can...

- offer content that is personalized to the audience—both in depth and in learning style.
- be a means of offering updated information on a topic that is changing.
- act as a ‘human glossary’ to help visitors discuss a subject.
- act as a source of feedback for visitors to test assumptions.
- model thinking strategies for a particular field or topic.
- Learning challenges

Opportunities for Social Experiences

Socially live interpretation in an exhibition can...

- act as a method of connecting people together as a ‘stranger enabler’.
- be a place for modeling social behavior and setting expectations about what visitors can and can not do in an exhibition.
- act as an introduction into a community of thinkers.
- Social challenges

Opportunities for Physical and Emotional Engagement

Physically live interpretation in an exhibition can...

- be a way of creating physical and intellectual interactivity with otherwise didactic content.
- create more engagement by slowing down the visitor observation process.
- modeling physical interactions or practices

Emotionally live interpretation in an exhibition can...

- create a personal connection to an otherwise remote topic.
- be a means of inspiring or modeling enthusiasm for a subject.
- Demonstrate that the museum can be a personal resource
- Engagement challenges

opportunities for cognitive experiences

Encouraging effective cognitive experiences has been a primary goal of exhibitions since the emergence of education as a major museum mission. Many museums have since expanded the range of what they consider to be the successful use of an exhibition. But learning in an exhibition is not likely to ever be completely outmoded, so long as museums continue to be the exhibitors of interesting objects and ideas.

- **Live interpretation in an exhibition can offer content that is personalized to the audience—both in depth and in learning style.**

Educational museums have a responsibility to their missions and to their visitors to be intelligible and appropriate in what they offer. There are challenges inherent whenever speaking to large segments of the public. Defining audiences can help, but museum guests are a group that is hopefully only growing more diverse.

Exhibitions frequently offer information and ideas through a variety of modalities. But text, however insightful, is typically static. Objects can reveal a variety of information about themselves, but then only to visitors who know how to ‘read’ them. Interactive media can be more flexible, perhaps allowing the visitor to choose depth of information or the topics that are most interesting. But a conscientious and attentive interpreter is more capable of tailoring content to the situation than even the visitor might be. For many programs, one of their greatest strengths is adaptable flexibility. “Face-to-face interactions are

well suited to make a deep impact on a small number of people. Personalized and tailored experiences... [have been] cited as the main reason for the quality (and also the limited impact) of these programs.”¹⁴

In a museum’s quest to help visitors engage with information, live interpreters can do two things to personalize the experience: they can expand into information that is not covered by the exhibition, or they handle it in a different manner.



National Museum of Scotland. Photo by Martin Burns.

Learning theories have emerged in the past 30 years that have changed the way that many people understand education. Howard Gardner’s theories of multiple intelligences,¹⁵ the Felder-Silverman model of learning styles,¹⁶ David Kolb’s theory of experiential learning styles,¹⁷ and others, gave museums models for thinking about different ways audiences may prefer to receive

14. Russell, Lauren, and Dennis Schatz, Portal to the Public: face-to-face with scientists: exploring the features of face-to-face interactions between scientists and public audiences, Seattle, WA: Pacific Science Center, 2008, 10.

15. See Howard Gardner, “Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences” (1983, 1993)

16. See “Learning and Teaching Styles in Engineering Education,” *Engr. Education*, 78.7. (1988) 674-681.

17. See “Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development” (1984)

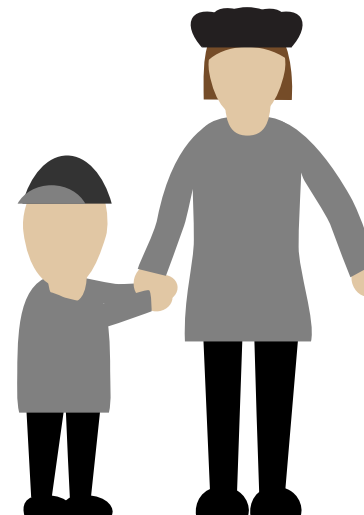
information. In cases where a guest might be confused or bored by one modality, the interpreter, particularly in a more personal, small group setting, may be able to change tactics.

As well, flexible, personalized live interpretation could allow museums an additional opportunity to practice Freeman Tilden's final directive—that interpretation addressed to children should be fundamentally different from that addressed to adults. Speaking about school children, Hooper-Greenhill wrote that they have “this need to explore the space before feeling comfortable [that] can interfere with knowledge-based tasks, unless these tasks can be carried out in an exploratory mode.”¹⁸ No matter the audience, there is a lot to be gained when an interpreter can understand and accommodate specific preferences within their programming.

Ease of adaptability also allows live interpreters to delve into otherwise un-discussed information with those guests whose interest and understanding make it prudent. This could mean going into more depth about an idea; or, in another situation, it could mean relating the topic to something that the visitor has seen outside the museum. Repeat visitors may particularly appreciate the changing nature of live programming. This, along with their comfort in the museum setting, could contribute to their being among the most likely visitors to take advantage of available staff for conversation.¹⁹

18. Hooper-Greenhill, Eileen, Museum and Gallery Education, Leicester: Leicester University, 1991, 114.

19. Adams, Megan, and Amanda Morales, Guest Perception of Floor Staff: formative evaluation, Fort Worth: Fort Worth Museum of Science and Industry, 2004, 9.



- **Live interpretation in an exhibition can be a means of offering updated information on a topic that is changing.**

Where live interpreters are budgeted and already in place, there is a relatively low cost to updating information, as compared to other interpretive media such as graphic panels or video. Live interpretation provides inherent opportunity to update information, because each iteration of a program is produced anew. There are many situations where a live interpreter could theoretically insert new content with every presentation.



San Bernardino County Museum. Redlands, CA.

Updated information can be especially significant in traveling or short-term exhibitions. One of the most interesting but also difficult things about temporary exhibitions is that they are frequently topical in nature and address current events or research. If the topic is particularly timely, even over the short life of a few months or a few years there will be opportunities to bring in new information and comment on what has changed. Some scripted programming, such as plays, may require extra lead-time. But generally speaking, there will be easily available opportunities for live interpreters to take advantage of new and changing information.

On the other hand, many exhibitions, particularly permanent or long term ones, are designed for longevity and the information contained may not necessarily become outdated. Whether guests believe it is good, bad or indifferent, it is not at all unusual to see portions of a museum that have been in place for 20 or more years. But if live interpreters can provide some information that is current to a field, it may stimulate visitors and help to alleviate complaints that exhibitions feel 'old.'

• **Live interpretation in an exhibition can act as a ‘human glossary’ to help visitors discuss a subject.**

There are frequently times where visitors will need to be introduced to the type of language that will let them discuss a subject. Ellin Keene summed it up nicely when she wrote, “before students can control a process they must be able to name it.”²⁰ All visitors can benefit from this type of assistance. Even those guests who are familiar with a subject may need help to begin talking about it.

Turning ideas and feelings into something that can be discussed is like changing the ephemeral into something that can be grasped—it makes them conquerable and easier to maintain possession. Things that guests would not even know that they need a word for could become the basis for entire trains of thought. It was described by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill how, “the more a visitor was able to explore and talk about the different characteristics of a work of art the more layers of meaning he or she was able to discover.”²¹ The verbalizing of thoughts is an important



Computer History Museum, Mountain View, CA. Photo by Marcin Wichary.

first step of meaning making, and is often an area where visitors can benefit from assistance.

Working within an exhibition, live interpreters can crystallize words and ideas together by taking advantage of visuals and other opportunities that the setting affords. A summative evaluation conducted by Randi Korn and Associates for a series of exhibitions at the National Canal Museum in Easton, PA illustrated the process:

“The docent directed adults and children in their completion of steps, often explaining some basic exhibit-related content. For example, one docent introduced a child to the term, “keystone,” and demonstrated what happens when a keystone is removed from an arch.”²²

Elsewhere it was written that:

“Docent assistance typically included introducing visitors to the canal’s history and the canal’s relationship to people, introducing correct terminology (e.g., “aqueduct”), and explaining how to operate the canal system.”²³

Museums work hard to be a place where visitors can suspend the outside world and accompanying distractions in order to focus on whatever subject is being discussed. Interpreters can take advantage of the thinking opportunities provided in these situations to help visitors crystallize concepts for which they otherwise would not have sufficient time. Discussions become more fruitful and nuanced as visitors are introduced to vocabulary in a meaningful context and are then given the opportunity to try out terms for themselves.

20. Keene, Ellin Oliver, and Susan Zimmermann, Mosaic of Thought: teaching comprehension in a reader’s workshop, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997 in Ritchhart, Ron. “Cultivating a Culture of Thinking in Museums,” *Journal of Museum Education*, 32.2 (2007) 137-153. 148.

21. Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean, Theano Moussouri, et al, Meaning Making in Art Museums 2: visitors interpretive strategies at Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester: RCMG, 2001, 10 Oct. 2008, <<http://hdl.handle.net/2381/23>> , 21

22. Randi Korn & Associates, Exhibit Evaluation: summative evaluation of the three exhibition galleries: Engineering America, Towpath Town, Waterworks, Alexandria, VA: National Canal Museum 2007, 28.

23. Randi Korn & Associates X.

• **Live interpretation in an exhibition can act as a source of feedback for visitors to test assumptions.**

In a study conducted where guests to a museum were followed during their visit, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill reflected that visitors made sense of art exhibits in one of two ways: by interpreting what they saw directly through asking questions and making statements; or by seeking out additional information such as labels.²⁴ The pattern is a common one that could take place in any situation where guests are attempting to construct meaning out of artifacts or objects. From her experience, Hooper-Greenhill wrote that there were times when the guests “seemed reasonably confident about what they knew but they also wanted their knowledge verified by the gallery.”²⁵

It may feel counterintuitive, but visitors often times want to engage with information about which they are already quite familiar. Visitors do not often go into an exhibition knowing absolutely nothing about a subject; and they may very well be bored if they did. Research by the Smithsonian indicates that:

“People tend to attend the exhibitions that they think will be congruent with their own attitudes, with whose point of view they expect to agree, and that they respond best to exhibitions and themes that are personally relevant and with which they can easily connect.”²⁶

Most people will recognize that there are faster, “more efficient ways to gather factual information”²⁷ than going to a museum. But where live and installed interpretation, are

most effective is in “confirming, reinforcing and extending existing beliefs”²⁸ of museum visitors.

The pattern of asking questions, making statements, and looking for information is often carried out successfully by visitors on their own. But visitors grow frustrated if the process is disrupted, often because they are unable to find enough information to conclude if their statements are correct. By engaging with a live person, a guest is given the opportunity to say what they know or have reasoned and to have that knowledge confirmed or redirected. Live interpreters can extend these conversations by asking for more information or probing for additional clarification, thereby helping visitors to solidify and expand their reasoning.

The need to discuss and confirm is a strong impulse in some people. More research is needed on the topic, but beyond satisfying their own inquisitiveness, there may be two other rewards inherent for visitors who participate in such exchanges: it may be a way for guests to legitimize their place at the museum, by showing what they know; and it could be a means of testing the museum to see if they are in agreement about fundamental views or controversial topics. It would not be surprising to find that some museum guests start these types of exchanges with non-interpretive staff when they cannot find a docent or other educator. Increasingly, some museums are adding floor staff to facilitate just these types of opportunities.

24. Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean, Theano Mousouri, et al, Meaning Making in Art Museums 1: visitors interpretive strategies at Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Leicester: RCMG, 2001, 10 Oct. 2008, <<http://hdl.handle.net/2381/22>> , 16

25. Hooper-Greenhill, Making meaning 1, 25.

26. Doering 7.

27. Doering 7.

28. Doering 7,8.

• **Live interpretation in an exhibition can model thinking strategies for a particular field or topic.**

For the majority of guests, a museum is an invitation to involve themselves for a short time in a field where they are amateurs rather than experts. Museums are frequently the public face of a discipline, and in effect offer a bridge between that information and its adherents, and the general public. As a field develops, methodologies and thinking strategies specific to the topic also arise. Understanding how to evaluate something allows thinkers to make logical conclusions and to appreciate and follow the work being done by others in the field.

Thinking strategies abound and can cause confusion for anyone who is new or relatively unfamiliar with a topic. In *The Art of Seeing*, Mihaly Csikszentmihaly wrote about difficulties that can arise when guests attempt to interpret art in a museum:

*“Each feeling, each response to the object can be tested by looking for new evidence that will confirm or call into question one’s first impressions. Yet this process of discovery requires confidence bred of experience and training—precisely the skills that the layperson lacks.”*²⁹

The exact procedure may be different, but this kind of critical thinking is no less necessary to explore the sciences, history, or any other field. To learn to interpret for oneself requires practice; and that may first require a model or mentor.

The effective modeling of thinking practices can actually

offer two slightly different kinds of benefits, which will impact two somewhat different kinds of guests. There is modeling for those who are uncertain of the process, and modeling for those who do not recognize the opportunity to begin. Fortunately they are not mutually exclusive.



Morro Bay Museum of Natural History, Morro Bay State Park, CA.
Photo by mikebaird.

29. Csikszentmihaly, Mihaly, and Rick Robinson, *The Art of Seeing: an interpretation of the aesthetic encounter*, Malibu, CA: JP Getty Trust, 1990, 185-6.

Developing a new way of thinking about and interpreting the world is no small achievement, and may even constitute a life changing experience.³⁰ It is a process that can certainly be seen in children. Ron Richhart wrote that, "Observing models of how adults actually use and interact with museum objects positively affects children's own interactions."³¹ One need not be explicit to teach children, and perhaps adults as well, a routine for approaching a subject. A live interpreter who demonstrates his or her own process can provide a form to emulate. Even better if they then encourage the visitor to do so as well, either by offering feedback when the visitor tries on their own or by asking a series of questions to guide them through the steps.

There is a second case, where guests may come into an exhibition knowing facts, and even the necessary steps to critical thinking. Richhart is quick to point out that there is a difference between the ability to think and what he calls the 'disposition' to do so. Here:

*"...museum educators are not so much teaching these skills, since most students have them to some degree, as helping students spot occasions or their use and highlighting their value, thus nurturing their awareness of and inclination for thinking."*³²

Exhibitions offer countless opportunities to go through the process of critical thinking. At times, visitors simply need to be reminded when and in what order to use what they already possess. It is one way that museums can turn knowledge into practice. This can happen if someone shows guests which proverbial tool to pull from their toolbox.

George Hein wrote, "People learn to learn as they learn."³³ He identified that the process is self-sustaining. If visitors are taught to do something once, they will often continue to do so, improving as they go along. Those guests who choose to do so can also influence other members of their group or even other strangers. During or after an encounter with a volunteer or staff member, one or two people in a group will often begin to interpret the interpreter. They self-select, particularly in cases where some members of group feel more comfortable with a subject, are more familiar with a museum, or where for some members English is not a primary language.

30. Sachatello-Sawyer 17.

31. Richhart 144-5.

32. Ritchhard 139.

33. Hein, George E., Learning in the Museum (museum meanings), London: Routledge, 1998, 31.

Challenges in providing Cognitive Experiences

Having examined some of the many positive outcomes of live exhibition interpretation, the planners of exhibitions and programming should also acknowledge that there could be challenges to creating positive learning experiences that will need to be recognized and overcome. Some of these challenges may require additional investments of time or other assets in order to be mitigated. But once a museum has made the decision to include a live element in an exhibition, it becomes advantageous for them to also think about what resources could be made available to make the most out of their live interpreters.

Live interpretive programming could pursue goals that are divergent or irrelevant to an exhibition or it may create mixed messages about the content in relation to the rest of an exhibition.

Situations that are less than ideal and could impact visitors would include any experience where the live programming is somehow in discord with the aligning exhibition. As previously discussed, it often benefits guests to explore a topic in more than one way. But differences become negative when individual facts do not match up, when topics are approached in a fundamentally different way without explanation, or in cases where the live program is pursuing a different set of goals than those of the installed exhibition.

Live interpretation could exclusively take on the role of acting as a 'fix' for an exhibition.

A similar disconnect can sometime occur when a traveling exhibition is brought in that is distant from, or does not on

its own meet, the hosting museum's mission. Because of its generally low startup cost, live programming is often an obvious means of reinterpreting the content and making the necessary connections. But the visitor experience may be unsatisfactory if this is its only purpose; particularly if it cannot successfully do so.

Live interpretation could be delivered at an inappropriate educational level for exhibition guests.

A mutual understanding between the interpretation and the exhibition is also important when thinking about audience. Programming that has been designed for an audience who is not present may not satisfy the needs of those visitors who do try to utilize it.

There could be gaps left in the exhibition if staff/volunteers become unavailable.

For whatever reason, live interpreters sometimes become unavailable to be on the floor of an exhibition at all times. Short-term causes may include staff taking a break, going on vacation, or becoming sick. Long-term reasons could involve a need for available staff elsewhere, halts in funding or training, or a general disinterest in continuing the programming. Visitors may be able to tell that something is missing, in the case of an unusable or empty area of an exhibition. Or they may unknowingly be missing out on an important part of the experience.

opportunities for social experiences

Broadly, social experiences can cover anything involving the individual visitor as a part of a group. A positive social experience could include interactions between multiple people in an exhibition, an internal feeling in a guest of belonging to a community, or some combination of the two.

Social moments are central to the museum experience. Compared to a classroom, there are many more opportunities available in an exhibition to bring together different ages and demographics. Together, a live interpreter and an exhibition can turn a field or a topic into a shared experience and create a community within the museum.

• Live interpretation in an exhibition can act as a method of connecting people together as a 'stranger enabler'.

There are inherent benefits simply to facilitating social exchanges within museums. Visitors appear to be impacted by, and enjoy having, interpersonal experiences during their time in exhibitions. Research has found that, years after a museum visit, "97% of all people...interviewed can recall at least one person who accompanied them."³⁴ And that, "it is not uncommon for children to remember qualities of docents or staff years after the experience."³⁵ This evidence suggests that social memories are particularly enduring.

In her book on adult museum programming, Bonnie Sachatello-Sawyer wrote:

"Participants frequently mentioned interaction with others as a major memory of museum experiences.

As one particularly insightful program participant observed, 'I think, because of the way our species is, that we tend to recall social interactions most vividly. Because this program is essentially a social activity in which learning takes place, I think the social interaction provide the context in which we recall the actual educational experience.'"³⁶

So chaperones, family members, friends, and live interpreters can all have a significant influence on a visitor, simply by being present. But live interpreters provide an added luxury when they act as a 'stranger enabler' and help guests to intermingle with each other.

Museums are collective places and it has been suggested that some visitors may go expressly for the purpose of meeting others.³⁷ But while discussions amongst group members are commonplace, and museum staff, if properly identified, have what amount to a free pass to speak to guests,³⁸ actually getting guests to talk with each other when they are not already a part of a group can be challenging. Without a proper conduit, the social inhibitions against interacting with strangers are strong.

Visitors, and in fact all people, require something out of the ordinary to begin. Nina Simon of Museum 2.0 writes that for strangers to interact they first require that the normal rules of social interaction be temporarily put to the side.³⁹ Where live interpreters step in is to provide a safe, appropriate, and appealing place for social interaction. "It's not too hard to imagine floor staff in this role as social lubricators or party hosts, introducing visitors to each other."⁴⁰ They become a mediator to start interaction. If the live interpreter has a remarkable prop with them, like

34. Falk, John, and Lynn Dierking, The Museum Experience, Washington, D.C.: Whalesback Books, 1992, 120.

35. Falk, "Museum Experience" 157.

36. Sachatello-Sawyer 128.

37. Alfonsi, Leonardo, "Literature Review," Journal of Science Communication, 4.4 (2005): 8 August 2008 <<http://jcom.sissa.it/archive/04/04/C040407/>>.

38. Simon, Nina, Museum 2.0, 2006-2009, <<http://museumtwo.blogspot.com>> 18 Feb. 2009.

39. Simon 3 July 2008.

40. Simon 15 Oct. 2007.

a live animal, or an alluring object, their job of starting people talking only becomes easier.

The types of interactions that live interpreters could facilitate range from encouraging an entire crowd to try something out together, to starting a conversation between a small group of interested individuals. In some circumstances it may be enough so that even after the facilitator has moved on, the inhibition of guests has lessened and they may continue to interact.

Bonnie Sachatello-Sawyer shared another story, about

a simple tour, that was conveyed to her by a fellow colleague:

"The leader was experienced, knowledgeable, flexible and related well the participants. The people were complete strangers to all except their partners, yet they were open to sharing and learning from one another...The result was that the learning process did not end when the tour concluded. We stayed together as a group for an additional half an hour..."⁴¹

Not every tour or lecture will connect strangers. But with the right combination of participants and events, and with a live interpreter to ease the way, satisfying social experiences do occur between unfamiliar people in exhibitions.

41. Sachatello-Sawyer 28-9



• **Live interpretation in an exhibition can be a place for modeling social behavior and setting expectations about what visitors can and cannot do in an exhibition.**

Museums can be socially intimidating places,⁴² particularly to visitors if they are new or have limited experience with that type of cultural setting. Exhibitions are full of potential for misuse and, whether purposefully put in place or not, there are perceived barriers to entry. There are rules and social expectations to the space that when broken can leave visitors in the uncomfortable position of being glared at by other guests or reprimanded by security guards. Museums do list rules and give briefings or orientations to help inform guests about these types of expectations. But one of the ways that people learn best is by observing the behavior of others.

Behavior modeling is an effective tool, which many museums probably wield unconsciously. It is done by people everywhere, and is one of the primary means by which human beings pass on culture. Whatever the setting, “most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling.”⁴³ With behavior modeling, individuals pick up anything from short cues to entire methodologies, by observing and ultimately imitating behaviors.

Albert Bandura, a psychologist specializing in social cognitive theory, says that in order for effective modeling to occur the first step is for the person to notice the model.⁴⁴ While social models for museum guests can emerge from their peers, live interpreters effortlessly step into this role because museums typically make them and other staff easily identifiable.

Visitors can assume that live interpreters know the rules of the exhibition space, and, if given the opportunity to replicate, may pick up and start to carry out the same types of behaviors. The behaviors modeled could be anything from talking at an appropriate volume to correctly using an interactive. Modeling may help to ease feelings of discomfort, both because the visitor previously felt like they did not know what to do, and also because other guests were uncomfortable witnessing aberrant behavior.

This kind of modeling can be effective for children, for visitors who are new to museums, for exhibitions that offer opportunities to try out new things, or those that are substantially different than the rest of a museum (for example, an interactive exhibition in a museum that is otherwise not). A summative evaluation at the National Canal Museum gives an example of this kind of modeling in action:

“...observational data indicate that when docents actively engaged visitors while they were using the Model Canal System, their actions and words set off a chain reaction: docents modeled correct usage for visitors who, in turn, modeled correct usage, both directly and indirectly, for other visitors in the exhibit area, and so forth... Furthermore, after docents left visitors to use the exhibit independently, visitors continued to use the information learned from the docent throughout their exhibit experience.”⁴⁵

Modeling behavior and setting up expectations can help focus visitors and allow them to experience an exhibition in the way it was planned. And just like modeling for thinking strategies, it helps guests to feel like they are part of a group and that they belong in an institution when they know what is expected of them.

42. Hein 127.

43. Kearsley, Greg, “Social Learning Theory (A. Bandura),” Theory Into Practice (TIP) Database, 17 Apr. 2009 <<http://tip.psychology.org/bandura.html>>.

44. Abbott, Lynda, “Social Learning Theory,” TeachNet, 17 Apr. 2009 <http://teachnet.edb.utexas.edu/~lynda_abbott/Social.html>.

45. Randi Korn & Associates X.

- **Live interpretation in an exhibition can act as an introduction into a community of thinkers.**

As mentioned earlier, museums are frequently the public persona of a discipline and often act as the representative of that field and community to the broader population. Art museums and galleries become the face of the art world. Zoos are often a spokesperson for conservation and environmentalists. The *Lower East Side Tenement Museum* in New York City is a public representative for social justice and human rights.⁴⁶ For visitors who find that they want to establish their position as a part of a specialized community, or others who simply wish to learn more about them, live interpreters can be a key resource in finding information and making the connections necessary to proceed.

Because museums are public spaces, there are fewer barriers to involvement than there might be in other places



Palais de la Decouverte, Paris, France. Photo by, Martin Deutsch.

related to a field. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has written about how, “Art galleries can bring people who are not formally trained as artists in touch with the cultural practices of art-based communities and also with members of the communities themselves.”⁴⁷ For certain visitors, Live Interpreters can act something like an ambassador—a nonthreatening introduction to related community groups. Both staff and volunteers are often current or past professionals of the field or are laypersons with a deep interest in the topic they are addressing. Because the live interpreters are frequently already a part of a community of thinkers, they can act as a link or an initial source of information.

Hooper-Greenhill continues,

“Participating in the practices of a community as a peripheral member gives people the opportunity to be involved without having to become full members. It also prepares them to become full members, if they choose to, and to participate in the core activities of the community.”⁴⁸

For someone who is thinking about becoming more involved in a discipline, it is less intimidating to engage with a live interpreter who will meet them where they are. As a novice, understanding how a group thinks and what their ‘rules’ are is one of the first steps to feeling like you are a part of a community. And visitors who perceive the relationship between a museum and the outside world can gain from it whether or not they ever decide to become more deeply involved. When visitors see how exhibit content is related to the lives of real people, it broadens the entire exhibition experience.

46. International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. 2009. ICSC. March 18, 2009 <www.sitesofconscience.org/about-us/en/>.

47. Hooper-Greenhill, Making Meaning 1, 29.

48. Hooper-Greenhill, Making Meaning 1, 30

Challenges in providing Social Experiences

Once again, museum planners will want to think ahead about how to avoid harmfully impacting their visitor's—this time with negative social experiences. There are a couple of situations that could interfere with a visitor's ability to satisfactorily engage with live interpreters or with other visitors.

As was discussed earlier, the types of outcomes that museum guests find satisfying include intrapersonal experiences. Social experiences and intrapersonal experience are by definition nearly impossible to accommodate simultaneously. In this way, socially driven live interpretation can become intrusive to museum guests in situations where they are actively having an intrapersonal moment. Where possible, museums should think about how they can facilitate these separately. And interpreters should of course be trained to avoid being invasive.

Live interpretation could intimidate visitors who do not feel ready to engage with a live person.

A similarly problematic situation could occur if a visitor does not feel ready to engage with a live person. Visitors can become intimidated by the prospect of dialogue with a museum representative. There is sometimes a fine balance in producing live programming that is welcoming and provocative, but not overbearing.

Live interpretation could create mixed messages about acceptable behavior in relation to other staff expectations.

Another social challenge that may find its way into the exhibition setting occurs when live interpreters create mixed messages about acceptable behavior in relation to other staff expectations. The power of live people as models for behavior and expectations has been previously discussed. The problem arises when there are inconsistencies in expectations throughout an institution. It can be an extremely negative experience to be told or shown that you can do something by one authority figure, only to be chastised for it by another. This is a simple thing and yet it can instantly break whatever trust and goodwill has been built between the museum and the visitor.

opportunities for emotional and physical engagement

The previous two sections have discussed some examples of how live interpreters and exhibitions can together help promote meaningful social or cognitive experiences for visitors. But there are also situations where the benefits of exhibition interpretation by a live person may be in encouraging deeper engagement for visitors. The engagement level of guests can have a significant impact on their experience of all parts of a museum. Physical engagement and the drawing in of the visitor, is often the key to capturing and maintaining the visitor's attention. Similarly, emotional engagement may be absolutely essential to making the visitor care about the topic of the exhibition. However it is achieved, engagement is the foundation upon which most meaningful interactions are built and, therefore, a vehicle for impacting guests that should not be ignored.

• **Live interpretation in an exhibition can be a way of creating physical and intellectual interactivity, even with otherwise didactic content.**

Some exhibitions are designed to be physically hands-on or otherwise interactive. Others are not. Choices about this are often made with regards to the content of the exhibition, the demographics of the audience, and the customs of the institution. Children's museums and science centers are traditionally more highly interactive than historic houses and art galleries. This may, for example, reflect the recognized desire in children to touch, feel, explore, and otherwise interact. But regardless of setting, there will always be at least some percentage of the exhibition visitors who prefer to engage with content in a participatory or kinesthetic manner.

Many historical museums have traditionally attracted an older audience, and only allowed limited interaction with artifacts and objects. And yet their guests still have a desire to handle and engage personally with the museum. The 2008 the Connecticut Cultural Consumer study, carried out by Reach Advisors, asked visitors to describe what they would like to do at a historic house museum if there were no restrictions. The survey reported that "among their top wishes were: ... More hands-on, participatory experiences... Touching, or otherwise getting closer to, original artifacts..."⁴⁹ Or, as one respondent exuberantly wrote, they would like to, "TOUCH, PICK UP, LOOK AT THE MARKINGS, SIT ON THE CHAIRS, FEEL THE FABRIC, LOOK AT THE BOOKS - TOUCH HISTORY."⁵⁰

49. Museum Audience Insight, 11 Feb. 2009.

50. Museum Audience Insight, 27 Feb. 2009.



Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg VA. Photo by Larry Pieniazek.

Beyond simply having a tactile experience, Reach Advisors has also found that many people (and men in particular) enjoy going behind the scenes, working “with their hands, and with others, doing the kinds of labor that they did not do in their professional lives.”⁵¹ Visitors like to feel both special and involved. And they especially enjoy “behind the scenes opportunities”⁵² and the exploratory nature of seeing the unseen.



Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA. Photo by, Colin Purrington.

Having a live interpreter present can ease two of the most common concerns working against interactivity in an exhibition—that it damages objects and is disruptive to the museum experience. With a live interpreter acting as a chaperone, model, and guide, interactivity can become a part of the exhibition experience, even in an otherwise didactic setting. In a previous section this thesis discussed the influence of live interpreters as models for visitor

behavior. In this particular case, if museums can designate some objects as ok to handle in at least limited situations, live interpreters can help visitors to treat those objects appropriately. The touching of artifacts, or allowing individuals to peak backstage or in storage areas of an exhibition are events that may only be possible with a museum staff member or volunteer present—but the immediacy would promote engagement for the visitors involved.

51. Museum Audience Insight, 20 Feb. 2009.

52. Museum Audience Insight, 3 Feb. 2009.

• **Live interpretation in an exhibition can create more engagement by slowing down the visitor observation process.**

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill reminds her readers that when “given no guidance or help, most people spend very little time looking at objects in museums or galleries, and the few short seconds that are spent are rapidly reduced after the first two or three display cases.”⁵³ Museum staff and exhibition creators are sometimes shocked to realize how quickly museum guests will often move from one exhibit to another.

“Thinking requires time” an article by Ron Ritchhart states. He continues:

*“Without the time to engage properly with an object or idea, an opportunity for thinking can feel hollow. It is only through extended inquires that conjectures can be made, perspectives can be examined, theories weighed, and new understandings developed.”*⁵⁴

Exhibition visitors subconsciously look for clues that will tell them where to spend their time.⁵⁵ Without that, they run the risk not only of missing something important, but also of not really engaging with anything at all. Without a doubt, the planning and design of an exhibition will go a long way toward catching a visitor’s attention. But Mihaly Csikszentmihaly says that exhibitions sometimes “unfortunately reinforce the expectation that all the audience has to do is parade in front of the objects.”⁵⁶ But either way, a live interpreter may provide the opportunity for guests to pause from their otherwise steady movement,

to do something different, and ultimately to think more deeply about the exhibition they are experiencing.

Two visitor research evaluations carried out at the Museum of Science, Boston, reveal more about the holding power of live interpretation. In 2005 the museum conducted a timing and tracking study which measured dwell time at a new alternative energy exhibit:

*“Given that the average time spent at the exhibit and interpretation was 4.7 minutes versus 86 seconds for the exhibit alone, the interpretation appears to drastically increase visitor engagement time with Green Fuel.”*⁵⁷

At more than three times as long, that is a substantial difference in how long visitors remained on average.

A final evaluation of the Museum of Science’s exhibition *Star Wars: where science meets imagination* reconfirms long holding times as a characteristic of this type of dialogue driven live interpretation. But it also reveals a limitation that should be accounted for by planners. The exhibition contained 44 exhibit components and four staffed carts. According to timing and tracking data, out of all the components, the four carts were visited by some of the lowest numbers of visitors, but were among the highest in overall holding power.⁵⁸ This type of interactive dialogue situation works effectively with small numbers of guests, providing in-depth experiences. It cannot serve as many people as a text panel, or large video, but it does effectively encourage longer engagements and whatever benefits that brings.

53. Hooper-Greenhill, Museum and Gallery Education, 126.

54. Ritchhart 143.

55. Durbin 145.

56. Csikszentmihaly 185.

57. Boyce, Angie Marlene, Green Fuel: summative evaluation report, Boston: Museum of Science, 2005, 17.

58. Tisdal, Carey, Remedial Evaluation of Star Wars: where science meets imagination, Boston: Museum of Science, 2006, 31-32

• **Live interpretation in an exhibition can model actions and interactivity**

As was documented previously in Diagram A, there are many forms of live interpretation that accommodate the inclusion of demonstrations. Demonstrations can be simple or complex, highly skilled or uncomplicated, ongoing or intermittent. This thesis has separated into discrete categories a number of productive ways in which exhibition-based live interpretation can serve as a model for guests. Here, live interpreters who actively demonstrate actions, skills or crafts may at the same time act as models for visitors to do the same.

Seeing a scientist, an artist, or some other live interpreter actively engaged in a practice can inspire participation in exhibition visitors as well. If the museum would like to encourage visitors to become involved in an activity while they are within the exhibition, demonstrations by live interpreters can give them the knowledge, confidence, and inducement to do so. This is itself a key benefit, but besides modeling the specific act, the live interpreters are at the same time also modeling and promoting ‘activeness’.

Modeling activity can be effective in encouraging guests either to try out that same activity immediately, if it is facilitated by the museum, or perhaps also to try something on their own in their own time. In a previous section, it was discussed how people learn and make-sense of the world in many different ways. Particularly for people who are ‘things’ oriented or kinetic learners, seeing a person doing something or creating something may inspire them to want to be active as well.

Active participation in cultural activities is often connected to being an audience member for others to demonstrate.

So when institutions allow live interpreters to carry out demonstrative and interactive programming, they may be doing more than just creating a satisfying experience in a single exhibition. The Philadelphia Cultural Engagement Index, a study commissioned by the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, set out to assess cultural engagement and expression in the Philadelphia region. Their procedure included measuring often ignored levels of personal participation—including things like listening to the radio, gardening, taking music lessons, and acting out stories—as well as more traditional cultural activities such as attending concerts and museums. Evaluators were able to recognize a significant correlation between personal practice and attendance to programs and facilities.⁵⁹ For example, “Even informal activities such as ‘design, embroider or sew clothing,’ have a positive effect on respondents’ likelihood of attending established venues like art museums.”⁶⁰

The implication of this for museums may be that if they can successfully promote personal participation, they might be able to link together a self-sustaining cycle of highly culturally engaged citizens. Visitors enjoy being actively engaged. If visitors to an exhibition are provided with an opportunity to dance (or research family history, etc.) and continue to be interested after they leave, they may be more likely to attend other audience-based cultural events in the future. The study suggests that this, in particular, may be a way to encourage “a more diverse public with more modest education levels”⁶¹ because personal participation is the area where the widest variety of community members are most likely to be involved. Live interpreters can begin the cycle by modeling their own activity and inspiring guests to move, act, and create.

59. WolfBrown, Philadelphia Cultural Engagement Index, San Francisco: Author, 2009, 72.

60. WolfBrown, Philadelphia Cultural Engagement Index 75.

61. WolfBrown, Philadelphia Cultural Engagement Index, 55.

- **Live interpretation in an exhibition can create a personal connection to a topic.**

One of Freeman Tilden's original maxims for cultural interpretation was that it should relate what is being displayed to something relevant to the visitor's experience or personality. He indicated that without a connection, interpretation tends toward being dry and unsatisfying for guests.

Reach Advisors, in partnership with Connecticut Landmarks and the Connecticut Humanities Council completed a survey of visitors to in-state cultural institutions in 2008. As a part of the analysis they looked at a particular demographic, mothers of children, as a way to illustrate differences in the types of guests who visit museums. The variety of questions asked lead to some interesting insights about the most frequent museum visitors.



Museum de Toulouse, Toulouse France. Photo by museumdetooulouse.

There is a recognized group of 'core visitors' to museums. They attend museums and museum programs frequently and commonly become members. The moms in this group "are on e-mail lists, and respond to the surveys...They like their local museums, and visit the appropriate ones for their children's ages and interests."⁶²

But within the category of 'core visitors' there is a subset known as 'museum advocates' who behave somewhat differently. They too are frequent museum visitors, but attend a wider variety of museums. In the case of moms, those who are 'core visitors' tend not to go to museums that they think are too advanced, and to abandon institutions as their children grow older. Although demographically the same, 'museum advocate' mothers are more diverse in their taste and seek out many types of cultural activities.

But the most significant difference between the two is the level of personal engagement that 'museum advocate' moms reported in comparison to their 'core visitor' counterparts. 'Core visitor' mothers indicate that museum time is something done for their children, and not for themselves. With core visitors, "what seems to be lacking is an emotional connection to the museum."⁶³ Mothers in their 30's and 40's report the lowest levels of satisfaction with their museum visits, despite being the largest visitor segment. But while this remains true for 'core visitor' moms, 'museum advocates' were 50% more likely to say that their needs [were] met."⁶⁴ Evidence in this survey and others⁶⁵ indicates that engagement and curiosity, two key characteristics of 'museum advocates', seems to make the difference in satisfaction.

62. Museum Audience Insight, Ed. Susie Wilkening, Reach Advisors, <http://reachadvisors.typepad.com/museum_audience_insight/> 05 May 2008.

63. Museum Audience Insight, 5 May 2008.

64. Museum Audience Insight, 9 Jan. 2009.

65. See Reach Advisors, International Study of Science Museum Visitors.

Charlie Walter of the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History wrote, “We learned that an exhibit is stronger if we can engage the visitor emotionally in the experience... The exhibit clearly respects the visitor by having many connecting points to their personal lives...”⁶⁶ Interpretation that creates personal connections invites deeper engagement, which can help to close the space between the exhibition and the visitor. There are many ways for different kinds of live interpretation to do this, particularly if it is made into an explicit goal. But returning to the Connecticut Cultural Consumer survey, we can identify one method specifically. Reach Advisors found that:

“...while almost all moms tell us that hands-on activities are primary attractions for their visits, [museum advocate] moms are much more likely to also mention narrative and story-telling, saying things like ‘telling with a good story is key.’”⁶⁷

Storytelling is something that particularly resonates with the highly engaged moms. Almost all forms of live interpretation offer the option of narrative storytelling. Some forms, like theater, practically guarantee it.

In Exploring Museum Theater, Tessa Bridal quoted a woman talking about her experience with museum theater in an exhibition:

“The day before I had walked through this same space with and glanced past the signage and displays... After watching the performance, this exhibit, ...the artifacts in the museum’s collection, the whole space

suddenly became personally interesting...Theater can reach the heart. Once the heart is involved, teaching the facts, history, and science is a breeze.”⁶⁸

This describes how forging a personal connection in one area of an exhibition can positively impact other parts of the experience. Narrative seems to have the ability to craft a new point of connection where there previously was not one, but other interpretive methods identifying and exploiting previous points of connection should have similar results.

66. Walter, Charlie, “Creating Extraordinary Learning Environments,” *Curator*. 45.4 (2002) 277-287. 285-86.

67. *Museum Audience Insight*, 9 Jan. 2009.

68. Bridal 119.



• **Live interpretation in an exhibition can be a means of inspiring or modeling enthusiasm for a subject.**

John Muir, a 19th century naturalist, once said, “Dry words and dry facts, however clear-cut and polished, will not fire hearts.”⁶⁹ The missions of many museums include a call not only to preserve, display, or teach about a subject, but also to inspire an interest or passion for it in their guests.

Along with modeling thinking strategies and behavior, enthusiasm is one more place where interpreters can shine as models. For visitors, seeing genuine enthusiasm in another person is evidence that there must be something worthwhile at the museum. It can catch a guest’s attention and may get them to consider an object or idea that they might otherwise have simply bypassed.

In combination with the exhibition surrounding them, live interpreters can be particularly successful. Unlike an exhibit component, live interpreters feel and express real emotions; and unlike in classrooms, there are ‘real things’ around them. Surrounded by the trappings and artifacts related to a topic, live interpreters can point to those parts that they personally enjoy and that spark their own interest.

In 2007 the Pacific Science Center launched their *Portal to the Public* program, an initiative that aims to develop new and innovative ways of connecting public audiences with scientists and their current research. Information released by the program acknowledges that “many other delivery models exist...[but] face-to-face interactions provide a unique, personal experience for the museum visitor.”⁷⁰ Through a variety of different kinds of programming

(forums, stage demonstrations, citizen science opportunities, etc.) scientists become role models for guests. Provided with the opportunity, guests can interact with real, genuine people who are interested and involved in scientific research.

Staff involved with the program believe that face-to-face opportunities with scientists will positively impact many different kinds of visitors. It may inspire adults to become interested in public policy and issues with current science, because these are both concerns about which many researchers are quite passionate. For younger audiences, an enthusiastic role model could be especially significant, “since the number-one predictor of whether someone will go into science is not mathematics achievement or grades, but the person’s interest in science at a young age.”⁷¹ No matter whether the topic is science or art, one reason why programs like Portal to the Public are promising is because the live interpreters are interested enough in their particular field to specialize in it. And in properly executed programming that kind of enthusiasm is infectious.

69. “Linnaeus, by John Muir (1896): the writings of John Muir,” *Sierra Club*, 17 Apr. 2009 <http://www.sierraclub.org/John_Muir_Exhibit/writings/people/linnaeus.html>; Originally found in Warner, Charles Dudley, ed., *Library of the World's Best Literature*. New York: R.S. Peale and J.A. Hill, Publishers, 1896?, v. 16, pp. 9077-9083.

70. Russell 9.

71. Russell 12.

- **Live interpretation in an exhibition may demonstrate that the museum can be a personal resource**

It has been discussed previously how live interpreters are able to share with their audience the importance of the topic being covered within the exhibition, and about how it may connect with their lives. At the same time as they do that, Live Interpreters may also successfully reveal to guests the importance of the museum itself and how the institution can be personally significant.



Museum of Science, Boston, MA.

Ron Ritchart gives an example he witnessed during a school program at the Guggenheim museum. A live interpreter,

Ben Moore looks at a painting of Van Gogh with his group of students. “Then Ben adds, ‘I’m a painter. I have a studio and I paint with oils. When I paint, I sometimes look at paintings like Vincent Van Gogh’s. Why would I do that?’” By asking these questions, the live interpreter helps the students to make a connection and to think about why the museum would be important to someone:

“The students are instantly engaged with the painting and with Ben. ‘To get inspiration,’ a student calls out. ‘To study how he does it,’ suggests another. ‘Maybe you want to be like him, and you like how he paints,’ offers a third. By sharing something of his own use of museums, Ben invites students to see themselves and the museum in a new way...”⁷²

In any museum with resources worth using (collections, libraries, experts, classes, etc.), a live interpreter could similarly help visitors to understand what is available and how one could benefit from what is there.

72. Ritchart 145.

Engagement Challenges

Because visitor engagement is one the key factors in successfully involving guests in a museum, any foreseeable challenges to creating that engagement should be carefully considered.

Live interpretation could become an insufficient or overtaxed resource if the exhibition relies too heavily on the work of interpreters without providing sufficient resources.

A number of live interpretive programs, particularly dialogue driven varieties, work best at serving a small audience in a deep and meaningful way. Whatever the reason is for the demand, if the interpreters are fulfilling a key need that is not or cannot be served elsewhere in an exhibition, museums may need to make resources such as additional staff or extra space available to expand a program if it becomes overcrowded. Or alternatively, there may be a need for more types of offerings that can take some of the pressure off of the individual interpreters.

Live interpretation could become an ignored or underutilized resource if hidden or unadvertised.

In a busy exhibition, interpreters may want a quiet corner to carry out their programming. But when this is not the case, live interpretation that is hidden or unadvertised could be ignored or underutilized, and therefore an inefficient use of invested resources. Interpreters sometimes have the luxury of moving around, of calling attention to themselves, or of recruiting guests to join them in a certain area. But not always, and this is inconvenient to say the

least. Also, it could contribute to sense among guests that live interpreters are pushy.

Whether appropriately or not, live interpretation could be seen as ‘just for kids’ or as a beginner’s element.

Improper advertising can also contribute to a persistent problem in museums—that adult visitors believe that any live or interactive interpretation must be aimed at children. The challenge of how to actively engage adults in some types of more interactive experiences is not one that can be solved simply.⁷³ This is in part because many programs do see children as their primary audience, and that expectation has been cultivated in visitors. But placement and immature branding can be detrimental where efforts are otherwise being made.

If programs are hastily put together or fit awkwardly into the exhibition space, live interpretation could give the impression that the museum is shabby or underserved.

When informed about what they are doing, museum guests are often keen to help test rough and unpolished prototypes of live programs and exhibit components. But the interest in being a part of the museum’s development process, which makes them so agreeable, is not present when a live interpretation is presented to them as a finished program. Hastily revealed and untested fitting also reduces the ability of the museum to produce really well integrated programming.

73. Denver Art Museum, *New Angles on Interpretation: in the DAM’s new Hamilton building*, Denver: Author, 2007, 14.

Live interpretation may compete (ex. audio from video) with other elements in the exhibition.

Besides reflecting poorly on the institution, physically ill fitted interpretation can be detrimental to the visitor experience of both installed and live interpretive elements. Areas of an exhibition that are rendered too noisy, or too quiet, are just one way that experiences can compete with each other. Tight spaces, an overabundance of elements, lights, sounds, etc. can distract from one and other, and leave visitors over stimulated and unable to concentrate.

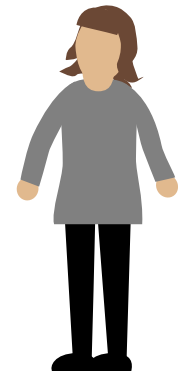
Enthusiasm amongst interpretive staff can flag after a time for a particular program.

Live interpretation is incredibly dependent upon the individual interpreter to make the experience successful. So when an interpreters interest or enthusiasm in a topic begins to weaken, there is a chance that that may be reflected in their programming.

In institutions where live interpreters can choose to work elsewhere, they may simply move on to something new. But this fading of enthusiasm is especially problematic in exhibitions that are narrow in scope or that have live interpreters pegged to do something very specific. Although some interpreters are happy to carry out the same programming time after time, it is not always going to be the case.

Visitors might think that live interpretation is redundant or annoying if presenters are strictly repeating information seen in other parts of the exhibition.

When choosing to participate, there is an expectation amongst guests that live interpretation will provide something in addition to what the visitor could find on their own. It is a problem if visitors start to feel like they could get the same information better and faster by reading it or watching a video. Live programming that does not offer some service that is different than the accompanying exhibition is also not taking advantage of what it is to be an interpreter. Because the mediums are different, live and installed programming should be complementary, but tailored offerings.

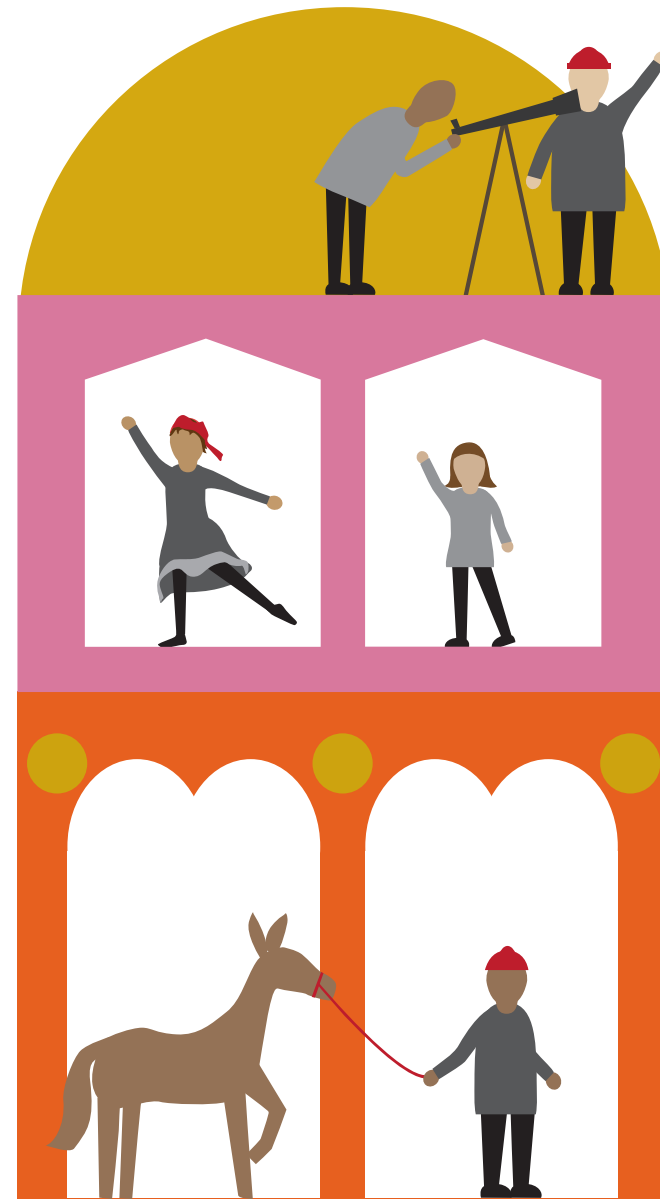


Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, the power of exhibition-based live interpretation has been evidenced. There are dozens of opportunities, small and large that are provided by the presence of a live person in an exhibition. The impact on a museum visitor of interacting with a living person should not be understated. There are instances where it can be overwhelmingly positive or appallingly negative. With so much at stake, staff throughout the museum do well to think about the consequences of live interpretation and their own impact on the matter.

It is not a simple matter of planning for live interpretation alone, since installed exhibit components and live programs are not separated in guest experience. Overarching questions, such as of audience, may decide whether live programming offers something different to exhibition visitors who otherwise would not necessarily already find something that speaks to them; or, if it helps to maintain a core exhibition visitorship by offering a variation on a similar type of experience. Social experience or object experience, talking circle or puppet theater, there are countless variations on format and outcome, and all have their own implications.

So like any other public offering, exhibition-based live interpretation must be thoughtfully crafted. No one person or group in a museum is likely to have full responsibility for all the aspects that will be involved. Chapter two will take up this discussion of the planning processes and explore some groundwork for how museum teams can dialogue about the subject effectively.





Part One

chapter two—the development process in practice

introduction to museum planning

Having examined a range of potentials and possibilities in the previous chapter, this section will look at the practical implications of developing new live interpretive programs and exhibitions.

As with any installed interpretive method, live exhibition programming can be out of place or counterproductive if poorly planned or executed. In an article about exhibit development models, museum consultant Janet Kamien writes, “There are the exhibits whose promise is not met because the aspirations were not backed up with the necessary resources.”⁷⁴ This type of shortcoming is true of all aspects of exhibition, including live interpretation. Careful consideration must be given in order to determine just what those necessary resources are. But a well-organized planning team can overcome many of these challenges with diligence and preparation. By anticipating problems before programming is presented to the public, museums can avoid potentially saddling their guests’ experience with the negative consequences.

Three case studies and four key practices

A review of beneficial practices does well to begin with case studies; in this instance, we will begin by looking at three museums that have had success in both their installed exhibitions and their live interpretation. The Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, the Chicago History Museum, and the Denver Art Museum exemplify and share some archetypical qualities that seem to have lead to their success with public offerings.

There are four key practices that are seen broadly in the three institutions:

1. Everyone supports the big, shared vision.
2. When there is an opportunity to reexamine and self-reflect, do so.
3. Take risks.
4. Specialize, but work as on a continuum.

Interestingly, although they seem to be separate things, all four practices start to intermingle with each other on closer examination. For example: institutions who specialize can work in a continuum only when that continuum is founded off of the support of a big, shared vision; and big, shared visions do not develop unless the museums exploit opportunities to reexamine and self-reflect; but museums will only take advantage of any reflections made if they avoid being risk adverse.

The **Fort Worth Museum of Science and History** currently stands at an interesting place in its history as it prepares to reopen in the fall of 2009. As the institution comes out of a major building project, there will inevitably be a period of readjustment resulting in changes to their process and thinking. But the museum has had a long history of producing significant exhibitions and live programming, as well as having influenced other museums by codifying their process.

Museum COO Charlie Walter has both written and spoken about the institution’s exhibition development process, including the positive impact of formally verbalizing their purpose and vision. A big, shared vision is not the same

74. Kamien, Janet, “An Advocate for Everything: exploring exhibit development models,” *Curator*, 44.1 (2002) 114-128.

as the mission of an exhibition, although having a mission during the development phases may certainly be helpful as well. A vision is a larger and broader goal, but at the same time may also be distinct and simpler than the overall mission of a museum. For example, the institutional mission of the Fort Worth Museum reads:

*"Dedicated to lifelong learning and anchored by our rich collections, the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History engages our diverse community through creative, vibrant programs and exhibits interpreting science and the stories of Texas and the Southwest."*⁷⁵

But their big, shared vision, or 'core purpose' as they describe it, is to "provide Extraordinary Learning Environments."⁷⁶ Walter writes about how, for the institution, the Extraordinary Learning Environment (ELE) is a "common understanding of what the visitor experience could and should be."⁷⁷ The museum has taken the trouble to further outline what constitutes an ELE. Because it is a simple, yet well-defined statement the Fort Worth Museum's vision statement can become a common focal point to inform the work of staff throughout the museum.

Although striving to create ideal situations for visitor learning was something that the Fort Worth Museum had been practicing for some time, the institution had to make a conscious effort to self-examine in order to conceptually solidify their purpose; which, in turn, allowed them to develop a framework for future planning. In their case, the self-examination process took the form of staff meetings and dialogue, facilitated in part by an external organizational coach. Other successful institutions, such as

the **Chicago History Museum** have worked with slightly different approaches; but still with the goal of self-awareness.

Reopening in 2006, the Chicago History Museum had, over the course of several years, majorly redeveloped approximately 70% of their public space. At the same time, the educational department took advantage of the occasion to evaluate all of their current programming and to think about what options could be made available in the future. For instance, led by the director of education, D. Lynn McRaney, a multidepartmental team looked at which practices were working particularly well for live school programming and which were not.⁷⁸

Overall, the Chicago History Museum decided to move away from their past practice of primarily offering tours and workshops and introduced a course consisting of seminars, town hall meetings, and, in the case of school programming, activity stations. Staff at the museum recognized that changing the exhibitions created both the necessity and the opportunity to reevaluate the live interpretation offered.

Refashioning a museum's entire suite of live programming is not a simple task. The CHM took a substantial risk in doing so and was for the most part positively rewarded.⁷⁹ But the process of reevaluation will likely continue.

The cycle of informed risk-taking is one that can be seen implemented successfully at the **Denver Art Museum**. The museum has received attention for their innovative thinking and experimentation in museum art education. In 2009 the institution opened a temporary show, exhibiting rock

75. Walter, Charlie, Notes from ASTC 101 Session, 2007 Los Angeles Conference, 29 March 2009, <http://cils.exploratorium.edu/resource_shared/downloads/4073/ASTC%20Session%20Notes.doc>

76. Walter, "Creating Extraordinary Learning Environments," 278.

77. Walter, "Creating Extraordinary Learning Environments," 278.

78. McRaney, Lynn. Telephone interview. 7 Apr. 2009.

79. Garibay Group, Chicago History Museum: activity stations evaluation, Garibay Group 2007.

posters from the 1960's. To accompany the exhibition, a small nearby room was planned to host a variety of interactive experiences facilitated by a museum staff member. When describing her experience in that room, museum blogger Nina Simon wrote that it was "a thrilling challenge to the traditional form of art museum exhibit design" and that it contained several "ingenious interactive experiences...[which were] comfortable, diverse, authentic, content-oriented, and deep."⁸⁰

The Denver Art Museum's ability to carry out new, well-integrated exhibitions and interpretation may be due in part to their institutional organization and the values that it reflects. According to an in-house report, "the museum conceives of its visitor programs as a continuum between installed...and live."⁸¹ Everything that the museum offers to the public would therefore fall somewhere along this scale.

The idea of a programmatic continuum is reflected in the job descriptions of staff and, ultimately, in the work that is produced by teams at the museum. In particular, the managing educators all serve dual roles where they

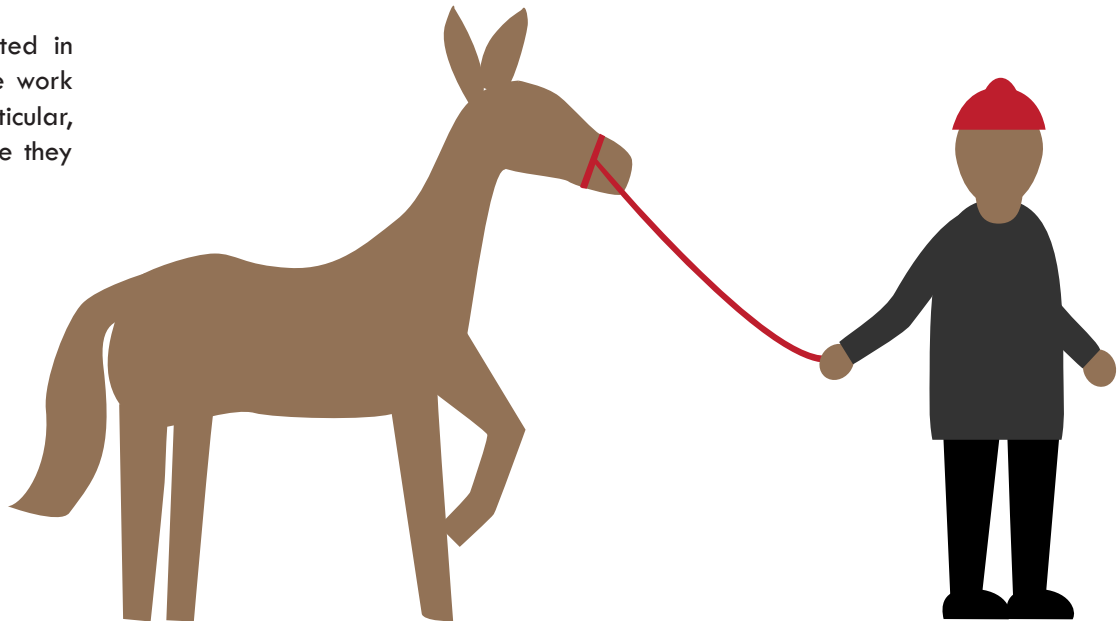
specialize in both a particular audience and a specific subject matter. This implies that these individuals have an obligation to both the content and the audience, and, consequently, to the entire process of how visitors access that content.

The lead educator works as part of the core exhibition team along with a designer and a curator. The teams, which develop both installed and associated live programming, are at the same time "pretty specialized" yet "pretty collaborative." The function of each of the team members is clearly distinct. But they work together in a big picture way so that everything, including the live interpretation, is "embedded in the galleries" and not just "plugged in later."⁸²

80. Simon 27 March 2009.

81. Denver Art Museum 17.

82. Housel, Lindsey. Telephone interview. 7 Apr. 2009.



the development process and important points of discussion

The Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, the Chicago History Museum and the Denver Art Museum, have established specific practices to carry them through the phases of program development. Though other institutions may not have all the same infrastructure in place, and will likely not choose to follow their exact methods, there is still a lot to be learned about the process.

For example, though variations on the team model of including an educator, a designer, and a curator have been followed by a number of institutions since the 1980's⁸³, the Denver Art Museum represents an exhibition development system that is not in this form widely practiced. Even still:

*"...the small staffs and significant time required to provide visitor and school services, programs, and materials, frequently preclude education staff from participating in exhibition evaluation."*⁸⁴

This is important to remember because it acknowledges the challenges that are present. However, this does not mean is that communication between exhibition and education staff should be carried out only when it is convenient. In the case of the Denver Art Museum, there is an educator present to advocate for the integration of the entire continuum of live and installed programming. In situations where there is not an advocate for live interpretation on the exhibition team, it would therefore become even more important that the involved constituents understand the critical points and be prepared to succinctly and unambiguously discuss any concerns.

Remembering this, and the four key practices already discussed, it is time to look at the duration of the

development process, including concerns and questions that well-informed museum teams should consider.



Highland Sam J. Racadio Library and Environmental Learning Center.
Highland, CA.

Before program/exhibition development begins

When creating satisfying visitor experiences in exhibitions with live interpretation, the first steps should be taken prior to (and probably independent of) the program development process.

Pre-development is a key phase in which a museum lays out an institution-wide vision and creates the firm foundation for all future planning. For example, actions taken during this phase will allow a museum to follow the first of the four key practices earlier discussed—to support a big, shared vision.

83. Kamien.

84. Office of Policy and Analysis. The Making of Exhibitions: purpose, structure, roles and process. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, Office of Policy and Analysis. 2002.

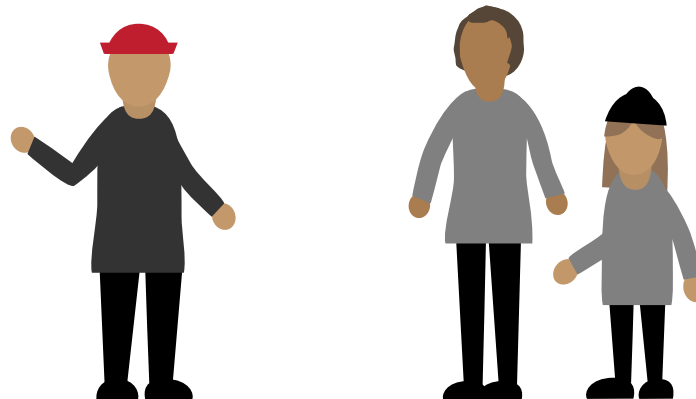
*"By exploring together as a staff just what those [ideologies and values] are, then clearly articulating them, you will have a stronger institutional foundation to step off from as you develop exhibits and programs...By trying to build a stronger organization through clearly articulated expectations and values, the museum developed a strong foundation for its exhibit development process."*⁸⁵

Not only is this the time for thinking about vision planning, but also institutional planning, interpretive planning, strategic planning, or whatever other term the institution uses to describe the preparation of big picture, long term, forward thinking arrangements. Every one of these is a topic of sufficient complexity and importance to warrant significant further study. A number of books and other resources are available that can help museums through the processes of creating these plans.⁸⁶

It is worth mentioning the important goal of creating 'buy-in' throughout the museum, and in the various departments that will all ultimately impact visitor experience. Cheryl Meszaros writes about cultivating critical and ethical thinking in visitors as a worthwhile vision for art museum. She explains, "The move toward ethical thinking is the

task of the museum in its totality, not just the task of its volunteers and educational staff."⁸⁷ Steering a museum is difficult even when everyone can agree on the major course. A lack of commitment from any of the constituents is best dealt with at this point; especially because eventually everyone must come together again in preparation for funding grants,⁸⁸ exhibitions, etc.

A solid foundation for programmatic planning also requires institutional stability for planning ahead. The lack of monetary resources for supplies and staff are two barriers that frequently surface when program development begins.⁸⁹ Money is an issue at almost every museum, small or large. This is not likely to change, so stability and the ability to plan becomes critical.



85. Walter "Creating Extraordinary" 279.

86. Both the Fort Worth Museum of Science and Industry, and the Chicago History Museum cite Collins, James C., and Jerry I. Porras, Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visioning Companies, New York: Harper Collins, 1994;

See also, Falk, John H., and Beverly K. Sheppard, Thriving in the Knowledge Age: New Business Models for Museums and Other Cultural Institution, New York: Altamira Press, 2006;

And, Brown, Kathleen, "Strategic Planning: the destination and a journey." Western Museums Association. 14 Apr. 2009 <http://www.westmuse.org/resources_strategic_planning.htm>.

87. Meszaros, Cheryl, "Modeling Ethical Thinking: toward new interpretive practices in the art museum," Curator, 51.2. (2008) 157-169. 162

88. Ucko, David. Lecture. University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA. 17 Mar. 2009.

89. Sachatello-Sawyer 86.

The exhibition development/design phases and their impact on live interpretation

Because it is important for the parties involved to have a shared understanding of the development process, this thesis will briefly describe the basic design/development phases.

- Concept Development
- Schematic Design
- Design Development
- Construction Documents
- Fabrication/Installation

The terms used are generally specific to exhibition development. Fortunately for everyone's understanding, the fundamental practices of developing public museum programs—live, installed or other—all involve many of the same steps. There will be research, brainstorming, planning, crafting, and, hopefully, prototyping and testing along the way. But the needs of different groups will put emphasis on different parts of the process, and some tasks may be completed for one program or exhibit in a different order than for another.

Two years is a typical timeline for the development of a moderately complex exhibition; though by no means is it a universal standard. Museums will often try to compress the process to save time, or allow it to stretch out over a longer period. Many museums employ exhibition coordinators who work hard to keep the team moving forward. Developers of live interpretation need not worry about following the exact same pace as the exhibition. Such a thing is not even really possible since certain elements of an exhibition will always be more or less developed at any point along the

way. But there needs to be some degree of coordination. By waiting until the very end of the exhibition design period to develop live interpretation, or to think about how everything will fit into a space, the involved departments miss out on opportunities to test together and to create a visitor experience that is better integrated.



Organ Museum. Photo by JanneM.

Concept Development

The first phase begins with the initial exhibition idea or preliminary concept. During this time, involved team members conduct content research, craft the mission and goals, and begin to construct the exhibition framework.

Concept development is also the time to create an 'exhibition plan.' Somewhat more limited than the interpretive or strategic planning discussed earlier, this is still a broad proposal in that it covers an overarching strategy for all programming and other efforts related to an exhibition.

This plan will include a general idea of who and what will be involved in the final exhibition, though nothing is yet concretely designed.

As a part of this first planning phase, there may need to be an initial discussion to decide to what extent various topics will be covered and by whom. In cases where the exhibition subject includes themes that are controversial, there should be a conversation about who is best suited to tackle the tough questions—the installed exhibition, the live interpreters, or both.⁹⁰

During conceptual development and in the following stage of schematic design, most of the overarching questions about content will be decided. For the sake of live interpretation, that would make this the ideal time to resolve any related issues, rather than going back to reshape things later. Also conceptual development is often the beginning of research into available objects and artifacts. This type of information is extremely relevant to live interpreters because excellent programming often has “considered the unique opportunities afforded by the museum collection”⁹¹ and built experiences around that. It may also reveal opportunities for objects that can be handled or used in other nontraditional ways by live interpreters.

More administratively, this is also the phase where important practices are established. There are always interesting tangents that begin to pop-up during research phases, which the involved staff will need to decide whether or not to pursue. Some tangents become foundational pieces for an experience, while some can dangerously sidetrack a group. It helps if there is shared understanding in the form of goals and objectives, so no one veers too far

afield along the way. But cutting ideas can be painful. Before those goals are written, and even afterwards if there is disagreement, there needs to be a respectable arrangement about how to deal with those issues.

Schematic Design

The schematic design phase is a continuation of the development of ideas and content and the beginning of the shaping of those ideas into a prepared package.

Between this stage and design development, most decisions about the physicality of the exhibition will be made. How exactly this phase is impactful to the live interpretation depends upon the specific characteristics of the program in question. As exhibition teams turn themes into content regions and craft the storyline of ideas, the exhibition experience begins to take form. Discussions early on between designers and the planners of live interpretation will make it more likely that programming can be carried out in a location in the narrative of the exhibition that is appropriate to the content of the program.⁹² Or in another case, so that tours and the path taken through the space are well matched.

As floor plans become more concrete, team members may also want to think about the physical requirements for space usage. Obviously it would be a mistake to put a large program in a small space. But depending upon the specific type of interpretation, other things can be uncomfortable—for example, the placement of socially interactive programming in areas that are removed from the rest of an exhibition. As Nina Simon of Museum 2.0 writes, “I would feel less comfortable playing with strangers in a room shut off from the rest of the museum.”⁹³

90. Sachatello-Sawyer 130-33.

91. Ritchhart 143.

92. Falk, John, and Lynn Dierking, The Museum Experience, Washington, D.C.: Whalesback Books, 1992, 113

Throughout the development phases, there typically exist opportunities to test and prototype concepts, content, and interactive elements. Before being released into the final exhibition context, both exhibit components and live interpretive programming can be improved through their own pre-testing. When looking at pieces that are presented in different formats, but are similar in content or concept, concurrent testing can reveal common underlying issues that might not otherwise be apparent.⁹⁴ Also, if the staff involved are prepared to work together, simultaneously testing exhibits and live interpretation along side each other can offer a glimpse of what their future relationship might look like.

Design Development

All exhibition components that will need to be built in should be accounted for during the third development phase. This will allow museum designers the time to respond to any physical requirements. For the developers of live interpretation, there begins to be a need at this point to know specifics about what constructed elements their programming will require. The involved parties should discuss these and any other issues that might be solved through design. Specific features such as creating ways to visibly document visitor thinking during a program, can greatly impact guest experience and are more easily accomplished in situations where there is multidisciplinary discussion between designers and interpreters.

During or before design development, the requirements of an exhibition and its associated live interpretation may warrant a discussion about what will happen in the space when there is not a live interpreter present. This is most

critical for live programs that have their own installed components (such as a stage or cart), or for those that use exhibit components in a modified way (such as an interactive with an 'interpreter mode').

Depending on the live program and on the institution, the live interpreters may design and build their own smaller equipment, or a designer may do so. Either way, as the look and feel of the exhibition comes fully together, it may be helpful to think about how physical aspects of the live interpretation will be understood. This is particularly significant if the live program is aimed toward a certain audience, since cues are important to guests who may not be familiar with what is being offered.

Construction Documents and Fabrication/Installation

Starting in the Construction Document phase and continuing through to the fabrication and installation, museum exhibitions take their final shape. Last minute questions and problems between departmental stakeholders are almost inevitable, but hopefully limited.

In the final stage, with designs complete, exhibition fabricators conclude construction and managers in charge of live interpretation can complete staff training, or whatever else is required before the live programming can be released into the gallery or exhibit space. During this time it may not be too late to make some small changes. However, for those who think about the mutual aspects of live interpretation and the built space, the hope is that by this point the only requirement will be to make certain that necessary amenities such as storage, lighting or access to electrical outlets are not forgotten and left out.

93. Simon 11 Nov. 2008.

94. Denver Art Museum 31.

Factors to consider when deciding on types of interpretation

The design/development phases are guidelines that can be used by the creators of live and installed programming to strategically plan the creation of public offerings. At some point along the way, a decision will be made regarding the type of live interpretation, if any, that is to be presented in an exhibition.

The contributing factors in determining what forms of live interpretation will be offered are not unlike those discussed by development teams when considering installed exhibition offerings. They include: the museum's mission and vision; the budget; the artifacts available; the size, needs, and preferences of the audience; the tradition of the museum; the infrastructure already in place; and the content being presented. In any given situation there is probably no one right answer. This is because there is likely no one thing that can perfectly answer all of the constraints and needs of a project. Committing to the four key practices may help drive decision-making. It may be useful to remember the four satisfactory visitor experiences—cognitive, social, object and interpersonal—and to think about how the different parts of an exhibition will interact.

As a general rule, live programming has a low start-up but high reoccurring cost, when compared to installed exhibit media. But as has been previously discussed, live and installed programming exists on a gradient and there is often no clear divide between the two. Live interpretive programming may share built components with the unmediated exhibition, such as is often the case during a tour or with an exhibit explainer. Or, a program may

require specialized components that will be constructed particularly for its own use, as in the case of a petting tank.

Figure B lists a number live interpretive programs that are currently being carried out in museums, along with information about the categories of built components that are frequently involved with each type. In some cases, more than one category of built component will be listed with a particular mode. This is because individual examples of the program frequently fall into either group.

This chart is not meant to reflect the amount of preplanning that will be involved with each modality, but rather the types of planning that may be necessary.

For example, live programs that require their own built components will not necessarily require more time, but they may require extra attention paid during the Design Development and Construction Document phases of exhibition planning. There are some modes of live interpretation that physically may require little more than sufficient space, but all will benefit from good communication and constructive thinking during the conceptual planning process.

[figure b] installed components of live interpretation

	Likely to Require Customized Built Components	Likely to Impact Components Otherwise Built for the Exhibition	Primarily Works Independently of Built Components
Costumed Interpreter			
Animals and Stories			
Pop-up Theater			
Puppet Theater			
Staged Play			
Living Diorama			
Mime			
Question Desk			
Traditional Gallery Tour			
Gallery Talk			
Expert Panel			
Staged Lecture			
Live Animal Show			
Dance Performance			
Live Music			
Artifact Care			
Crafting of an Object			
Device Demonstration			
Interactive Tour			
Talking Circle/ Forum			
Undercover Roamer			
Cart Interpreter			
Installed Exhibit Interpreter			
Art station			
Pocket Prop			
Petting Tank			
Workshop			
Guided Activity			

Considerations for specific types of exhibitions

Although they will not be considered here in depth, planning for live interpretation in some types of exhibitions may require additional specialized concerns to be resolved.

Permanent or continuing exhibitions are the most likely to be faced with the challenges of maintaining programming for long periods of time. This will include changes in staff and volunteers, loss of enthusiasm particular subject matter, the aging of equipment. The extended time line may make permanent exhibitions the most likely to require flexibility: in the physical space as alternative formats are adopted; and in content, since this will allow the interpreters who wish it to change topics.

Although the quick timeline of temporary exhibitions leaves very little chance for critical modifications to ever reach visitors, they are freed from some of the long-term worries previously discussed. However, many of these come back, along with a new host of challenges if the exhibition is traveling.

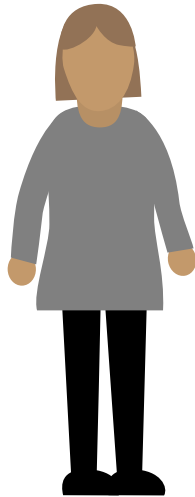
Traveling exhibitions can be some of the most complicated to plan for, particularly with regards to live interpretive programming. This is in part because, with very few exceptions, the exhibition travels but not the live interpreters. Museums that receive an exhibition from an outside institution will only have the limited ability to adapt the exhibition to fit their needs. They can make some changes on their own, as in cases where museums will add sections that are especially relevant to themselves. But most special considerations made ahead of time are probably limited to exhibition partner institutions. Exhibition collaboratives,

such as the Science Museum Exhibition Collaborative (SMEC), will engage in shared discussions about live programming and may send materials and infrastructure for programs between partner institutions. It does bring new concerns such as a lack of staff expertise at some sites, or a changed and therefore inappropriate audience, which may impact the effectiveness of such programming. Museums that produce traveling exhibitions may wish to consider some of these issues, but it is a topic that certainly warrants further study.

Other specialized situations would include working with an outside consultant or design firm. Both of these situations will probably require some modification in the manner in which planning occurs and may be worth some additional consideration.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has taken a broad look at the planning of exhibition-based live interpretation, as it is carried out in real world museums. Though responsibility for exhibitions and live interpretation are frequently shared amongst a variety of museum staff, we have seen that successful institutions work hard to produce situations where creativity, evaluation, and the sharing of goals can flourish and impact all programming, both live and installed. The subjects previously covered here are purposefully flexible just as the planning processes used by most institutions are purposefully flexible—to accommodate the individual requirements of particular exhibitions or programs.



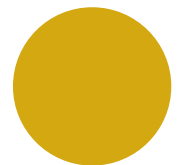
The issues raised in this chapter are meant to be a starting place for the parties involved in museum planning to begin discussion. The ultimate goal is to help museums to take advantage of the benefits of exhibition-based live interpretation in as an efficient a manner as possible. This thesis has primarily and consciously explored both the styles of exhibition and live interpretive formats in a non-specific manner. This allows for overarching themes to be revealed; but it also means that planners and developers are free to decide which pieces are significant to their own work

Many topics have been raised in the previous two chapters that are ripe for further research and discussion. An area that was not specifically touched on, but that will undoubtedly arise more frequently in the future is the question of what a live interpreter looks like in social media or web portions of an exhibition. Online programming is often perceived as an alternative to live and installed programming. But there could potentially be the same need for facilitation, modeling, or any of the other positive outcomes of live interpretation when dealing with content in an online setting. To what extent museums will choose to serve this need with a live person remains to be seen. But it would likely require new protocols for coordination to be established.

These and other newly emerging questions will need to be explored as live interpretation and exhibitions continue to evolve and grow. Live interpretation today is both the same and different from what Freeman Tilden described in 1957. Museums should continue to explore its potentials to take every advantage of whatever opportunities can be offered through human interaction in an exhibition.

Part Two—the solution

exhibition-based live interpretation packet



addendums

Glossary

Best Practice: a technique, method, or process that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome with fewer problems and unforeseen complications.

Exhibition: a museum or institution's installed public offering, which can combine a variety of objects and media, but has an overriding conceptual goal or theme.

Exhibition Development Process: the codified or uncoded process by which a museum plans and designs new permanent, temporary and traveling exhibitions. It is frequently divided into sequential stages, which may include: Conceptual Development; Schematic Design; Design Development; Construction Documents; Fabrication/Installation; and Revisions.

Interpretation: museum communication that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource, thereby impacting the visitor experience and meaning-making process.

Live Interpretation: any exhibition-based interpretation that includes visitor involvement (passive or active) with a living human representative of the institution.

Live interpreter: a staff or volunteer who is personally involved with exhibition interpretation

Museum Education: a wide variety of formal or informal educational programming carried out by a museum. May or may not be directly related to an installed exhibition.

Visitor/Guest: an audience member or consumer of museum resources.

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*planning resources
for exhibition-based
live interpretation*

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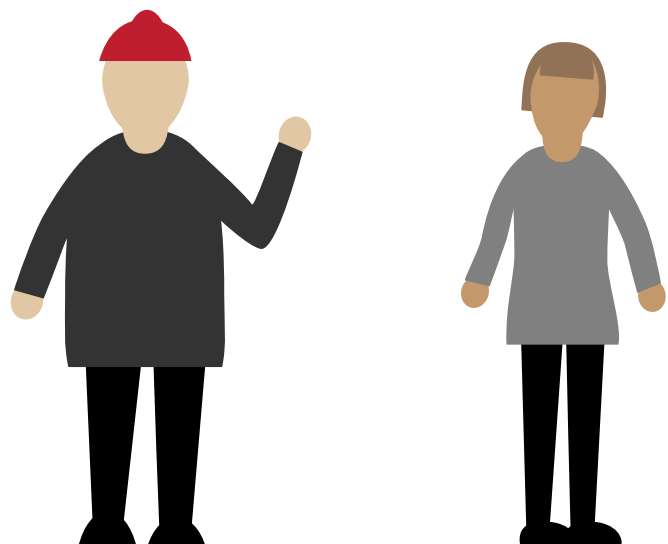


using this resource

Exhibitions are the major media by which museums communicate with the public. But rather than being one uniform whole, they are made up of distinguishable parts that are ultimately experienced in relationship with each other. Visitor experiences are created by individual elements and the association between elements, alike. Among the impactful components that are included in the relationship is the presence of staff and volunteers in the exhibition acting as live interpreters.

Evidence suggests that visitors are impacted by, and enjoy having, other people around during their time in exhibitions. Museums are collective places and some visitors may go expressly for the purpose of meeting others.¹ Research has found that, years after a museum visit, “97 percent of all people...interviewed can recall at least one person who accompanied them.”² Chaperones, family members, and classmates all have significant influences on a visitor; but so can live interpreters. For example, “it is not uncommon for children to remember qualities of docents or staff years after the experience.”³ Attentive staff are the key to “giving each person a little attention, making her or him feel special and important, [which] almost guarantees that the museum experience will be both positive and memorable.”

Anecdotal and quantitative evidence of the influence of exhibition-based live interpretation is compelling. Acting as a model for behavior and thinking, a source of information, inspiration, feedback, and guidance, there are dozens of opportunities both small and large that are provided by the presence of a live interpreter in an exhibition. The impact on a museum visitor of interacting with a living person should not be understated. There are instances where it can be overwhelmingly positive or appallingly negative. With so much at stake, staff throughout the museum do well to think about the consequences of live interpretation and their own impact on the matter.



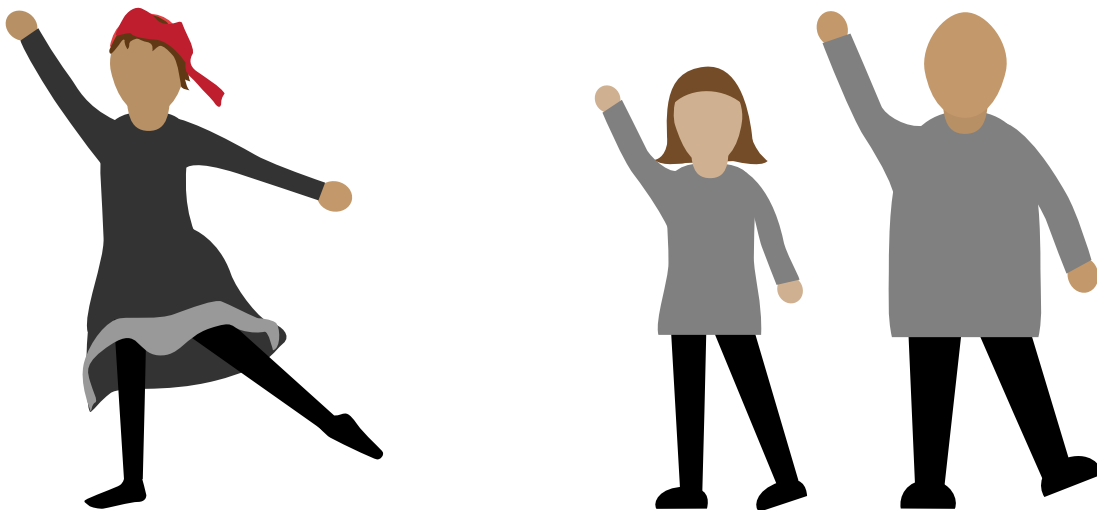
1. Alfonsi, Leonardo, “Literature Review,” Journal of Science Communication, 4.4 (2005): 8 August 2008 <<http://jcom.sissa.it/archive/04/04/C040407/>>.

2. Falk, John, and Lynn Dierking, The Museum Experience. Washington, D.C.: Whalesback Books, 1992, 120.

3. Falk, “Museum Experience” 157.

The planners of exhibitions and live interpretation are charged with facilitating cohesive engagements that will guide visitors toward the types of meaningful experiences that are signified by the exhibition's mission and goals, as well as supporting the institution's overall mission. Responsibilities for the wide range of installed and live programming carried out in an exhibition are frequently shared amongst a variety of museum staff. Within this packet is information designed to be a starting place for the parties involved to begin discussion.

Inside, you will find questions and resources intended to be specific enough to be helpful, but broad enough to be adapted and used by different types of museums for different types of programming. The ultimate goal is to help museums to take advantage of the benefits of exhibition-based live interpretation in as an efficient and effective a manner as possible. And this will require a certain amount of investment by the museum as a whole.



development discussion guides

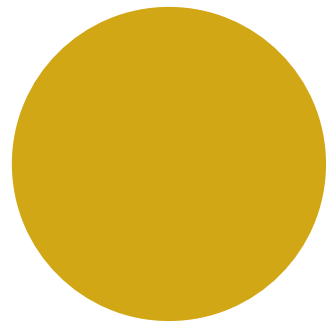
There are a number of topics that will likely need to be discussed and understood between the museum staff involved in exhibition-based live interpretive planning. A selection of these topics have been organized by design-phase in the following guides.

The following discussion guides include suggestions about discussion points, people who will be involved in the decision making, and helpful resources to have on hand. Additionally, there is also a template that can be used to create modified discussions guides that are tailored to a specific institution, exhibition, or program.

A word about those who will be involved in the process, there are four major roles that are at play during this type of exhibition/program development. They are:

- the Content developer/Expert
- the Designer
- the Planner of installed interpretive programming
- and the Planner of live interpretive programming

The roles may be split and filled by a number of different people; or the same person may fill more than one (for example, the planners of live and installed programming could be the same person, and she may at time also act as an expert/content developer).



conceptual development

The purpose of this stage is to establish the conceptual framework for all exhibition components. It may be too soon to begin the specific design of live interpretive programs; but even still, questions relating the content of the exhibition and live interpretation are likely best dealt with early on during the development process.

Discuss...

- The exhibition mission and goals, so that they are clearly described and universally understood between all team members.
- The availability of artifacts, objects and educational collections, both to be used inside the exhibition and for live interpretive programming.
- The language and vocabulary that will be used within the exhibition to ensure consistency.

Make plans for...

- Access to exhibition content, object lists, and floor plan for staff who are not a part of the core planning team.
- How decisions will be made regarding the inclusion of tangential topics.
- Who will tackle the 'tough questions', and institutional positions on controversial subject matter.

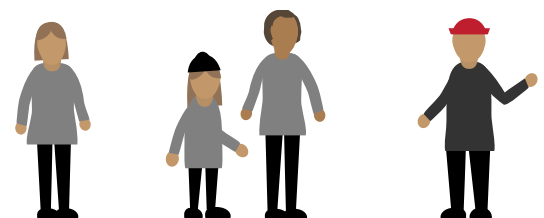
Notes:

Resources to have ready:

- Institutional Mission and Vision
- Budget
- Object Lists

Discussion will primarily concern:

- Content developer/Expert
- Planner of installed interpretive programming
- Planner of live interpretive programming



schematic design

Decisions regarding content quickly lead to the initial questions about the physicality of the exhibition and the associated live interpretation. As exhibition teams turn themes into content regions and craft the storyline of ideas, the exhibition experience begins to take form. As well as the specific place and role of live interpretive programs.

Discuss...

- The exhibition floor plan and location of live interpretation, so that the topic of live programming is appropriate to exhibition content; or so that the path taken is appropriate to narrative of tour.
- Qualities of the space that make it appropriate to the specific type of interpretive program being carried out; this would include seating, room for large groups, openness and the availability to see what other guests are doing.
- How the exhibit space will function if/when the live interpreter is absent.
- The gestalt and mood of the overall exhibition as well as individual sections of the exhibition, to ensure that there are not conflicts between individual interpretive media.

Make plans for...

- Opportunities to pretest live interpretive programming alongside exhibition components, or within the exhibition context.

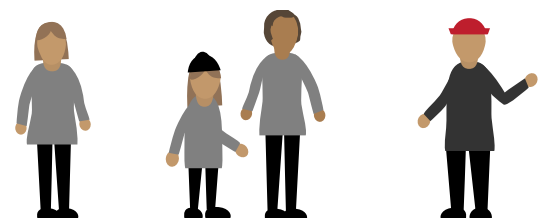
Notes:

Resources to have ready:

- Institutional Mission and Vision
- Budget
- Object Lists
- Exhibition Mission and Goals
- Conceptual Diagrams
- Target audience for exhibition and live programs

Discussion will primarily concern:

- Content developer/Expert
- Planner of installed interpretive programming
- Planner of live interpretive programming
- Designer



design development

The purpose of this stage is to establish the conceptual framework for all exhibition components. It may be too soon to begin the specific design of live interpretive programs; but even still, questions relating the content of the exhibition and live interpretation are likely best dealt with early on during the development process.

Discuss...

- The design of live interpretation, props, setting etc. so that they are appropriate for engaging the audience intended for the program.
- Opportunities for additional value in visitor experience, such as the ability for live interpreters to visibly document past visitor thinking.
- Necessary amenities that live interpretation will need such as storage, lighting or electrical outlets
- The need for future changes to the space, if programming is temporary or likely to be modified.

Make plans for...

- If/how live programming elements will travel, if the exhibition is touring.
- Scheduling for the sharing of space if multiple programs will be in the same area (for example, tour and theater piece, or presentation and movie).

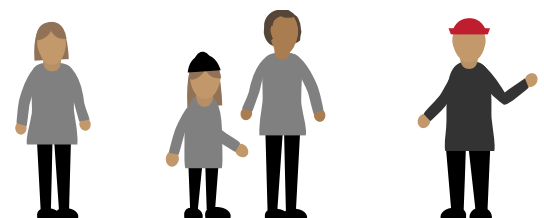
Notes:

Resources to have ready:

- Institutional Mission and Vision
- Budget
- Exhibition Mission and Goals
- Target audience for exhibition and live programs

Discussion will primarily concern:

- Content developer/Expert
- Planner of installed interpretive programming
- Planner of live interpretive programming



sample page

dialogue topic

Description of exhibition status and what is expected out of meetings during this phase.

Resources to have ready:

Discuss...

- These are specific objectives that must be accomplished during the phase/meeting.

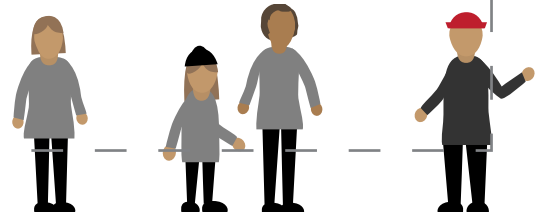
Discussion will primarily concern:

- List of the primary constituents and their roles.

Make plans for...

- These are plans for actions and protocols that will take place in the immediate and somewhat distant future.

Notes:



characteristics of live interpretation

Characteristics						
	Narrative/ Storytelling	Fact-Sharing	Demonstration	Dialogue w/ visitor	Facilitate Visitor Interactivity	Group Facilitation
Costumed Interpreter						
Animals and Stories						
Pop-up Theater						
Puppet Theater						
Staged Play						
Living Diorama						
Mime						
Question Desk						
Traditional Gallery Tour						
Gallery Talk						
Expert Panel						
Staged Lecture						
Live Animal Show						
Dance Performance						
Live Music						
Artifact Care						
Crafting of an Object						
Device Demonstration						
Interactive Tour						
Talking Circle/ Forum						
Undercover Roamer						
Cart Interpreter						
Installed Exhibit Interpreter						
Art table						
Pocket Prop						
Pretting Tank						
Workshop						
Guided Activity						

Typically

Possible

Sometimes

Unlikely

Narrative and Storytelling:
can be a full drama to a quick anecdote. It is so central to how human beings think and communicate that it appears in almost every form of live interpretation.

Fact-sharing: the act of passing on information.

Demonstration: the display of a skill or action by a live interpreter.

Question Answering: happens in many different forms of live interpretation, but most frequently in programs that are heavily driven by dialogue.

Facilitate Visitor Interactivity:
guiding guests through a process or some other action.

Group Facilitator: acting as a link between different guests and encouraging them to interact and engage with one and other, either in conversation or in shared activities.

Guide Through a Space:
touring or guiding throughout an exhibition.

live interpretation and installed components

	Likely to Require Customized Built Components	Likely to Impact Components Otherwise Built for the Exhibition	Primarily Works Independently of Built Components
Costumed Interpreter			
Animals and Stories			
Pop-up Theater			
Puppet Theater			
Staged Play			
Living Diorama			
Mime			
Question Desk			
Traditional Gallery Tour			
Gallery Talk			
Expert Panel			
Staged Lecture			
Live Animal Show			
Dance Performance			
Live Music			
Artifact Care			
Crafting of an Object			
Device Demonstration			
Interactive Tour			
Talking Circle/ Forum			
Undercover Roamer			
Cart Interpreter			
Installed Exhibit Interpreter			
Art station			
Pocket Prop			
Petting Tank			
Workshop			
Guided Activity			

This chart lists a number live interpretive programs that are currently being carried out in museums, along with information about the categories of built components that are frequently involved with each type. In some cases, more than one category of built component will be listed with a particular mode. This is because individual examples of the program frequently fall into either group.

This chart is not meant to reflect the amount of preplanning that will be involved with each modality, but rather the types of planning that may be necessary.

For example, live programs that require their own built components will not necessarily require more time, but they may require extra attention paid during the Design Development and Construction Document phases of exhibition planning. There are some modes of live interpretation that physically may require little more than sufficient space, but all will benefit from good communication and constructive thinking during the conceptual planning process.

additional resources

Crafting a museum vision

Collins, James C., and Jerry I. Porras. Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visioning Companies. New York: Harper Collins, 1994.

Walter, Charlie. "Creating Extraordinary Learning Environments." Curator. 45.4 (2002) 277-287.

Meszaros, Cheryl. "Modeling Ethical Thinking: toward new interpretive practices in the art museum." Curator. 51.2. (2008) 157-169.

Specific forms of live interpretation

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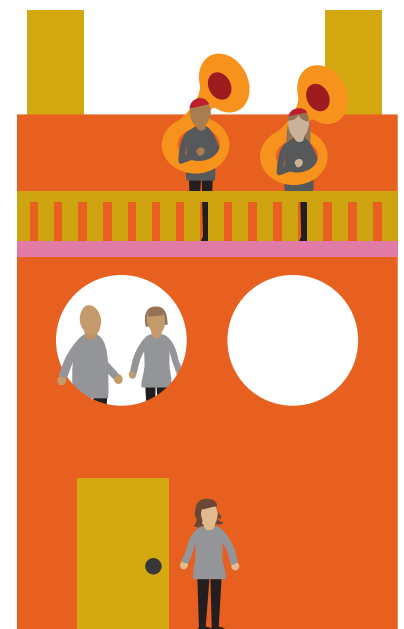
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glossary

Best Practice: a technique, method, or process that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome with fewer problems and unforeseen complications.

Exhibition: a museum or institution's installed public offering, which can combine a variety of objects and media, but has an overriding conceptual goal or theme.

Exhibition Development Process: the codified or uncoded process by which a museum plans and designs new permanent, temporary and traveling exhibitions. It is frequently divided into sequential stages, which may include: Conceptual Development; Schematic Design; Design Development; Construction Documents; Fabrication/Installation; and Revisions.

Interpretation: museum communication that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource, thereby impacting the visitor experience and meaning-making process.

Live Interpretation: any exhibition-based interpretation that includes visitor involvement (passive or active) with a living human representative of the institution.

Live interpreter: a staff or volunteer who is personally involved with exhibition interpretation

Museum Education: a wide variety of formal or informal educational programming carried out by a museum. May or may not be directly related to an installed exhibition.

Visitor/Guest: an audience member or consumer of museum resources.