Teaching the Teacher

Not surprisingly, the Junior Museum has been orientated almost exclusively toward children. Within the scope of the Metropolitan's collections, Junior Museum exhibitions are planned with children's questions, interests, and enthusiasms foremost in mind. Gallery talks are offered on their favorite subjects as well as on topics they study in school. Film showings, art entertainments, archaeology lectures seek to present serious aspects of art history in ways that are easily understood, lively, and fun. Activities such as last year's Rag Tapestry Workshop and the ever-popular Studio Hours cater to youngsters who especially enjoy creating with materials. For young people with practical curiosity, a new course, Our Museum: A Key to How It Works, is being given this year, with lecture-discussions, gallery tours, and glimpses behind the scenes. The Junior Museum Library, with its wide-ranging collection of art books on open shelves, provides an inviting place for children to browse as well as to find answers to specific questions.

While our primary concern remains focused on children, developments within the schools and within the Museum move us to join the high school and adult divisions of the Education Department in devoting more time and thought to working with teachers.

In recent years, changes in the school curriculum have resulted in a new emphasis on art appreciation, archaeology, and the humanities. Teachers are turning to us for help in presenting these subjects, for which they often lack both background and experience. The Museum's resources for providing such help are impressive. The collections, covering five thousand years and many cultures, are of course freely available; the significance of these works of art, however, is not self-evident to the uninitiated. Participating in the Museum's program of adult lectures and recorded tours can be helpful. Bringing their students for staff-conducted tours can be helpful. For a small rental fee, teachers may borrow slides for classroom use (the Slide Library contains nearly a quarter of a million slides). The impressive resources of the Museum Library are available to teachers for their own research. Books, pamphlets, post cards, and other reproductions may be purchased at an educational discount from the Art and Book Shop. A wealth of material goes to those teachers of American history who are participating in the program described on pages 205 to 210. An in-service course for New York City teachers has been offered each semester for the last eight years. Still, more specific, more convenient assistance to more teachers is needed.

Concurrently, the pressure on the Museum for gallery guidance for school classes leaps ahead of our capacity to provide it. In spite of the fact that the New York City Board of Education has assigned three teachers to assist our sizable staff, last year we were able to guide only thirty-seven per cent of visiting classes on the elementary and junior high school level, and nineteen per cent on the high school level. Unguided groups tend to mill aimlessly through the building, creating crowded and noisy conditions disturbing to all who are trying to use the galleries seriously. Teachers who know the Museum's collections well are able to plan visits that are quite as skillfully prepared, motivated, and conducted as those offered by our own staff. Such teachers, however, are rare. As an educational service as well as in self-defense, we clearly need to develop materials and techniques to enable many more teachers to guide their own classes effectively.

Some beginnings have been made. The number of in-service courses offered each semester has jumped from one to five. All are open to New York City teachers who may offer them for salary increment credit. Three are led by the teachers assigned to us by the Board of Education: a survey of the collections of the Museum, given in two sections, is taught by Arta T. Mazor and Marian Halperin from four to five-thirty on Tuesdays, and The New Art: From the Ashcan School to the Environmental Structures is taught by Janet Saleh Dickson on Tuesdays from four to five-forty.

In an effort to reach suburban teachers, an eight-session Teachers' Workshop on the Use of the Museum was given by Lois Mendelson on Wednesdays from four-thirty to six during May and June. At least two communities, one in New Jersey and the other in Westchester, gave in-service credit to teachers attending.

These four courses all have in common the fact that they survey the collections in whole or in part through gallery talks or slide lectures, and seek to relate these collections to the school curriculum through discussion and individual projects.

A fifth in-service course, Field Research in the Social
Studies, will introduce the Museum collections in a different way. To be offered for the first time this spring, this workshop course is being taught by Melanie Yaggy of the high school division of the Education Department and by George Calvert, a teacher at Intermediate School 117 in Manhattan, both of whom attended a seminar on the subject at the New York State Historical Association in Cooperstown last summer. Hazel Hertzberg, of Columbia University's Teachers College, who directed the summer seminar, is serving as consultant. By using a camera, making slides, and interviewing with the aid of a tape recorder, each teacher develops his own documentation for a topic of his choice. He also learns to consider the art object as a social and historical document, and to evaluate exhibition content and techniques.

Particularly pleasing, inasmuch as it reaches graduate students in art education, many of whom will become teachers of teachers, is a new course offered this fall by Teachers College in collaboration with the Museum. Taught by Professor William Mahoney and other members of the Teachers College faculty and by the Chairman of the Education Department and curators from the Museum staff, this three-point course, entitled Art Museums as an Educational Resource, is meeting here on Tuesdays from five-ten to six-fifty. The approach was proposed by the Education Department and developed in a series of conferences with Professor Mahoney and others: the students will learn how various departments of the Museum organize objects into exhibitions, and will be encouraged to devise their own ways of using the collections to meet specific classroom needs. They then will test their plans with visiting school groups.

We expect that all of these courses will develop a body of teachers who know how to use the Museum well. However, as there are nearly sixty thousand teachers in the New York City public school system alone, even six courses every semester can never reach them all.

In an attempt to give immediate, specific help, in January the Education Department established a consultation service, suggested and organized by Roberta Paine. Every weekday during the school year (holidays excepted), a member of our professional lecturing staff is available from three to five to help teachers who plan to guide their own classes. A slip announcing the service and urging the teacher to take advantage of it is included with every confirmation of an appointment for a Museum visit. Although the number who have come is so far somewhat disappointing, those who do are enthusiastic, and we hope they will help spread the word.

The Museum lecturers are currently preparing written outlines of suggested tours on the subjects most often requested by teachers, for use in the consultation service as well as independently. Each will be tried out first in mimeographed form and then, when we are satisfied that it works, will be printed. The Visitors' Center will also find these outlines useful in their counseling of individuals as well as unexpected groups.

Looking ahead to the outstanding exhibitions and events now being planned to celebrate the Museum's one-hundredth anniversary, we are certain that our attendance will soar. The materials and techniques we are developing now will be ready in time to help teachers and students take full advantage of the unusual opportunities the centennial year will offer.

Louise Condit

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