Museum Education Assessment: Survey of Practitioners in Florida Art Museums

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MUSEUM EDUCATION ASSESSMENT:
SURVEY OF PRACTITIONERS IN FLORIDA ART MUSEUMS

By

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ABSTRACT

This study identified current attitudes, beliefs, and philosophies guiding practices in art museum education assessment. The evaluation and assessment of educational programming is an increasing concern for museums. Practitioners and researchers have been working for decades on various aspects of evaluating museum programming; however, it is only with recent political, social, and funding pressures that assessment has become a necessity.

After an analysis of current and past research in museum education programming and assessment, a survey was sent out to museum educators in the state of Florida. The survey examined the current state of assessment in each institution and probed practitioners to share their own ideas and influences affecting their involvement with assessment. Results found while many practitioners agreed assessment was needed and valued; time, resources, and funding were often deterrents from creating and implementing an assessment system in their institutions. It was found that there is a need for further development of assessment practices and it is necessary for museums to organize and structure evaluation practices in order to create standards and best practices for assessing education programming.
INTRODUCTION

This study examined assessment practices of museum education programming in Florida art museums, accredited by the American Association of Museums (AAM). Assessment and evaluation come in many forms within any institution. The goal of this study was to examine current beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies affecting the evaluation of programming in art museums. Through an examination of current and past assessment research and a dialogue with current practitioners, this study mapped current assessment research, practices, and issues directing assessment in the art museum. This study described current assessment in the art museum, including influential beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies of practitioners, as well as discovered current theories and developing practices in the field.

Assessment of programming in the museum focuses on aspects of learning and experience (DeVito, 2005; Garoian, 2001; Griffin & Symington, 1998), but ranges in research from visitor studies to institutional analysis (Ames, 1993). According to Hicks (1996), assessment in art museums has lagged behind other institutions because of additional complexities in the relationship of aesthetic development in learning and experience. To date, many researchers have called for an increase in assessment (Wetterlund & Sayre, 2003; Williams, 1996), both theoretical (Sheppard, 2000; Shettel, 2001) and practical (Martin, 2004; Miles, 1993). With a gap between need and practice, an examination of current philosophies and practices can discover solutions for organizing and evaluating assessment practices for the future.

Museums are an integrated part of culture and society: as society changes, so do museums. In the last few decades, all museums have undergone fundamental changes in administration and organization (Emery, 2001; Freedman, 2000; Mathewson, 2003), from the types of collections (Freedman) to the characteristics of visitors (Hennes, 2002). Museums are now brokers of information and experience, not just collectors of objects (Cohen, 1998). With a growing emphasis on information, museum education has been a primary focus for transformation. Over the past several decades, there has been a growth, not just in the size of museum education, but also in the scope as well (AAM, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 2003a). Education departments in museums are building diverse programs to meet the needs of an even more diverse audience, in response to the social changes of moving from an industrial age into the information age. Museums are changing their fundamental theories and structures based on social, cultural, and political pressures (Cohen, 1998; Emery; Freedman; Hein, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 2003a, 2003b; Mayer, 1998; Schmertz, 1998). According to Code of Ethics for Museums presented by AAM in 2000,

Museum collections and exhibitions materials represent the world’s natural and cultural common wealth. As stewards of that wealth, museums are compelled to advance an understanding of all natural forms and of the human experience. It is incumbent on museums to be resources for humankind and in all their activities to foster an informed appreciation of the rich and diverse world we have inherited. (p. 5)

While museum education had evolved into a prominent position several decades prior, this statement cemented the priorities of museum education and the importance of the museum’s mission to focus on education and enlightenment.

Even though museums are now responding to the information age, the conceptual age is already in transit. The conceptual age, according to Jarche (2006), is about creativity and empathy. Many researchers who first coined the term conceptual age, like Pink (2005), have
developed the metaphor of left and right brain comparison to explain the shift in thinking between the information and conceptual ages. The left side of the brain, traditionally revered as the dominant information side, has been replaced by the right side of the brain that controls creativity and empathy. This shift in philosophy brings a focus to artistic and creative endeavors. With a new focus on creativity, the need for a paradigm shift in education is on the horizon (Pink 2005, 2007). The museum as a place of informal and free-choice learning (Falk & Dierking, 2000, 2002b) has a flexibility in the approach to education and learning. The flexibility in museum education has already adapted to meeting the needs of a diverse audience, but researchers and practitioners have called for an expansion in theory, practice, and accountability (AAM, 2005; Cohen, 1998; Emery, 2001; Freedman, 2000; Hein, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 2003a, 2003b; Mayer, 1998; Schmertz, 1998).

According to Beal (2005) “we have an 18th-century form of government depending upon a 19th-century industrial model school system to supply a 21st-century electorate capable of making monumental decisions we will face in the coming years” (p. 3). This statement, while directed at public school administration, is reflective of museum administration as well. The museum is under pressure from external government and funding agencies, as well as internal practitioners and researchers promoting change and professional standards (AAM, 2005; Cohen, 1998; Emery, 2001; Freedman, 2000; Hein, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 2003a, 2003b; Mayer, 1998; Schmertz, 1998). Throughout history, the museum has evolved from curiosity cabinet (Impey & MacGregor, 2001) to storehouse of objects (Arnold, 2006) to educational institution (Hooper-Greenhill, 2003a). Yet, even with the changing philosophies guiding museum focus, the administration remains fundamentally unchanged. There have been some shifts to emphasize education. This includes the development of separate education departments that had an equalizing affect in the relationship between curator and educator. Traditionally, curators organized and structured museums according to their own perspective; in other words, they focused on the object. The educator, on the other hand, in theory, focused on the audience looking at the object (Mathewson, 2003; Mayer 1998). Even with the greater emphasis on education, practice and principles guiding activities, museums remain rooted in curatorial philosophy. Curatorial philosophy focuses on the collection and preservation of objects (Mayer). This guides the path of education and programming to center around the objects, while trends in education focus on the individual and visitors. The museum faces a new challenge of balancing its foundation in the object, while responding to the audience’s individual needs. The museum is in a position to make greater advancements in administrative structure and education to respond to the growing needs of the conceptual age.

The art museum presents fertile ground for the transformation into the conceptual age, because of the nature of the collections. Art in itself is considered a conceptual age commodity (Pink 2005), whether it is the appreciation of art or the creation of art. In order to meet the needs of a changing society, the art museum needs to examine its own practices. Evolution in the structure and purpose of a museum has brought forth many new needs. Of particular interest are museum education programs. If a museum is a place of education and learning (Falk & Dierking, 2002a; Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999), then, how does the education and learning in the museum function? Accountability is one of the prominent needs for museums to examine how effective education and learning are in museum settings (Falk, 2000; Garoian, 2001; Loomis, 1987). Museums are under scrutiny to document the effectiveness of their changing roles in society; namely the impact of museum education and learning (Cohen, 1998; Emery, 2001; Griffin & Symington, 1998). Assessment and evaluation provide the opportunity to satisfy public
demands of accountability and give significant reports on the progress and effectiveness of a
program (Hicks, 1996).

Statement of the Problem

In the changing climate of museums and education, assessment is a necessity (Miles,
1993; Sheppard, 2000). Yet, assessment practices in museum education are not developing
equivalently to the growth of educational programming (Hicks, 1996). As museum education
develops, there is a need to document current practices and record the progression of assessment
from principle to research to practice (Martin, 2004). Hicks reported a decade ago, that there
were no standards or guides for museum assessment. While there are many researchers working
on ways to develop best practices in museum assessment there are still currently no professional
standards in museum education assessment (Gorman, 2007a). There is also no cohesive guide for
how or what to assess when evaluating programming. With no comprehensive plan or guide for
how or what to assess, practitioners are presented with a hardship on how to effectively and
efficiently implement assessment plans for educational programming (Martin, 2004).

Many issues surround why assessment has lagged behind in the museum field, but
primarily the very nature of museum education with a diverse audience and assorted practices
presents a problem in creating a universal strategy (Hicks, 1996). The combination of theories in
museum administration, education, and learning has created a complexity in how to assess a
program. The art museum has an added complexity of aesthetic development theory (Ebitz,
2006, 2007; Hicks, 1996), causing delays in the development of art museum education
assessment (Falk, 2000). Assessment in art museum programs is elusive, creating the need to
focus on current practices in art museum education assessment, to fill the void of information
about the benefit of art museum education programs (Ames, 1993).

Research Questions

The basis of this study is in the primary research question: what is the current state of
assessment in Florida art museum education departments? There are several underlying
questions involved in examining the current state of assessment, including issues in research,
education, learning, and aesthetics. In addition, the following questions supplement the primary
research question:

1. What is assessment in museum education? What are museum education practitioners
   assessing? What activities are current in the field of museum education under the pretext of
   assessment?
2. What views and attitudes do museum education practitioners have about assessment? How
does this influence assessment practices in each institution?
3. How can results be organized and synthesized to provide standards and recommendations
   for future assessment practices in art museums?

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the current state of assessment in art museum
education and to uncover current practices, beliefs, and ideas influencing assessment in
education departments of accredited Florida art museums.

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Define the meanings and functions of assessment in the museums, through examination of
current research in the field and an analysis of current practices.
2. Investigate current beliefs and attitudes practitioners have about assessment in museum
   education programs and analyze how this affects assessment in their institutions.
3. Report results to provide ideas for best practices and future research in art museum education program assessment.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework is to provide the researcher a foundation for inquiry. In this study, the framework used determined elements of museum education proposed by researchers for best practices in museum education and assessment. This included accountability practices, current assessment theory in education, and current understandings of museum programming.

**Accountability, then assessment**

What is assessed, or rather what is the museum accountable for? This is the first question of many in assessment in the museum: what are the current responsibilities of museums. AAM responded to several of their own reports by issuing a final version titled, *Museum Education: Principles and Standards* (2005). In total, AAM reported on 10 recommendations for best practices in areas of accessibility, accountability, and advocacy. This study focused on four areas of accountability. This presents the first part of the framework for this study: what are the responsibilities of museum education departments. First, museums must exhibit quality in content knowledge of their collections including research and scholarly pursuits. Second, museums must apply learning theories and educational research into practices. Third, educational practices should use varied techniques and tools as appropriate for different audiences to promote learning. Finally, fourth in accountability, is also a key area AAM called for direct assessment by evaluating educational tools.

In theory, AAM, being the accrediting body, uses these responsibilities as criteria in the accreditation process; therefore, each museum should be striving to accomplish these goals. The extent to which museums respond to each of these responsibilities, however, is unique to each museum, as each museum has a different philosophy and guiding administrative structure.

**Assessment Theory**

In order to understand what is possible in museum assessment, assessment theory needs examination. Since there are no current standards for museum education assessment, the framework of this study uses educational assessment theory, in order to get a complete picture of what assessment might be in the museum. The following principles are from a culmination of assessment philosophies in several fields of education and programming (Angelo, 1999; Astin, 2003; Burrough, 2003; Cunningham, 2004; Gorman 2007a; Linn, 2001; Luke & Adams, 2007; Schulman, 2007; Scriven, 1999).

1. Assessment begins with values, attitudes, and beliefs. In other words, the underlying philosophies of the organization will guide assessment practices. For example, understanding core values of education and learning directs a department on how to create and implement programming. This same understanding of education and learning guides assessment practices (Astin, 2003).

2. Assessment is a tool kit of instruments, techniques, and strategies for how to evaluate something in a context. It is the visitor studies, observations, and processes of how to collect and find information pertaining to questions asked (Linn, 2001; Schulman, 2007; Scriven, 1999).

3. Assessment measures institutional goals and objectives and compares mission with outcome. Assessment works best when a program has clearly stated goals. When a goal is not established from the beginning, assessing the program to determine the guiding theme in a program can help identify goals and objectives to correlate with the museum mission.
There is an understanding in museums that activities and programs should support the institution’s mission (Cunningham, 2004; Ehrmann, 1998).

4. Assessment is most affective when it is ongoing versus intermittent. Assessment should be an integrated part of the learning process, not just a result. Ongoing assessment evaluates throughout a program, not just the final stages (Burrough, 2003).

5. Assessment measures outcomes, but puts similar consideration on the process leading to assessment. (Burrough, 2003).

6. Assessment uses multiple methods. There is no standard or individual test in assessment. The methods and processes of assessment take consideration of context and purpose. Each study seeks diverse results, as each study has a different context and purpose (Schulman, 2007; Scriven, 1999).

7. Assessment leads to improvement of programs and services. One purpose of assessment is to ensure a program is working and repair what is not working, to promote positive change in the larger framework of an institution (Astin, 2003).

8. Assessment affects each department and employee. While only a handful of people may actually perform assessment, a ripple effect reaches each person and department in the organization. Getting all staff involved in the assessment practice also helps create effective assessment and encourages communication (Cunningham, 2004).

9. Assessment demonstrates results and meets accountability demands. The data collected from assessment projects substantiate how a program is functioning and gave evidence to outside or interested parties (Astin, 2003; Linn, 2001; Schulman, 2007).

This study used the first two principles to guide inquiry. The first principle indicated the influence of philosophies on assessment practices. This study established the underlying beliefs of an institution in order to understand the assessment practices. The second principles demonstrated that assessment is a product. This study examined the current trends in assessment tools.

**Museum Experience and Context**

Museums, while widely accepted as places of learning (Falk 1999), are first places of experience. There are three contexts influencing the museum experience: the physical, the personal, and the sociocultural. These contexts are a culmination of Falk and Dierking’s (1992, 2002a) work on the Interactive Experience Model. Each context is an area of influence affecting the overall experience an individual has in the museum. It is the fluctuating combination of these contexts that creates an understanding of how the visitor is affected before, during, and after the museum visit. This area of research is vital to the framework of this study as it identifies the influences in an educational experience in the museum. The Venn diagram shows the relationship of the contexts in the museum experience, known as the Contextual Model as seen in figure 1.
Figure 1. Contextual model by Falk & Dierking (2002a) (p. 5)

The combinations of these elements explain the dynamics of the visitor experience (Falk & Dierking, 1992, 2002a; Falk & Storksdieck, 2005), but each context retains individual characteristics. A review of each context individually is needed to understand the relationships among them. In the contextual model, Falk and Dierking (2002a) present several additional aspects of each context. Each context and the combinations of these contexts in turn affect the impact on the visitor’s learning and experience in the museum (Falk & Storksdieck).

Physical context. The physical aspects of the museum influence the overall experience of the individual. This includes the design of the museum, lighting, display, temperature, and exhibition layout. Even simple amenities like restroom location and access can have a profound impact on the visitor’s experience. Falk and Dierking (2002a) also discussed having adequate seating and eating areas as a needed place for study in the physical context. In addition, the physical context examines the accessibility or location of a museum, including parking and transportation issues. All of these factors will influence the mood and receptiveness of the individual, even prior to entering the museum.

Other aspects of the physical environment are labels, wall text, and the aesthetics of the museum, like the color of the wall. The wall text has two aspects to it--the actual content and the aesthetics of it. The way the text appears next to the objects and the readability of it are just as important as the content (McManus, 1989, 1993). The content of the labels needs to be understandable to a wide range of people all with different experiences. There is a balance between too little and too much information. When done incorrectly, this can be confusing or condescending to the viewer (McManus, 1989, 1993).

The final aspect to the physical context is the time after the museum. The events and experiences outside of the museum support the events that happened within the museum. These after events strengthen and reinforce the affects of the museum, long after the visitor has left an exhibition.

Personal context. The personal context is the most variable. Each person who visits a museum is unique. First, everyone is starting with a different understanding or knowledge. Falk and Dierking (2002a) refer to this as prior knowledge, attitudes, and experience. This comes from the individuals’ experience, education, and exposure to different materials and events. The individuals have a specific knowledge foundation based on they own understanding.
Second, everyone has a different perspective. The combination of the knowledge, attitudes, and experience shapes the perspective of the individual. The perspective, as Falk and Dierking (2002a) stated, is like a flashlight that focuses light on only a small area at a time. This is similar to the interests people have. People see what they want to see; the rest of the area is irrelevant (or darkened, without the flashlight) at any one time, similar to a flashlight beam. Only that illuminated by the flashlight is relevant to the person. Their unique perspective, or automated filter, will drive them to discover certain things and participate in certain activities.

Third, each person has his or her own agenda or motivation. This is what brings the person to the museum. Falk, Moussouri, and Coulson (1998) identified six categories of visitor motivations affecting the museum experience. These motivations are place (leisure or recreational), education (purpose of learning), life cycle (time in life), social event (occasion), entertainment (source of fun and enjoyment) and practical issues (weather, proximity). Each motivation will influence the agenda of the individuals, and direct the museum experience. The expectations of a visitor closely link to the motivation for attending the museum.

Social context. The social context is the social aspects that influence the person’s experience. Social context includes whom the person comes to the museum with and whom the person interacts with while at the museum. Whom the person comes with will significantly influence how that person experiences the museum and even change his or her perspective and motivation. Falk and Dierking (2002a) divided the social context into the group a visitor comes with and the influence of the surrounding social context. According to Falk and Dierking’s review of the social context, the experience of a museum differs greatly whether the individual is alone or in a group. What type of group also affects the group dynamic, whether it is family, friends, or classmates. The size of the group is also a factor. The social context can lead the visitor in directions that he or she might not have chosen for himself or herself. This affects the experience both positively and negatively.

The social aspects of the museum also factor the interaction of the individual with the museum personnel and other visitors. Museum personnel have a direct affect on the experience when they interact with the visitor. For example, if the guards of a museum were creating an uncomfortable atmosphere because they were too overbearing, this could affect the visitor’s behavior and experience. How the docents interact with visitors also affects the experience. Visitors also have an effect on other visitors. Koran’s (1972) study on using modeling to influence visitor behavior was used by Falk and Dierking (2002a) to illustrate the influence that people have on each other. The study placed an interactive exhibit in the middle of a traditional exhibition. Studies showed that people did not participate in the hands-on portion until it was modeled, and they saw others participating. Visitors watch other visitors for cues on how to behave. In the same vein, other visitors contribute to the atmosphere of the museum space.

Between the physical, social and personal. The relationship between the contexts is where Falk and Dierking (2002a) stress the importance of understanding the museum experience. While each context may be examined individually, it is in examining the relationship among the components that the understanding of the experience will emerge. For example, the social context greatly influences the visitor motivation and agenda in the personal context. A couple going to the museum with their children will have a much different experience than going with a small group of friends or with a large group of adults. The play between the social group and the individual is part of the personal motivation for being there, which often determines the physical path taken by the individual. An individual can move about the museum freely, but when part of a larger social group the individual is pulled to parts of the museum he or she might not have
visited. This can be positive or negative, but the importance is in recognizing that there is an effect in the individual museum experience (Falk & Dierking 2000, 2002a, 2002b).

The visitor’s personal expectations and the physical reality of the museum is another example of the relationship. If an individual has a certain notion of what a museum experience should look like, or should be, and he or she finds something different or odd, this can affect the entire experience.

The contextual model as framework. While the contextual model explains the complexities of a museum visitor’s experience, it is not a complete framework for research and assessment. It begins to answer what influences the experience, and how the experience functions in a museum, but it does not have any indication of what is assessed. Learning is the other discrepancy in the model. If an assessment is for museum education programs, learning and experience are both factors. The contextual model discusses the influences of the experience, but does not reflect on the impact of learning. The contextual model was incorporated into the framework of this research to provide a basic understanding of the museum experience and as a way to organize influencing factors on museum education programs and audiences.

Supporting Framework

The combination of education assessment practices, museum experience, and current practices created the overall framework for this study. Museum education assessment only exists with the combination of museum (practices), education (experience), and assessment (theory). This created a starting point for how to approach practitioners to determine what the current practices in museum assessment were. In order to ask practitioners about current practices of assessment it is essential to understand what the field considers best practices in education programming before asking about assessment practices of programming.

Significance of the Study

The field of art museum education is in a state of growth and transition (Cohen, 1998; Emery, 2001, Freedman, 2000). These developments create a need for expanded research across the field, including illumination on assessment and evaluation (Falk, 2000; Falk & Storksdeick, 2005). The significance of the study is to bring understanding to the current state of art museum education assessment.

Even though museum research is growing, research in the art museum is not expanding as rapidly (Griffin & Symington, 1998; Hicks, 1996). Research in the art museum is more elusive because of the nature of learning from art. Education in the art museum is not just about learning facts but also about gaining an appreciation and better understanding. Appreciation is more difficult to measure, for example, than the factual learning in science museums (Falk & Dierking, 2002a; Hein, 1998). How educators respond to museum learning and the additional complexities in the art museum create anomalies in the assessment of art museum education programming. This offers an opportunity to report on factors influencing art museum education. This study provided the field with a better understanding of how the beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies of museum educators guide assessment practices. There is currently no consensus of assessment theories, standards, or practices for evaluating art museum education. This study synthesized current research and practice to help guide recommendations for future and best practice.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is assessment of art museum education in Florida art museums, incorporating examination of research, programs, and personnel. Assessment is a broad term to encompass components used in research or practice to measure, gauge, or evaluate art museum
education. Practitioners from all levels within education departments reported on their beliefs and philosophies guiding their current involvement with assessment in their institutions.

Assumptions of the Study

Based on a preliminary examination of current museum research, this study makes three assumptions. First, there is no pattern in the research to indicate a cohesive dialog of assessment emerging. This indicates a lack of structure or framework to organize museum assessment research. This is not a critique on individual research, but a generalization of the field as a whole. With no comprehensive framework, it is hard to place current research trends in a useable order for practitioners. Second, this study assumes that there is a gap between research and practice. Practitioners may not be informed or may not have access to research in the field of assessment. Third, this study also assumed that practitioners, while informed, may not have the resources to be actively engaged in assessment activities due to a lack of resources within their institution, depending on collections, size, budget, and other institutional factors.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study arise from the assumptions. First, the lack of accepted framework creates limitations in the structure of inquiries. There is not a standard vernacular of assessment within the museum field. This results in additional attention needed in the framing of inquiries, to allow flexibility in how practitioners respond. Second, practitioners not informed on assessment practices or engaged in assessment activities is possible. While this is a concern for the current state of assessment in the museum, it does add to the results of the study, and it limits the researcher’s ability to compare and cross analyze responses between practitioners.

Definition of Terms

Accredited museum. There are two organizations that govern museums, the American Association of Museums (AAM) and International Council of Museums (ICOM). These two organizations offer standards for what a museum is as well as granting accreditation. A museum that adheres to these standards is awarded accreditation by AAM and is considered an accredited museum.

Assessment. An examination or evaluation of effectiveness; any gauge, measure, or observation.

Educational programming. Any activity or program that a museum staff develops, to enhance museum exhibitions or engage the community or its members. Programming includes materials produced and planned activities.

Museum Staff. Any person paid or unpaid who works in the museum during operations or functions.

Museum Visitor. Any person not working or volunteering at a museum, who visits a museum to experience an exhibition or programming; also referred to as a patron or viewer.

Practitioner. Any museum staff engaged in educational practices in the institution. For this study, practitioner refers to those specifically working in education departments or with educational programming. A practitioner can be a museum staff member, consultant, or volunteer. A practitioner may be paid or unpaid.

Program Assessment. An evaluation of a specific program or aspect of a program

Chapter Summary

One of the main concerns in assessing museum education is the confusion among education, learning, and experience. Researchers like Falk & Dierking (2000) recognized the importance of the experience on learning, but there is still a discrepancy in what research and evaluation are trying to accomplish. In this study, education refers to the efforts of the museum
staff to accommodate museum visitors with additional information to enhance or complement an exhibition. This includes the actual materials the department creates, but also the actions they take. Current trends in museum education are no longer restricted to lesson plans and school groups. Museum educators are now responsible for creating and implementing programming and tools that respond to a wide variety of backgrounds and interests. The role of education in the museum is not just to teach, but to enhance the visit. This has forced museum educators to look at learning and experience, both separately and simultaneously (Hooper-Greenhill, 2003a).

Since there is little precedence in research assessment in the museum, there is a need to examine and organize current research and practices. The emerging distinctions among education, experience, and learning prove to be a challenge when developing assessment and evaluation programs. In the art museum, this is further complicated by the incorporation of aesthetics and philosophies of art. The nature of aesthetics is fluid; it evolves with culture and redefines art, the purpose of art, and the understanding of art (Koroscik, 1996). If the definitions and understandings of the art objects are not concrete, assessment has a need to be flexible as well. This study aims to clarify the current state of art museum education assessment research and practice, in order to gain a better understanding of the needs of museum educators when creating an assessment plan. The beliefs, attitudes and philosophies of the individual affect assessment practices in evaluation, this study maps out the ideas practitioners have about assessment, as well as examining current practices.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Education in the museum continues to be a growing interest in literature and research. This chapter examines major publications that have brought prominence to museum education over the last three decades. In addition, assessment and evaluation research and practices are examined. There are four main sections in this review. The introductory section focuses on a historical review of how museum education has developed in the museum field. The second section reviews historical research and evaluation in the field, as well as influences leading to current evaluation practices. The third section examines the complex difference in experience and learning in museum education, and the discrepancy between museum experience and museum learning is at the core of understanding what is evaluated in assessment practices. Finally, the last section focuses on evaluation trends and assessment practices in other fields to investigate relevant information applicable to the museum field. The focus of this study examines the current practices of assessment in the museum, but the literature review focuses on the educational aspects of a museum to create a basic understanding of what is potentially measured in museum assessment.

Development of Education in the Museum

Museums have always had educational elements (Falk, 2004; Hein, 2005), but it is only in the past few decades that the field has seen a growing interest in the museum as an educational institution. The origins of museums can be traced back to antiquity (Arnold, 2006; Impey & MacGregor 2001), but the modern museum has roots in the cabinets of curiosity dating back to the 16th century. Historians like Impey and MacGregor have traced the origins of a museum to these collections. Traditionally the wealthy members of a society would maintain large collections of objects that piqued their interest. This created a wide range of collections that would come to be modern museums. Some early collectors would exhibit their collections in private venues and occasionally to the public for special events, but most of the collections did not become public until a bequest to a university or government. Buildings, warehouses, and separate rooms were utilized to house collections that would be the predecessors of modern museums. Formal museums developed throughout the 18th and 19th century embracing an administration centered on collection and preservation of objects (Arnold; Impey & MacGregor).

The philosophy of a museum as an object warehouse continued throughout the 19th century. Even though museums were primarily developed as storage and conservation, scholars used them for education. Scholars noted the importance of object-centered learning (Paris, 2002; Rice & Yenawine, 2002), and the benefits gained from examining the authentic object over learning from books and other sources (Paris). Scholarship in the museum continued to develop over the changing century, as more universities acquired collections, and public collections grew.

Over the course of the industrial revolution, the middle class grew, and leisure time entered the mainstream vernacular. Museums soon responded to the new demands by opening their doors wider to the public. While scholars continued to use the museum for learning and research, the public did not have the same agenda. Rather than education and learning, the public looked for entertainment and enjoyment. The museums remained a cabinet of wonder, a place to look for the curious, rather than a place of learning (Impey & MacGregor, 2001).

It is only in the throes of the information age that a major transformation in thinking proposed the museum as an educational institution. The information age arguably (Warlick, 2005) started in the middle of the 20th century and continued until the end of the millennium. The age brought new light into the need for information and new attention into who holds the information. Museums were no longer keepers of just objects; they were keepers of knowledge.
(Hooper-Greenhill, 1999; Mathewson, 2003). This shift sent museum professionals stumbling into new territories of education. Up until this point, education was primarily self-studying scholars. Now museums had a new responsibility in making information available, as well as presenting information. The museum was becoming an educator (Allen, 2004; Anderson, Lucas & Ginns, 2003). This transition from educational to educator rapidly progressed in the later part of the century with several key documents exploring the educational potential of museums.

_Museums for a New Century_. In 1984, museum leaders commissioned a report to analyze the condition of museums and make recommendations for the future. The report became known as _Museums for a New Century_ (AAM, 1984). The commission proposed seven areas for museums to focus on for the future. Many observations made about the museum’s organizational structure and governance called for a revolution in how museums operate. One of the most important observations concerning education was that museums had not fully explored the possibility of museum as educator. Along with a direct need for education, the commission made two other observations that influence education programming. First, museums contribute to the human experience. In addition to the educational benefits and learning potential of a museum, it is first an experience. Up until this point, these experiences had never been analyzed or illustrated to gauge the full impact of a museum visit. This led to a new research focus on, museum as experience, as seen in the work by Falk and Dierking (2002a) discussed later in this chapter. Second, museums are part of a community. The report revealed shortcomings of a museum when addressing community diversity and found that museum audiences were not representative of the population area. This led to a new wave of programming, in the museum, to address the needs and desires of the community it served.

_Excellence and Equity_. As the millennium approached, AAM responded to past reports like _Museums for a New Century_ (1984) and commissioned the Task Force on Museum Education (1991) to write _Excellence and Equity_. Written in 1992, this new report addressed issues in education first identified in 1984. This report highlighted the museum as an educational institution by examining the museum’s contributions made to educational needs. Unlike the general observations in the first report, _Excellence and Equity_ made specific recommendations on how to fulfill the mission of education while providing for the public. The report has become the guiding philosophy of museum education supported by AAM. During this period, research in museum education practices also developed. Practitioners and researchers responded to meet the needs of museum as educator by creating new programs and experimenting in new research areas.

_Museum Education: Principles and Standards_. The latest report from AAM, _Museum Education: Principles and Standards_ (2002), revisited _Excellence and Equity_ in order to simplify best practices specific to museum education. The report suggested 10 principles encompassing topics such as accessibility, accountability, and advocacy. Accessibility points focused on the community, visiting audience, and the museum’s need to address diversity and multiple perspectives on interpretation, presentation, and social issues. Accountability addressed the professional responsibility of a museum to maintain standards of research and academic knowledge of collections and educational theory, to appropriately present information to the community. Advocacy points addressed promotion of education, and a commitment to meeting the educational needs of all audiences.

The three texts; _Museums for a New Century, Excellence and Equity, and Museum Education_, all commissioned and reported by AAM, a primary governing body of museum
governance, demonstrate the evolution and growing importance of education within the institution of museums.

Current state of museum education. There are many articles addressing current issues in museum education, namely multiculturalism and globalization. As society changes the museum is also in need of change. The new focus on the visitor (Cohen, 1998; Doering, 1999; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999) has created a quandary in the museum. On one hand, the object is central to the museum (Paris, 2002; Rice & Yenawine, 2002), but now the visitor’s needs are equal, if not more important. This area becomes an issue because museums are still organized according to the Nineteenth-century model of object-centered administration (Martin, 2004; Warlick, 2005). There is now a greater need for community outreach and consideration of the entire public. This is partially in response to the museum’s need for public funding. The traditional elite museum was able to stay open to the privileged because of private funding. Now, however, the museum has a responsibility to benefit the community, as the community is supporting the museum through public funds and contributions (Cohen, 1998; Sheppard, 2000; Weil, 1997, Williamson, 2007). Museums offer a wide variety of programming under the guise of education in order to fulfill community commitments and expectations.

Wetterlund and Sayre (2003) conducted a survey of art museums. The researchers collected data from 85 museums, to record information about museum education programming. They identified seven areas in education programs:

1. Tour Programs – Public tours, special exhibition tours, group tours, self-guided tours, audio tours, docent-guided tours, school tours, themed tours.
2. Informal Gallery Learning Programs – Activity areas, learning resources, films, videos or other technology centers inside museums to expand educational opportunities in an exhibition or gallery.
3. Community, Adult and Family Programs – Evening events, lectures, family programs, community festivals, socializing opportunities, and artist residencies.
4. Classes and other Public Programs – Classes, workshops, summer programs, lectures, films, performances.
5. Partnerships with other Organizations – Partnerships with cities, museums, universities, schools.
6. School Programs – Pre- and post- materials for teachers, classroom materials, trunks, outreach programs linked to school curriculum and school conferencing.
7. Online Educational Programming – Websites, education programming information, online activities, online lessons, and collection access online.

These seven areas represent the developments in education to date. There is a potential for each museum to have active programming in each area; however, most museums do not engage each area of programming equally. There are many factors in the focus of museum education programming including administrative philosophy, collection, community needs, and resources. This in turn influences the potential in research and assessment activities of each museum. The reforms in museum education and programming have lead to a need to change the methods of evaluation and assessment of museums. Museums now have to prove the qualitative value and impact of their institutions to the community with greater depth and vigor (Hicks, 1996; Martin, 2004).
Referring back to *Museums for a New Century*, along with the call for education and community initiatives, there was not enough data about the museum. Early research in the beginnings of museum evaluation was to create a profile of the museum. Since the report, there has been an increase of museum research, covering everything from economic impact to visitor satisfaction surveys (Ellenbogen, Luke, & Dierking, 2004; Hudson, 1993). While profiling museums and museum visitors hit a high, evaluation of programming and learning assessment was still in its infancy, partially because education and programming in the museum was still in its infancy (Allen, 2004). Some would still argue museums have not tapped their potential as educational institutions. There is a tremendous variance in museum education practices (Allen; Buffington, 2007; Chang, 2006; Mayer 2007). With this variance comes a great diversity in current research, as well as the potential for future research.

**History of evaluation in the museum.** Over the past few years, assessment of museums has become a concern, as indicated in the rising number of studies in research. This is because of a paradigm shift within the museum world. Museums are now responding to the public on how to make objects more accessible to the community. The evaluation efforts in the museum are commonly prompted by the need to justify existence. The justification closely linked to funding, is determined by political climate (Hicks, 1996). Starting in the 1970s, museums began visitor studies that reported satisfaction levels and attendance counts. During that time, this was the necessary information needed by governing officials to satisfy reporting and justification. Like the contemporary business model, the success of a museum was based on the quantity of people it served (Hudson, 1993). As educational programs grew, evaluation efforts remained the same. The climate changed over the course of the 1990s when museum professionals began to question their own field (Ames, 1993; Hicks; Loomis, 1987; Rice, 1995). This occurred for several reasons: a developing interest in professionalization of the field, pressures from society, and a growing need for greater accountability (Ames, 1993; Dierking & Pollock, 1998; Martin, 2004).

**Evaluation versus research.** With the explosion of many studies in the museum, there became a need for a greater level of organization and structure to classify these studies. Miles (1993) made a distinction in characterizing the difference between research and evaluation. Both use similar techniques in acquiring data. According to Miles, the key differences are in the purpose and the approach. Research is rigorous efforts to develop generalizations, whereas evaluation is pragmatic work to make judgments. In reviewing museum assessment literature, the distinction is a consideration. Table 1 is Miles’ comparison between research and evaluation.
Table 1
Comparison of evaluation and research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aim is to gauge how well something works</td>
<td>Aim is to explore empirical generalizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit of study is an exhibition or part of an</td>
<td>about visitors and exhibits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exhibition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May use less formal methods</td>
<td>Requires rigorous methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt is made to take all variables into</td>
<td>Attempt is made to control some variables and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>account</td>
<td>neutralize others by randomization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often qualitative</td>
<td>May involve formal analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be quick and inexpensive</td>
<td>Is generally time-consuming and expensive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Grasping the Greased Pig, p. 33

A distinction between evaluation and research is an initial step in organizing and structuring evaluation efforts. While progressions in the idea of research and evaluation continue to develop, the notion of what is being assessed remains an issue.

Differences in Education, Learning, and Experience

Experience and learning. One of the first complexities in museum education is the relationship between learning and experience. In the museum, learning is not restricted to attaining factual knowledge. Museum learning encompasses a broader conception of learning, because of the flexibility in how learning takes place. Falk and Dierking are currently researching many aspects of free-choice learning in the Institute for Learning Innovation (ILI). Both are science educators who have worked extensively with each other and others on many aspects of free-choice learning and museum learning. According to ILI (2006), free-choice learning is learning that is guided by the individual’s choices that originate from their personal preferences, knowledge, and experience. It is a fundamental part of life-long learning. Much of Falk and Dierking’s (1992, 2000, 2002a, 2002b) research is based in the museum, because the museum is a place that encourages free-choice and life-long learning (Dierking, 1992, 2005; Direking, Falk, & Ellenboben, 2005; Dierking & Pollock, 1998; Dierking, Falk, Holland, Fisher & Wilke, 1997; Falk, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2004; Falk & Adelman, 2003; Falk & Dierking, 1992, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Falk, Dierking & Rennie, 2005; Falk, et al., 1998; Falk, Scott & Dierking, 2004; Falk & Storksdiek, 2005).

Learning in the museum. Kelly (2000) has identified 10 themes of learning from a meta-analysis of learning research in informal contexts. Learning is “…a social activity… a sensory experience… facilitated by real stuff… an active process… connecting with prior knowledge… new information… immediate… changing your point of view… long-term…and individual” (p. 4). These identified themes have an impact on the overall museum experience, to each affecting learning. Informal learning and more specifically museum learning is not rooted in any one strong theoretical framework. There is, however, a multitude of theories contributing to the concept of museum learning (Ebitz, 2006, 2007). Museum learning theories have evolved with traditional learning theories. Many researchers and theorists have proposed learning theories in the museum. (Anderson et al., 2003; Falk & Dierking, 1992, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Garoian, 2001;

Table 2

*Theories in Museum Education presented by David Ebitz, NAEA National Conference 2006.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Center of theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object-Based Learning</td>
<td>Schlereth and others</td>
<td>Object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline Based Art Education</td>
<td>Getty</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Literacy</td>
<td>Stapp and others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Styles</td>
<td>Kolb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of Multiple Intelligences</td>
<td>Gardner</td>
<td>Learning and the psychology of the individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flow and Aesthetic Experience</td>
<td>Csikszentmihalyi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Thinking Strategies</td>
<td>Housen and Yenawine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum and Community</td>
<td>Karp and others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum as Communication</td>
<td>Hooper-Greenhill and others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum as Ritual</td>
<td>Duncan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum as Meaning-making</td>
<td>Silverman</td>
<td>Individual meaning-making and society in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum as Narrative</td>
<td>Roberts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Museum</td>
<td>Hooper-Greenhill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Theory of Learning</td>
<td>Hein</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Model of Learning</td>
<td>Falk &amp; Dierking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Culture Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The classification of these learning theories is based on the central idea of the theory. The development of the four centers has progressed along a sequential timeline as new ideas about informal learning have developed. First, object-centered learning is the root of museum education theory. From the beginnings of the museum as cabinets of curiosity, the object has been a focus for scholars and researchers to learn from (Paris, 2002; Rice & Yenawine, 2002). Second, discipline-based learning is the focus on the subject as central to the learners’ understanding (Anderson et al., 2003). Third, the development of individual learning styles paralleled the growth of similar learning theories in the museum (Rice & Yenawine, 2002; Williams, 1996). Fourth, individual meaning-making and context are current trends in museum learning, as researchers have taken the ideas of individual learning theories and incorporated surrounding influences on experience and context (Falk & Dierking, 1992, 2002a).

**Learning versus the visitor.** Along with theories about learning, the learner, or in the case of the museum, the visitor is being studied. Lambert (2001) identified four models of contemporary learners: the collaborator, the free agent, the wise analyzer, and the creative synthesizer. The collaborator is one who depends on social settings and networks for learning. The free agent seeks learning opportunities in a pursuit of knowledge and life-long learning.
The wise analyzer is reflective and critical in gathering information to apply to a new setting. The creative synthesizer has new ways of seeing and finds learning in a nonlinear fashion. Lambert illustrated the changing nature of learning from the traditional teacher center to student-centered learning. While the context of the article was in higher education, the four models of learners can all be accommodated in the museum settings.

One of the key components to the examination of museum education is the visitor. Mayer (2005) re-examined the place of the visitor in the museum. The evolution of museum philosophy has prompted an examination of not just the educational value of the museum, but the museum’s impact on the visitor to include learning. The visitor can learn in the museum, but it is also about the experience the visitor has in the museum. While the museum is inherently educational, Falk (2000) stated there are also many aspects to the museum experience that go deeper than traditional learning. Hennes (2002) also highlighted the discrepancies between the museum and the viewer. Often museums are focused on the taxonomy and interpretation of an object so closely that they lose sight of the viewer’s expectations and desires. Hennes called for a closer relation to museum learning and museum experience by connecting the visitor’s activities with museum education practices.

Complexities in art museums. The art museum is more complex than other institutions, because it deals with art. The debate of defining art has existed since the beginning of philosophy (Kennick, 1979) when Plato first presented his mimetic concepts of art. As society changes, so too does the definition of art. When the definition of art is elusive, the techniques for educating about art are more elusive. Rice (1995) outlined the many contradictions in ideologies that create a conflicting view of the responsibility of museums to educate about art. The various ways of looking at art and the art world create a strain to the way things are interpreted. There can even be contradictory beliefs among staff members within a museum that create problems in interpretation, display, and education.

Each museum has its own philosophy of art, and while a formal statement may not be written there may be a sense of it among staff. This does, however, become a problem in the comparison of art museums. The variance in art museums is one of the factors why art museums have not been evaluated in more depth. Another factor is the complexity of aesthetics. In one respect the study of aesthetics lends itself to studying the experience of the visitor, as aesthetics is an experiential activity. However, due to the complex nature of aesthetics, there is not a clear transition between studying aesthetic experience and museum experience (Rice, 1995).

Dewey’s influence on museum education. There are several key figures and theories in the development of understanding the museum experience. Dewey’s (1932;1993, 1938;1997) philosophy on experience, art, and education contributed to the development of understanding visitor preconceptions and actions in the museum and how these affects the museum experience. Hein (2004) reviewed Dewey’s writing to find the strong emphasis Dewey placed on museums as a central place for learning. Hein (2004) examined the implications of museum educators applying Dewey’s theories to the museum. The progressive movement of the early 20th century established museums as places of learning equally important to schools. Proponents of the progressive movement argued public institutions like museums could have a social, political, and cultural impact if permitted. Simpson (1996) stressed the importance of constructivism in the museum based on Dewey’s (1932;1993) Art as Experience. Constructivism is the creation of knowledge by the individual, using prior knowledge and personal preferences to create understandings (Hein, 1998). Connecting art through personal meaning is the first step in connecting the learned information to other subjects. According to Cole (1998), to evoke
personal experience one needs to follow the theory of Dewey and evoke experience from the past or create a shared experience to draw on to impact the new experience. Anspacher (2002) also used the concept of experience as learning and applied them to building engaging museum exhibitions. Anspacher argued that the traditional theory in the museum of transferring knowledge is not efficient for museum learning. Experience-based exhibitions, however, engage the visitor and allow quicker connections and longer retention of ideas. He also made recommendations for how to build engaging exhibitions.

Dewey’s concept of meaning-making is increasingly replacing the old notions of learning. Museums are responding to visitors’ needs to make connections. Silverman (1995) reported on the need for museums to understand the context of the visitor and how the past experience, companions, and leisure motivations affect the viewer. These are similar concerns to Falk and Dierking (1992), but they emphasized a greater connection to meaning-making then overall experience. Meaning-making goes beyond technical learning and measures the impact and connections viewers make to the experience in the museum.

The nature of the visitor. Doering (1999) examined the nature of the visitor experience. The researcher classified the visitor into three potential categories, stranger, guest, or client. This is in response to many claims for the changing face of the museum and its relationship to the public. The stranger is a visitor who attends a museum that maintains the philosophy that a collection comes first, and a visitor is only a secondary thought if any thought is given at all. The guest visitor is when the museum wants to “do good” (p. 74) for the visitor. This is often in the form of an emphasis in educational programming. Last, the visitor as client is when a museum responds to the need for accountability to be responsible to the visitor. This study of the museum’s perspective on the visitor is influenced by the changes in society. The author concluded with a research study under this premise and examined how the visitor’s experience is affected both positively and negatively by the different museum philosophies.

Learning and Experience in museum assessment.

Many researchers like Hein (2005) and Ebitz (2006, 2007), among others, have called for a reform in evaluation in the museum. The Getty Center for Education in the Arts commissioned Eisner and Dobbs, in 1984, to evaluate the state of museum education. The study resulted in a report, *The Uncertain Profession* that outlined 20 generalizations about the field. The findings covered everything from the political atmosphere of the education department to professional development. A decade later, Williams (1996) revisited those generalizations to find developments in the field. The focus was on nine of the original generalizations. One generalization related to this review is the lack of research in the field. Originally, Dobbs and Eisner (1984) found no formal research, training, or theoretical framework for evaluation in the field. By 1996, Williams had found an improvement in the field of research, but still no dramatic advancements in the structure and theory of research. While there is not a formal published review of research developments in the field of museum education, this study shows a clear increase in research projects, but still no framework or standards (Gorman, 2007a; Luke & Adams, 2007).

The traditional philosophy in evaluation is rooted in a 19th century industrial model (Jarche, 2006; Warlick, 2005). As late as 2003, researchers were still advocating evaluation to be front-end, formative, and summative. Bull (2003) explained that these are categories referring to when research is done and went on to advocate the importance of front-end studies being most effective. This notion categorizes when to conduct research, but it still says nothing to the content or framework of the research. Utilizing a time-driven framework of assessment does not
meet the complexities found in museum education. A time-based framework does not respond to what is assessed.

As stated previously, many claim that museums are places of learning, but actually proving it is another issue (Falk, 2000). Throughout the years, museums have been subjects for research, whether it is the museum, the object, or even the visitor. There are many multifaceted aspects to museum research. Measuring learning and educational benefits in a museum happen to be the current topic of interest. It is important to note the difference between museum learning and museum experience and even the differences in current museum experience and past museum experience. Learning, admitted Falk (2000; 2002a), is hard to define as many fields cannot agree on a single definition of learning. So defining learning in the museum is even more difficult to accomplish. The link of learning and experience is even more complex. Traditionally the museum experience came from the idea of commercial visitor studies, or satisfaction levels. If the visitor was satisfied with the experience, it was assumed learning took place. This idea stayed with the museum for much of its history. It is only with recent studies and research that a more complete view of learning and experience in the museum is emerging (Falk, 2000; Griffen & Symington, 1998).

Griffin and Symington (1998) suggested because the nature of museum learning is so unstructured and fragmented, researchers should not be looking at what was learned, but how it was learned. The researchers listed an extensive review of literature on learning indicators. The study concluded with assumptions about learning can be made through visitor observations. While visitor observations have potential for measuring learning or experience, observations do not generally fit all audiences.

What Falk and Dierking (2002a) have done is combined the idea of learning and experience influencing each other to view the overall museum experience. According to the authors, much of what is experienced in the museum is not seen in the museum or measured with tests but felt in the individual internally and over a period of time. Falk and Dierking presented a new definition of museum experience that incorporates learning. It encompasses the many contexts of a person’s life leading to the visit, occurring during the visit, and reinforcing ideas after the visit. With newer theories in experience and learning, new theories in evaluating the experience and learning are also emerging.

**Contextual Model for Evaluation**

Garoian (2001) has stated in his research that assessment first happens in a context, therefore it is important to incorporate the work of Falk and Dierking (1992, 2000, 2002a), as their contextual model is the leading model of museum context to categorize museum experience. The contextual model, as a learning model, illustrates the importance of the context and how that affects the visitor’s learning potential. It is “a device for organizing the complexities of learning within free-choice settings” (Falk, 2000 p. 2). A key factor in examining this framework is to note the flexibility of the context within the individual and through time. None of the contexts are constant, and none of them carries the same importance at any one time. In other words, the contexts change emphasis from one individual to the next. Each context has a different weight for different experiences. At the same time, the emphasis of each context changes over the life of a person, or even between visits.

According to Falk and Dierking (2002a), studies in the museum are often small and non-experimental. This creates unreliable and limited data on insight into learning in the museum. It is their assumption that past research in the museum asked the wrong questions to measure learning. Falk and Dierking proposed research done under the framework of the contextual
model will produce a more complete understanding of museum learning. Nearly 15 years have passed since the model was first introduced into the literature, and there are still very few researchers working under this model.

**Application of Contextual Model in Research**

Illustrated in Table 3 are the nine principles from the original contextual model. There are considerations in each concept that all have a different influence on a visitor at any one time that affect the overall experience. Falk and Dierking (2002a) proposed these principles be guides for creating museum exhibitions and developing educational programs. If these principles are used in the development of programs, there should also be a consideration in the creation of assessment of programs. This section reviews the past 15 years of museum research. Various studies are organized under the structure of the contexts and components of the contextual model.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Reference Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Each visitor learns in a different way, and interprets information through the lens of previous knowledge, experience and beliefs.</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>All visitors personalize the museum’s message to conform to their own understanding and experience.</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Every visitor arrives with an agenda and a set of expectations for what the museum visit will hold.</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Most visitors come to the museum as part of a social group, and what visitors see, do, and remember is mediated by that group.</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The visitor’s experience within the museum includes docents, guards, concessionaires, and other visitors.</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Physical are drawn to museums because they contain objects outside their normal experience. Visitors come to “look” in a variety of ways.</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Visitors are strongly influenced by the physical aspects of museums, including the architecture, ambience, smell, sounds, and the “feel” of the place.</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Visitors encounter an array of experiences from which they select a small number.</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The visitor’s attention is strongly influenced by the location of exhibits and by the museum’s orientation.</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Personal Context Research**

**Motivations and expectations.** Several studies have found the motivations of the visitor are broken into categories. Falk and Dierking (2002a) were first to formally divide the motivations of visitors into eight categories. They found that the motivations of the visitor have a direct affect on the learning potential and overall experience of the visitor. Subsequent studies have reinforced these ideas, for example, Packer and Ballantyne (2002) studied 3 sites, a museum, an art gallery, and an aquarium. Research conducted through surveys found similarities in responses, but overall distinct motivations for attending the different sites affected the reported learning and enrichment.

Ballantyne (2003) researched the perceptions of museum visitors in the District Six Museum. The museum preserves the history of district six and the segregation seen in recent history. The author interviewed and surveyed visitors to the museum in order to understand their perceptions on the museum. Findings include perspective and attitudes as well as many recanted memories of the district where many once lived. In a similar study at the Smithsonian, Kalata, Doering, and Pekarik (1997) studied the perceptions of visitors and staff on an exhibition of rock history. While the topic was not as controversial, the methods and purpose were similar. Kalata et al. observed visitors, recorded in-depth interviews, and analyzed surveys to find the feelings about the display. The results of the study were compiled for a report on possible improvements and expansions of any revision to the exhibition.

Pekarik (2004) researched the affects of expectations entering the museum with satisfaction levels leaving the museum. He found percentages in people expecting to learn from the museum stayed the same in the post survey. Also through his findings when comparing satisfaction to learning, the author found satisfaction is not as closely related to learning levels as previously thought. The author proposed the museum experience might be something not easily expressed in words clearly, something that lies between satisfaction or enjoyment and learning or gained benefit.

**Prior knowledge, interests, and beliefs.** Brown and Koran (1998) reported on a visitor study conducted in an archeological site in the Yucatan of Mexico. The main purpose of the study was to test visitor’s knowledge of the Mayan ruins before and after the visit to determine the knowledge gained during the visit. At the same time, however, they examined the feasibility of conducting research in a remote and bilingual location. The findings did show learning occurred, and they found room for improvement of the educational components at the site. Equally important to the researchers was their findings on the feasibility of conducting research in an archeological site. The researchers found that with the right combination of tools and questions a study could be conducted with valid responses.

Kelly (2003) examined the perception of learning in visitors and how that affects their museum experience. Visitors were asked to report on their prior understanding and knowledge of learning, then after the museum visit the researcher surveyed participants to find any correlations between the affects of preconceptions and the results of the experience. The purpose of the research was to gain understanding of the relationship between entertainment and education. Kelly found the notion of education and entertainment is not exclusive and often interchangeable in the perception of visitors.

Pekarik (2002) examined two exhibitions to look at the implications that interpretation or the lack of interpretation has on the emotional response of the visitor. To compare the impact on the visitor of no interpretation, he chose one exhibition at the Smithsonian that was deeply rooted in emotion, an exhibition about the attack on United States on September 11th, and the other
exhibition on flowers and butterflies in nature. The author decided that both exhibitions fit the category of not needing interpretation, but both would have an impact, albeit very different impacts. The study was conducted through interviews. The author concluded the feeling or emotional content of some exhibitions should be left to be experienced at the personal level. The author suggested that educators and designers involved in interpretation should not impose their own beliefs on an exhibition but leave the interpretations open ended to allow the viewers’ beliefs and values to interact with the exhibition.

Yalowitz (2004) examined several studies done on one exhibition to determine the impact of the exhibition on visitor behavior. Several researchers studied the exhibition on conservation at the Monterey Bay Aquarium for different purposes. Many researchers such as Ferguson (2000), and Korn (2003) have looked at effectiveness of the exhibition on learning and impact. Yalowitz called for an examination of the long-term impact of the exhibition on beliefs and behaviors. The purpose of all of the researchers was very specific. Yalowitz (2004) looked at changing behaviors, Haywood examined visitor perceptions and expectations, Korn reviewed the overall physical context of the exhibition, and Ferguson researched the content of the exhibition. All of the researchers had a specific agenda, but each shed light on a different aspect of the exhibition.

Adelman, Falk, and James (2000) studied the national aquarium in Baltimore to gauge behaviors and affects of the exhibition on visitors’ actions about conservation. The research was conducted through personal meaning mapping (PMM), face-to-face interviews, tracking, and follow-up interviews over the telephone. PMM is a tool developed by Falk (2002) to record preconceptions about a subject and after thoughts after experiencing an exhibition. Results found while the initial impact of the exhibition was high and participants seemed to be affected by the topic, the long-term effect was not noticed through measurement of conservation practices. Reports show nearly all participants’ levels of conservation fell to the original level after the exhibition. In 2003, Falk and Adelman (2003) experimented with prior knowledge at the National Aquarium in Baltimore. The premise of the research was that if people were grouped into similar knowledge bases and learning styles, it would be easier to observe the learning in the aquarium. The researchers proved through sectioned evaluation efforts that learning was evident in specific groups.

Choice and control. Chiozzi and Andreotti (2001) generated a report on visitor habits in a museum. The researchers observed 100 random people and tracked their progression and behavior through the museum. The results found that observing time and behavior in a museum did not show how effective the experience was. The researchers proposed further research into the attractiveness of an exhibition with time spent in the exhibition.

Social Research

Social groups are a consideration in assessment, as research shows the impact of being part of a group in learning situations. Packer and Ballantyne (2005) challenged the notion of social learning being more beneficial then solitary learning. Their experimental study examined and tested the museum experience of 40 adults visiting alone and 40 adults visiting in pairs. The results did not show a dramatic difference in the learning potential between the groups. The authors concluded that learning in a social group was not better, just different. Many aspects to both social settings allowed for positive and negative influences on the learning potential.

The social context of the museum is not just the group the visitor comes with; it is also the interaction with staff and people along the way. Marino and Koke (2004) examined the interactions of people with live interpretation affecting educational impact. The authors proposed
that live interpretation is more beneficial to the visitor, however, the financial cost needs to be considered before museums commit to such a large expense.

**Family groups.** Borun, Chambers, and Dritsas (1997) conducted a multiphased research project aimed at creating the most effective exhibitions to enhance family learning. The initial phase was observational data collected about the behavior of family groups in exhibitions. The researchers then implemented activities through observations and surveys, and discovered the most effective features to incorporate in an exhibition geared towards families. The final phase of the research was to create and test the newly created exhibitions. This research is an example of integrated assessment to promote improvements in the museum.

In 2003, Ash presented a report on audio observations as a methodology for examining the museum experience. Ash focused on family groups and, through dialog, found the dynamics of the social group that create the experience in the family. She proposed that this method of research should be the first approach to sociocultural research, as language and communication are key components to understanding the experience.

**School groups.** Research in school groups can range from testing students, analyzing educational tools, to examining collaborations between schools and museums. Many studies are found on the affects of museum visits with school groups. There are two primary reasons for a large amount of research on school groups. First, school groups make up a large population of museum visitors, and, second, schoolchildren are a relatively easy subject. Children in a particular class group or age range have an expected knowledge base. This creates a unified starting point for researchers to look at other variables of museum learning. Another factor with school groups is availability of testing, as students are located in a central location and accustomed to testing practices.

Witmer, Luke, and Adams (2000) experimented with multiple-visit museum programs. While the researchers found positive correlations between the projects’ goals and the results, they admitted the shortcomings of multiple museum visits both as an educational tool and as a research tool. As a museum program for the participants, it was a success. Students showed an increase in attitudes and understanding of art that met, and even exceeded, program goals. As a research tool to demonstrate learning, it was not as efficient. Researchers spent five years evaluating the program, interviewing the participants over that period to demonstrate the long-term effect of the program.

In 1999, Jeffers used a participatory research approach to examine the affects of a museum visit on children as well as on pre- and in-service teachers. The researcher clearly defined the framework, stemming from Deweyian constructivism. Preservice and in-service teachers were asked to become active researchers in the museum. Each was asked to find a child to act as docent for them and the teachers would in turn report on the performance of the child and their own experience. The researcher proposed more studies on the affects of guides in the museum experience.

Research in school groups with traditional docents was also studied. Cox-Petersen, Marsh, Kisiel, and Melber (2003) examined the effect of docent-lead tours in a natural history museum in comparison with scientific education requirements. The researchers used interviews, surveys, and student testing to discover the visit was satisfactory to most students and teachers, but inconsistent with regard to subject requirements. In the conclusion, the researchers made recommendations for future research as well as new structuring of museum tours to meet the specific needs of school groups under state subject requirements.
The teacher’s role in a museum visit can vary greatly from visit to visit. This depends on the structure of the museum, the teacher’s interest, and the school curriculum. Tal, Bamberger, and Morag (2005) studied the role of the teacher during guided school visits to a natural history museum. The teachers in Israel were not involved in the actual museum visit; however, the teachers’ involvement is noted in the classroom. Teachers are responsible for planning and arranging the visits, as well as incorporating the subject into the curriculum and preparing the students for the visit. After the visit, teacher involvement continued as the teacher is responsible for reinforcing the ideas presented in the museum. This research demonstrated the outside influences of the museum visit with pre- and post-reinforcements.

Even though school groups are typically more easily tested and observed, it does not always happen in the research. In 1998, Shoemaker reported on her “wonderful” (p. 40) experience in the art museum, where she researched the effect of teaching art to ESL (English as a second language) students. Shoemaker stated that all of the goals of the program were met; however, she reported that there was no formal evaluation of the students’ work. The after effects of the program were recorded by reading students’ writing and looking at student art work. There were no efforts made for pre- and post-testing or “objective, calculated measures” (p. 42) as it did not seem to fit the purpose of the program, even though the program was designed to enrich the understanding of art and increase the vocabulary and knowledge of art.

Docent tours. Jeffers (2003) used preservice teachers to examine the affects of building a community through the art museum. Preservice teachers became the docents, hosts, facilitators, leaders, and discussants at an art museum. The research was documented by journals kept by the teachers, observations from the researcher, and interviews and surveys from the participants. The results showed there was a greater sense of involvement and community within all of the participants. The museum offered a platform that crossed age, background, and education backgrounds, uniting different people to each other through art.

Physical Research

Exhibition design. Exhibition design is one of the most common forms of assessment in the museum because it is a controllable variable. Exhibition design research comes mostly through the form of visitor feedback, whether in survey, interviewed, or observational forms. Exhibition design reviews the overall atmosphere of the museum, labeling, usability, and aesthetics. Pekarik (1997) researched exhibition design through visitor feedback cards. An important aspect to feedback cards recognized in his research was the result of the typical comment card. He reported that those who write comment cards usually have a strong emotion one way or another. The author argued that this is a good determining factor for exhibition design as it goes to the extremes. The report concluded with specific recommendations for the exhibition studied stemming from feedback on visitor comment cards. This research stems from the personal perspectives of the visitor but is a reaction to the physical.

Research shows that exhibition labels are considered for content and aesthetics. Martin and Toon (2005) researched the affects of narratives on labeling. The methodology of the study was content analysis of narrative labeling and interviews with science professionals and museum visitors. The authors concluded that the narrative of a label is important to capture the attention of the reader, connect the context to real life experiences, and be written in a way that is not too academic or educational in tone.

In 2003 and 2004, Ash questioned the design of an exhibition in relation to family dynamics. The study examined families in conversation during the exhibition. She researched the effectiveness of the dioramas in the family dynamic. This research crossed the context of
physical and social to examine meaning-making in the museum. Meaning-making is in personal context, but many studies about meaning-making focus on the psychical aspects of the design to determine the opportunities for meaning-making. Rahm (2003) also examined the exhibition design to find meaning-making opportunities. The focus of the study was on conversations and observations to assess the nature of the conversation when interacting with exhibition space. The author concluded with a recommendation to focus on learning as a long-term process rather than a short term accumulation of facts. Schlenk and Shrock (1994) studied a case in the Chicago Institute of Art. The purpose was to examine an exhibition’s effectiveness through an examination of the physical environment. The exhibition was geared towards children’s tactile development. The authors concluded with recommendations of exhibitions having a broader general goal, objects chosen to meet specific objectives, and an integrated evaluation process to determine the potential for meaning-making in an exhibition.

Falk (1997) experimented with museum labeling and conceptual learning. Research was experimental, Falk tested visitors before and after experiencing an exhibition with and without explicit labeling. This resulted in an equality of learning from visitors in both circumstances. These findings have implications on future labeling and exhibition design.

Interactive displays are a component of the physical context. Research shows the experience of the visitor is different when they are actively engaged in an exhibition. In 2005, Lindemann-Matthies and Kamer researched the influence of interactive exhibitions on learning in the zoo. The experimental study used 600 participants who were observed, tested and then retested after a period of time. Results showed there was a significantly higher retention rate of information on the people who were engaged in the interactive components, than those who were not. Chang (2006) also experimented with interactive experiences to measure contextual learning. Using the Falk and Dierking (2002b) model, Chang researched visitors with observations, interviews, and surveys. The study combined perspectives on personal and social considerations while looking at the physical environment of the interactive. Chang observed the social conditions and made conclusions that the social partnering affected the use of the interactive exhibitions and ultimately affects the impact of the visit.

Technology. Technology is also considered in the physical context. Graham (1999) studied the use of a computer-based art work in an observational study. The results of the study found some patterns of use, for example males used the computer based-art work for slightly longer time periods of time than females. The patterns indicated use of the interactive art, but did not indicate effectiveness of the exhibition. Videos are a relatively new addition to exhibitions. Serrell (1997a, 2002) worked extensively on examining the time visitors spend in the museum. She examined the way the visitor interacted with the physical space and made assumptions about the experience of the visitor based on the time analysis. Her first study concluded with recommendations for museum design based on the implications and findings. She stated “the amount of time visitors spend and the number of stops they make in an exhibition are systematic measures that can be indicators of learning” (p 108). This finding reached the attention of many researchers including Shettell (1997) and Doering and Pekarik (1997). All of the subsequent research argued that the measurement of time is not a measure of quality or experience. Serrell (1997a, 1997b, 2002) tried to defend her position and research but was unable to substantiate any actual learning or meaningful experience that occurred in the museum. Serrell (2002) analyzed the attraction and holding time of the videos in exhibition by observations. The author suggested that the holding time of the video is an indicator of the success of the video. The attraction and staying power of the video is a consideration when laying out the exhibition design. The author
questioned if people are watching, the vital information presented in videos. The author did not analyze the content of the video for what makes one video more attractive than another, she reported statistical data about time spent watching.

Technology is also changing the physical space of the museum. To add to the complication of the museum experience, online museums and museum web presence are now a consideration. While museum professionals find a place for the online museum, researchers are evaluating the impact. Soren and Lemelin (2004) completed a study of current best practices for creating a high quality museum website that offers an interactive experience for the visitor. The study examined six museum websites and made recommendations for future sites. Virtual reality influences the nature of the physical space of a museum, and the visitor’s interactions with the objects. Fry, Keith, Marti, and Moe (2001) studied the effects of a preliminary visit online with the impact on the museum visit. The study was conducted in libraries and museums. The author found no significant evidence of the impact of the museum visit but did get many responses of visitors who would go to the museum because of the website and those that would not go because of what they found on the website, like parking and transportation issues. This study is inconclusive but raises some questions about the relationship between a museum’s physical space and its virtual space.

Accessibility. Accessibility is ensuring all visitors have an equal opportunity for accessing the museum. This involves mostly physical accessibility, for example, floor plans that allow wheel chairs to move freely or alternative guides for hearing or vision-impaired visitors. There are several national and international organizations working as advocates for these specialized populations. Professional organizations like AAM also have accessibility policies as part of their professional practices standards. Government requirements and advocacy requests govern the accessibility of a museum.

Jennings (2003) studied a traveling exhibition for improving accessibility issues. The evaluation of the exhibition was incorporated into the planning and implementing of the exhibition. The author used interviews and observations at each location of the exhibition to improve upon the exhibition for the next time. The author stressed the importance of communication and listening to the needs and feedback of the participants to improve the exhibition’s accessibility.

The Impact of Research

Assessment is often thought of as a last effort or unavoidable; however, the definition of assessment is to evaluate to find value, which gives an opportunity to provide improvements (Hicks, 1996). There are many research reports about programs or results, but there are not many cases on how research has actually affected the organizations’ operations. Soren (2000) reported on how the results from a visitor study actually effected change in the museum. The report details the visitor studies conducted by three museums. Each report was qualitative in nature, going beyond the demographics to find visitor perceptions, interests, motivations, and needs. The results from two of the museums were used in the future strategic planning of the museum’s operations.

Durant (1996) stressed the importance of a museum having a philosophical framework to compose education programs. In a study done at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, the author demonstrated the importance of an education department defining the mission and purpose of its educational programming. Components of the philosophy are attitudes toward art and aesthetics, audience needs and desires, as well as museum purpose. The core philosophies of the museum
and education department influence not only the approach to the object, but the visitor and evaluation as well.

DeVito (2005) reviewed qualitative research literature on assessing student learning through examining student work or products. DeVito proposed the museum could find similar works to assess visitor learning by looking at work created by the visitor. In the museum, some research addressed concerns in methodology and techniques. Gutwill (2002, 2003) wrote about the challenges in acquiring visitor consent using a posted sign method. His research included several techniques to gain visitor consent, an essential component to legitimate research. The impact of research and results on the museum is also an emerging field in assessment practices.

Assessment Trends in Other Fields

Program evaluation. The examination of museum education begins with an examination of programming. The field of program evaluation has a wealth of information applicable to museum education. Among many researchers is Kirkpatrick, a leader in training program evaluation.

Kirkpatrick’s program evaluation. When reviewing museum education, programming is at the core of the examination. Kirkpatrick (2002) established a framework for training program assessment several decades ago. His framework focused on four levels of progression through a training program. These levels divided assessment by evaluation area. They are reaction, learning, behavior, and results. His research is a standard in training program evaluation. While other researchers have revisited Kirkpatrick’s work, the original four levels remain the core framework of program assessment in several fields of education and training.

Reaction level. The reaction level is the satisfaction level, in other words, did they like it. Studies measure attitudes about specific components, or the overall approval of the program. This is most often associated with satisfaction studies immediately after the event or program. Satisfaction levels relate to learning levels. The purpose of finding satisfaction levels is to ensure that participants are receptive to a program or event. While there are no concrete statistics about how much satisfaction affects learning, there is a widely accepted notion that dissatisfaction adversely affects learning potential.

Learning level. The learning level is the knowledge gained, or what they learned from it. Learning is based on goals and objectives created to guide the program. Depending on the type of program, emphasis can be on acquiring new knowledge, skills, or attitudes. This is most often researched with traditional testing and observation methods.

Behavior level. The behavioral level is the change in attitude and behavior as a result of participating in a training program, or whether it is used. The transfer of learned facts into knowledge is dependent on behavioral changes. This is most often associated with longitudinal studies, to gauge the affect of learning on the participant’s behavior.

Results level. The results level in Kirkpatrick’s (2003) research applies to the company or organization benefiting, because of an individual participating in a program. It asks how the company benefits from the employee’s participation in the program. In corporate training programs, this is most often associated with measuring productivity and profits to determine impact.

These levels lend themselves to the complexities in museum education, including, experience, learning, and instruction.

Tourism and leisure research. Museums are not just places of learning; they are places of leisure, entertainment, and grounds for tourism. Falk and Dierking (2000) examined the motivational factors of museum visits and found them similar to other leisure choices. Falk
(1995) examined the motivations for leisure activities of African Americans, traditionally an underserved population in the museum. One of the biggest factors in African Americans not going to the museum was a lack of tradition in going to the museum. This research is supported by other studies in leisure research that show a direct relation between adult activities and childhood influences. Early experiences in leisure help to mold adult activity preferences. Family was found to be the number one influence in choosing leisure activities.

Freudenheim (2005) observed the importance of remembering the museum is not just a place of learning, but also a place for an experience. He pointed out that it is not always necessary to learn a lesson from a museum, and advocated visiting to have an experience, no matter the outcome.

Visitor studies. Korn (2007) reviewed the importance of visitor studies and the dramatic development of visitor studies within the museum. Accordingly, museum visitor studies have grown from simple demographic questions to several pages of thought provoking questions. Korn emphasized the balance and entanglement of research, evaluation and marketing. Visitor studies can serve many functions and come in many forms, resulting in a wide variety of results. In 1993, Ames researched the state of visitor studies in museums. He stated professionals in the visitor studies field researched the majority of visitor studies and little, if any, were done by museum staff. This has many implications on studying visitors, as the visitor study professional has a different perspective than the museum staff. He went on to discuss the complexities of visitor studies in the museum and arguments within staff about what is accounted for in visitor studies and what is not. Having outside evaluators and researchers enter the museum can cause conflict in the evaluations.

Visitor studies cross all types of business from non-profit to commercial and include quantitative and qualitative methods. The purposes can be to find demographic information, satisfaction level, or even response or feelings to products and services. Shettel (2001) identified the growth of visitor studies within the museum over the past several decades, from objective data collection to subjective recording of experience. The developing needs of museum surveys can be analyzed using already developed visitor studies practices.

Hudson (1993) examined the need for visitor studies by looking at the results. He stated that in the museum visitor studies are often shallow and inconclusive. Results are preferred in quantitative data, which Hudson reported has little or no value to the museum. Rather than spend time gathering shallow data, he proposed spending more time with fewer people, assuming the researchers would find more information about the real experience and needs of the visitor. He also argued that visitor studies address only the current visitor, not the needs of potential visitors.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of examining what is being done in research and evaluation is to shed light on the current trend and attitudes about assessment. The purpose of this study remains in finding current trends, attitudes, and beliefs about assessment in art museum education. In order to examine current trends, an understanding of the complexities in museum education is necessary. The challenge between experience and learning and the influence of context will continue, but without a fundamental understanding of the debate, this study would not be possible. In addition, the fields of program evaluation, leisure and tourism as well as visitor study research need to be examined to give insight into directions in research not yet utilized in the field of museum assessment. It is in the grouping of these research perspectives the framework for this study is found.
METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher sought to identify the current trends of assessment in art museum education programming. The focus in this research was to document the current state of assessment in museum education. This was accomplished with a mixed method approach to data collection by sampling a diverse population of art museum educators in AAM-accredited art museums in Florida. Practitioners of art museum education were surveyed to find opinions, beliefs, and philosophies about assessment and evaluation affecting current practices in assessment.

Research Question

What is the current state of assessment in Florida art museum education departments? There are several underlying questions involved in examining the current state of assessment, including issues in research, education, learning, and aesthetics. In addition, the following questions supplement the primary research question:

1. What is assessment in museum education? What are museum education practitioners assessing? What research is being done in the field of museum education under the pretext of assessment?
2. What views and attitudes do museum education practitioners have about assessment? How does this influence assessment practices in each institution?
3. How can results be organized and synthesized to provide standards and recommendations for future assessment practices in art museum?

Research Design

This study utilized several research methods suited for gaining a broad perspective of the problem, while focused on specific issues for an in-depth understanding. According to Johnson and Christiansen (2004) a mixed methods approach can incorporate the most suitable qualitative and quantitative methods to a given study. Accordingly, this created the opportunity to utilize the most fitting methods to attain data in an organized, efficient way best suited to the needs of this specific study.

There is currently little documentation on assessment in the art museum, therefore a component of this research was exploratory in nature, to find what practices and trends were currently used. A survey according to Soy (1997) can be exploratory in nature and use multiple methods of collection while looking at a research problem within its context. The context of each museum is important, as even though there are similarities between institutions, each institution is unique in staffing and programming.

Quantitative methods, such as close-ended questions, were used to gain a broad understanding of current museum assessment. Open-ended questions took a qualitative approach to finding deeper meaning in responses. The two methods offered complementary data and expand on several areas of inquiry.

The conceptual framework for this study started with a basic understanding of what assessment currently entails in museum research to date. This was coupled with the research of context and influences on experience by Falk and Dierking (2002b). The assessment practices being studied focuses on education programming. A study by Wetterlund and Sayre (2003) divided museum education into seven categories. These divisions were used in this study to begin a classification of where assessment was used within the department. Participants were asked, what assessment practices are currently being used in each area. The framework asserts that museum education is a combination of learning and experience. According to Falk and Dierking (2002b) the museum visit is a combination of experience and learning unique to each...
individual. The experience of a museum is not dependent on learning just as learning is not dependent on the experience. While both influence each other, they can be separated. This creates additional dynamics in measurement, where museum education can be assessed for the potential of learning or experience or in combination.

Electronic mail surveys. Electronic mail and internet survey tools were used to distribute survey questions to participants. The components of the survey are as follows; demographic information about the institution; education and work experience of the individual; attitudes, values and beliefs about art museum education. Parkin (2005) recommended going beyond the traditional Likert scale of satisfaction surveys by asking one close-ended question accompanied by an open-ended. The questions formulated through a review of past research are seen in appendix A (Ames, 1993; Nichols, 1990; Rennie & Johnston, 2004; Soren, 2000; Weil, 2000).

Population and Sampling

The sample for this study is 56 art museum education practitioners from 24 accredited art museums in Florida. As of 2006, there are over 800 museums accredited by the American Association of Museums, 284 of which are art museums. As a governing body of museums, AAM’s definition of a museum was used to qualify an institution as a museum. While AAM states many conditions for an institution to be considered a museum, the AAM publication, Code of Ethics for Museums (2000) finds a consensus in museums to be a, “unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world (p. 1).” Only museums accredited by AAM were considered in the population to allow for a level of regularity in institutional standards.

The sample for this study focused on 24 art museums in Florida. These museums represented a range within art museums. This cross section included large museums with world-renowned collections like The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Sarasota, to smaller collections that focus on just one artist like The Dali Museum of St. Petersburg. The variety of museums found in Florida also represents different administrative structures, including those run by universities, municipal control, or private nonprofit organizations. Choosing museums in one state adds another level of consistency, because museums in the same state may face similar requirements set by government or public authorities unique to that state.

To be included in the sample, the first criterion for inclusion in the sample was a museum must focus on art. An art museum was determined by considering the collection and focus of each museum. The second criterion was the museum be accredited by AAM. The third criterion was the museum has an education division and employs at least one practitioner, who focuses their efforts in education programming and development.

The sample was selected from public records. The state of Florida Sunshine Act states that all non-profit organizations must keep open records for the public, including employment and other statistical information needed to gather for this study. The sampling was a moderate size, large enough to include a diverse cross section of participants but small enough to allow greater in-depth data collection. Stratified, purposeful sampling was used to ensure participants in the study are actively engaged in their institutions with education. Opportunistic and snowball sampling was utilized to find all applicable people in the sample population.

Reliability and Validity

Using qualitative methods in this study present unique considerations. Researchers like Stenbacka (2001) disputed the relevance of reliability in qualitative research to prove quality. Even though reliability in qualitative methods is still debated, certain measures can be implemented to achieve maximum reliability. To ensure reliability the survey will remain
consistent for every participant. Consistency was also assured because this study has one researcher, resulting in regularity in the interpretation and analysis of data.

Research Procedure

This research involved two phases: examination of current research in assessment, and survey of current practices to discover attitudes and beliefs about assessment, as well as current practices in each institution. An initial review of museum research was completed to discover the gaps in museum assessment, but a more thorough examination of the literature was continued to find emerging themes within survey responses. Fifty-six surveys were sent to 24 institutions. This included at least one survey per museum but more when museum education departments housed several staff members. Practitioners were selected by contacting each institution to inquire current positions and structures in order to access desired participants. The survey was conducted over a six-week period to achieve maximum feedback. Surveys were first distributed by email. A short telephone call was used for follow up to encourage participation. Additional survey requests were sent through email and telephone over the duration of the survey period.

The researcher analyzed the results, recording and tallying the survey to find emerging themes and immediate questions for further clarification and expansion.

Writing of the Results

A large portion of questions in the research design were open-ended, to allow new evidence to come forward. As a result, a theme-based qualitative method was used to allow for emerging topics (Johnson & Christiansen, 2004). Identified themes were analyzed in order of relevance to assessment in the museum. Charts, tables, and graphs were used to enhance understanding of the findings, and to visualize significance of the data. To encourage honesty among participants, quotes were attributed to an individual or institutional false name to maintain confidentiality. The final step in writing the results included a synthesis to make suggestions for future practices in the field.

Chapter Summary

Museums in general are at a turning point in education and accountability. The profession’s reactions to changes over the next few years will set the course over the next few decades. As we enter the conceptual age, art and aesthetics will gain an important value in our society. The art museum has the privilege of being able to be a first respondent to the new demands. This study intended to contribute a substantial amount of information about current practices and attitudes on assessment in art museum education departments, to help shape the future of museum assessment.
PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

This chapter presents data collected through a survey of Florida art museum education professionals. Survey participants answered questions about their philosophies, beliefs, and current knowledge on museum education and assessment practices. The population for this study was 24 art museums accredited by AAM in Florida who employed 56 art museum professionals. Each received a survey request, to achieve a cross section of different backgrounds and professional experiences. Two accredited institutions that fell under the category of art museums did not employ educators. One of the institutions was a cultural arts center that had only one full-time employee, acting as an administrative coordinator, who did not feel comfortable reporting on museum education. The other institution who did not feel comfortable responding to the survey did not have an education department or educator. Programs for this museum focused on adult events and community workshops coordinated by the director and development offices. Another institution was not available at the time of survey, as the only educator on staff was on maternity leave and unavailable for comment. This resulted in 21 museums sampled for this survey.

The resulting population sample consisted of a total of 56 practitioners including, 19 curators or directors of education, one director of development, five schoolteachers (current teachers for the school system and liaisons in the museum) and 31 education specialists focused on a particular aspect of museum education, including youth arts, outreach, or school programming. As a result, eight participants from eight museums completed the survey. An additional three institutions responded to the survey but did not complete it. All participants who responded to the survey request, but who did not complete it, indicated a lack of time being an issue for not being able to participate. One of the three non-responding participants, a director of an education department passed the survey to one of her employees, although the employee never completed the request. The summaries of responses fall into three categories, personal attitudes and beliefs, assessment practices, and affect on the institution.

Profile of the Participants and Institutions

The sample was small in order to ask in-depth questions of the participants. The 8 respondents represent an 18 percent response ratio. The 24 museums asked to participate provided a representative cross section of organization and administrative structures, from the large museum with a staff in the hundreds, to a small gallery with no primary educator. The 8 participants who replied to the survey represented a balanced cross section of the greater museum community by representing museums of all sizes and structures, represented in figure 2. The institutional profiles included, paid employees ranged from 1 to 11 full and part-time positions in each department, while volunteer positions ranged from 2 to 100. Volunteer positions reported by participants included, student interns, docents, and schoolteachers. The participants also represented a diversity of experience, with participants who had less than one year in the field of museum education compared to those who had more than 20 years in the field. To maintain confidentiality, practitioners’ comments are referenced with an individual letter.
Definition of assessment. Participants first responded to their ideas on assessment, and then completed a definition of assessment in their own terms. While there is currently no universal definition for assessment in the field of museum education, there is an understanding of what constitutes assessment. The definition of assessment continues to evolve in the field, as indicated by the diverse responses in the findings. All of the participants while using varied language shared similar ideas about the definition of assessment. The findings show a consensus in the definition of assessment comparable with institutional definitions; essentially, it is a tool used for measuring results or outcomes. The most variety in the findings was in what assessment measures, or what results are expected. Half (50%) of the participants responses measured goals and objectives of programs, while only 1 (12%) directly included learning as a unit of measurable outcome. Three (37.5%) of all participants reported a more holistic approach to assessment, including measuring the “visitor experience” (B)…”gauging needs”(E)… and “analyzing quality” (G) of programs.

When asked about first impressions of assessment, 5 (62.5%) of participants indicated that assessment was a necessity in their field. Most (75%) of the responses redefined assessment and indicated a purpose of assessment. Half (50%) of the respondents compared the purpose of assessment with tracking goals and objectives to improve programming. Three (37.5%) of the participants while understanding the necessity of assessment, voiced negative opinions about assessment. Participant E felt that assessment is “often cumbersome,” while participant G found assessment “not particularly fun.” Participant F criticized the extra, “time, money and energy” required in assessment projects.

These findings indicate there is still a discrepancy among professionals on the purpose of assessment, and what results from assessment.

Beliefs and philosophies of museum education. Individual beliefs of museum education can affect the practices in the department as well as how one approaches assessment. The request of participants to “Briefly describe your philosophy of museum education,” indicated a great diversity in beliefs and backgrounds. Each response while diverse focused on art or referred to the collection of the museum. These finding points toward a different approach in museum education according to the collection focus of the museum, indicating the approach in an art museum will be different from that of history or science.
The majority (87.5%) of respondents believe museum education to be a holistic experience, engaging the viewer in education, entertainment, awareness and experience. Only 1 participant saw museum education as solely a learning process. All but one of the participants referred to the visitor’s position in museum education. This included engaging the visitor with the objects (participants; A, D, F, G), expanding critical thinking skills (participants; A, B, D, F), explaining context and application of objects in art and society while increasing public awareness (participants; C, D, G, H), and broadening personal knowledge (participants; B, D, F, G, H). This finding indicates a wide range of goals and objectives museum educators face in creating programming. Respondents range in broad views, like participant C believed museum education should be “directed at all age and ability levels... (and) ...expose all aspects of art.” In comparison, participant B believed museum education should, “help visitors use critical thinking and observation skills to describe, discuss, and understand works of art in a way to broaden personal knowledge.” Both participants B and C, like many of the participants, felt it was the responsibility of museum education to broaden knowledge and understanding. Some educators had a more specific agenda for how to achieve that. For example, participant G, specifies, “exposing the public to relationships between art, history plus culture.” Another aspect, the majority (87.5%) of participants mentioned, was the importance of engaging the visitor in critical thinking, or exposure to new ideas to promote individual exploration of the objects and context. These findings show museum education as an integral role of the museum’s purpose with an influence on the visitor experience.

In conjunction with individual beliefs on museum education, participants reflected how their philosophy of museum education influenced their practices of assessment. Some participants diverged from their statements on philosophy while others made a direct connection to assessment practices. For example, participant E, while only recognizing a learning perspective in museum education, recognized assessment of learning was different from the assessment of affect, and both need different assessment approaches. Participant C also saw a need for diverse assessment to “cater to the audience.” This was in direct relationship to her philosophy of museum education, which needed to respond to “all age and ability levels.”

The diverse and wide range participant F saw in museum education may have led her to take an equally broad view of assessment. She stated, “I assume that I cannot make any assumptions about what our audiences bring to their museum experience or what they might like or need. We have to ask them and be open to their ideas even if they do not conform with ours. We can learn from them if we allow ourselves to and gather information from them.”

In the same manner, participant H stressed the importance of her museum’s philosophy as her philosophy, which was reflected in her response to how this influenced her assessment. She stated, “I need to always stay true to the philosophy of our museum,” and use assessment to find, “the target audience for what we wish to present.” Most of the other participants reiterated the importance of assessment, or the inevitability of it in their profession, rather than applying their own philosophies to how they approach assessment.

An emerging observation, not initially intended from the questions, was the way educators referred to the museum audience. One participant referred only to “students,” while two referred to the audience as “visitors.” The remaining responses referred to the museum audience as participants. Not enough information was available to conclude about the correlations between the individual’s philosophy, job position, and views on museum audiences.

Informed on current research. All of the participants reported using some form of assessment or another, however only three (37.5 %) reported feeling informed on current
research and practices of assessment in museum education. Academic journals, web articles, and conferences were all sources used by educators to keep informed of current practices. Community partners and other professionals were also sources for keeping up to date on current practices, according to all of the respondents who felt informed on current assessment practices. Participant B reported on the need to keep informed because, “Assessment research is more difficult to assess then (other) issues in museum education.”

Of the six (62.5%) participants who did not feel informed, half of the participants felt “out of the loop” and not able to keep up with current research because of time restraints. Participant G, while being responsible for assessment in her department, felt that it was not her responsibility for keeping up to date with current research, but that of the Department Curator. Participant H felt that it is not good to be informed on current research or “what others say or do” because it is “hard to be an innovator if you follow the pack.” Participant E did not feel a need to be informed because the institution uses, “very little formal” assessment.

Participant D admitted to a lack of time but indicated that being removed from the academic school setting was a factor. While in graduate school she attended conferences regularly and was up to date on current research and trends, but since beginning working, no longer has the “luxury of time devoted solely to research.” These findings indicate that time is a crucial aspect to why museum educators are not reading current research. There is however, also an indication of a lack of interest in keeping informed. Twenty-five percent of the respondents indicated no interest, or it was “not their responsibility.” There is not enough information to compare the background experience of the educators with these attitudes, but the participants who were least interested in keeping informed were among those who had the least experience in the field and in their current positions.

**Assessment Practices**

*Using assessment in the museum.* Most (87.5%) participants felt that less than 10% of their time was devoted to assessment, except for Participant H who was undergoing the creation of a long-range plan, so a higher than usual amount of time (25%) was devoted to assessment. All participants reported using assessment in their departments but each had a unique interpretation of what types of assessment were used and why. All of the participants reported assessment as a requirement in their institutions. While participant H was required to assess instructors, the majority (87.5%) of the participants perform assessment in their institutions because of grant or funding agent requirements. Participant A used assessment for specific programs and tours, mandated by grants and other funding agencies that required documentation of programming. Participant E and F also performed assessment for grant reports, but added, because of limitations of a small staff and funding, they were only able to fulfill the minimum requirements of assessment. Participant D also used assessment for meeting grant requirements, but also reports on using assessment for improving programming. Thirty-seven percent of participants reported using assessment to improve programming and services. Participant D used assessment to determine the success of programs in relation to visitor needs. Participant B performed assessment to enhance visitor experience by finding the discrepancies between potential outcomes and actual outcomes. Participant H was currently using a form of assessment to analyze the entire department as part of a long-range plan. Along with grant funding, participants also reported practicing assessment with school groups. The common theme in these findings was a lack of time and resources to incorporate assessment into practice. According to the majority of responses, assessment is costly, complicated, and consuming of time and resources. Participant F reported on hiring outside consultants for assessment projects because
staffing was already limited, however this process was only during a grant project because hiring outside consultants is not cost effective.

In 100% of the respondents, assessment was required for a variety of reasons. A third of the respondents had a direct requirement with granting or funded projects, and only performed assessment because of grant requirement. Another third of the required assessment was in initiatives by the institution for meeting goals and improving programs. While assessment was mostly for fulfilling grant requirements, the forms of assessment were often brief and simple. Participant A remarked, “I have learned that the more simplified the assessment the better and that assessment should be given to all involved.” The forms of assessment reported, vary from surveys, interviews, to questionnaires. Respondents also reported pre- and post-testing evaluations as well as observations and focal groups. Half (50%) of the participants used post-evaluation strategies of surveys and testing to assess programs. The diversity of findings in assessment output indicates no cohesive assessment practice in the field.

Current assessment practices. Participants reported on their current program activities and assessment practices for each program used by their institution. These seven divisions were derived from an earlier survey by Wetterlund and Sayre (2003) of museums to determine what constitutes museum education programming. The seven divisions were tours, gallery activity areas, community events, classes and workshops, partnerships, school programs and online offerings. Participants marked what programs their institutions offered and what forms of assessment used to evaluate each program. Assessment forms divided into four categories to explain where data or information derived from; visitor surveys, staff evaluation, outside auditors or an open category to explain a different form of evaluation. An overview of the seven education areas seen in figure 3, show half or less of the different programs used assessment. The most popular form of assessment was visitor studies, with approximately half of each program evaluated with visitor surveys. Three (36.7%) of the museums use staff evaluations, while almost no participating museums used an outside auditor.

![Figure 3. Overview of program and assessment](image-url)
Tour programs were a large part of programming in all of the museums, as seen in figure 4. All of the museums offered public tours, special events tours, group tours, and school tours, while most museums offer docent and themed tours. Only a quarter (25%) of the museums offered audio tours. Docent tours and school tours were the most commonly evaluated, with half of the museums using visitor evaluations and more than a third of the museums using staff evaluations. These findings indicate that tour programs are commonly evaluated through visitor surveys and staff evaluation.

![Figure 4. Tour program assessment tools](image)

Gallery activities were additional areas for visitors to utilize as resources during their visit. These areas can relate to a specific exhibition or refer to a general aspect of the museum collection, and range from activity areas, libraries to film viewing areas. Figure 5 shows a large majority of museums offered activity areas, learning resources, film videos, and libraries, but less than half of the museums assessed these areas. Only half of the museums had a film viewing area and only one quarter of those museums used any form of assessment. These findings indicate gallery activities are not actively evaluated.

![Figure 5. Gallery activities assessment tools](image)
Figure 6 indicates all (100%) of the participating museums offer evening events, lectures and family activities, but less than half of the museums assessed the programs using visitor studies or staff evaluations. By percentage, socializing opportunities that the museum offered were the least evaluated. More than half (62.5%) of all community festivals were evaluated by visitor surveys and staff evaluations. These findings indicate a balance of visitor surveys and staff evaluation but still indicate less than 50% of the programs were evaluated.

![Figure 6. Community program assessment tools](image)

Figure 7 indicates a high percentage of assessment in classes and workshops. Half (50%) of all participants assessed classes, workshops and summer programs, while more than half (71.4%) of these programs were evaluated using visitor surveys. These findings show higher percentages of assessment, indicating a more direct correlation to learning and measuring in assessment.

![Figure 7. Classes and workshops assessment tools](image)
Partnerships in museums were between other museums, schools, and community organizations. Figure 8 shows the majority of school programs (75%) and organization partnerships (85.7%) were assessed using visitor surveys, and both were assessed with staff evaluations as well. The findings in figure 8 reveal a higher level of assessment when other institutions are involved. This could also be an indication of partnerships in conjunction with grant requirements.

![Figure 8. Partnership assessment tools](image)

School programs were more actively evaluated, with more than half of all programs evaluated by visitor or staff evaluations. This could be reflective of schools requiring assessment in their curriculum. Overall, these findings indicate partnerships and school programs prompt more assessment than other public programming.

![Figure 9. School program assessment tools](image)
Online programming was the least evaluated of all programs. There were several possibilities as to why online programming was not evaluated. First, the museum website was not utilized as an education tool. Second, the education department did not manage the museum website. Third, the education staff did not have control over the content. While these possibilities may be plausible, there is not enough information from the survey to determine why online programming was not evaluated as much as other programs.

![Figure 10. Online program assessment tools](image)

**Assessment and the Institution**

Half (50%) of the participants were the responsible personnel for assessment in their institutions. Thirty-seven percent of participants share the responsibility with department team members and other key personnel in the museum, for example those who organize the event. Only 12% of the participants used outside auditors on a regular basis and then only in conjunction with grant funding.

None of the educators surveyed reported standards or institutional guidelines on assessment. One however, Participant F, used standards on school-based projects. Participant D, reported not having institutional standards, but used assessment standards according to the goals and objectives of each project.

Most education departments primarily used the results of assessment within the department, sharing among departments or key personnel was not common. Participant G shared the results of assessment when the information overlaps with another department. Seventy-five percent of the participants shared the results with administrative departments including the director and development for granting purposes.

**Sharing Results.** All but one respondent shared assessment results with other institutions, although the majority (62.5%) shared primarily with granting agencies. Thirty-seven percent of the participants also shared results with school systems. The school system assessment was in collaboration with the schoolteachers. Thirty-seven percent reported sharing results with other museum educators, on an informal basis. Twenty-five percent reported their willingness to share results with others if requested, but did not take an active role in distributing information. Only one participant reported assessment results through printed reports for the public and related conferences for professional sharing. These findings indicate that museum education
departments are not readily sharing and publishing their results, but would share results when required or in partnership with another institution. This lack of sharing also indicates a lack of awareness of what occurs at other institutions. This could have an overall affect on the greater institution if not kept informed of current practices.

Effectiveness of assessment. Participants were asked if they thought assessment efforts had been an effective tool in their museum, and how. All (100%) of the participants reported assessment being an effective tool for their museums. Seventy-five percent of the participants explained how assessment had benefited the department or museum. Participant F had made, “more thoughtful and rigorous in the design of our programs in terms of defining goals, objectives and action plans.” Participant A also reported having a better focus on goals and objectives. Other participants explained how assessment led to improved programming. Participant B had “changed programs and interpretive elements as a result of assessment.” While Participant C and H both used assessment to make changes in programs.

Chapter Summary

Many issues in art museum education assessment were discovered through these findings. There are three key themes in these findings affecting current assessment practices; available resources, communication and the individual educator. The available resources included, time (their time and others), funding, and research. Communication refers to the network between museum educators and professionals sharing information among institutions and even within an institution. The individual educator is the most varied with the educator’s personal knowledge as well as the institutional setting greatly affecting assessment practices.

Time as a resource was an issue for all of the participants. Museum educators in this study reported a lack of their own time as a great disadvantage in being able to create and implement assessment projects. Time was also a factor for the museum visitor and other museum staff who are involved in the program being assessed. Linked with time, funding was also an issue that all of the museum educators found to hinder assessment. Most of the educators were working with limited budgets that do not include areas for assessment. When funding was available, for example, written into a grant, then the assessment was more likely to happen. It was found that access to research was also a factor of resources. Many educators admitted to not having access to scholarly research after graduating and not having the time to find current research.

It was found that educators do not readily share assessment results and research with each other. A lack of communication can hinder practices in assessment. Educators shared information with granting agencies and school systems when appropriate, but even within an institution, educators were not readily sharing results with coworkers. The results of an assessment can lead to improvements in programs, departments, and administration. Another factor in communicating with other institutions, the information becomes a resource for other educators. Museum educators involved in assessment can refer to other museums that may have had similar experiences and can contribute to the growing body of information on best practices.

The individual situation greatly influences assessment practices. First, the personal knowledge and experience that an educator brings with them is a factor. Some of the participants had worked for granting agencies with strict assessment policies, so creating an assessment program was commonplace. On the other side of experience, there were those with hardly any experience in museum education and no schooling or experience in assessment at all. It was difficult for that participant to incorporate assessment into a program without any previous knowledge. The other factor is the institutional setting. Each museum had a certain structure and
size, and each administration had its own philosophy guiding the progress of that museum. This affects the educator in several ways. First, an educator may have to wear many hats around the museum, not being able to devote his or her time solely to educational pursuits. Second, even if the educator is allowed to just focus on education, some museums have a large list of demands on what programming is accomplished throughout the year. Third, the guiding administration may have unique ways of operating. Some of the participants had to perform assessment of programs regularly as administrative directives, where some museums had no requirements for assessment.

Assessment is occurring in the museums, but not consistently and there are currently no prominent resources or standards guiding current practitioners. These findings presented an array of activities in art museum education assessment, and lead to many questions and possibilities for future studies within museum education assessment.
CONCLUSIONS

This study is an initial step in a line of questions about the future of museum education assessment. There is clearly assessment of programming occurring in the museum. Most importantly 100 percent of the sample reported that some level of assessment was required in their institutions. This study focused on the attitudes of practitioners affecting assessment in the museum. Durant (1996) proposed that the philosophies of the museum and education department influence the approach to the object and the visitor. This study has proven those philosophies also affect assessment practices. This first step in documenting attitudes of professionals is a crucial step in understanding where research in assessment needs to be directed. In order to prescribe recommendations for the future it is important to examine what is happening in the present. There are several areas concerning assessment examined in these conclusions, including, the current state of museum assessment, the views and attitudes of practitioners, the resulting affect on each institution, and a need to create a common vernacular or framework for the future..

1. What is assessment in museum education? What are museum education practitioners assessing? What activities are current in the field of museum education under the pretext of assessment?

Current state of assessment

There is a great difference in institutions when it comes to museum education assessment practices. This study has shown a lack of cohesion among institutions when it comes to assessment. Assessment is occurring in museums, but is not shown to have consistent standards or guiding philosophies. If a practice has no professional standards, it is up to the individual to interpret how to proceed. It is evident of the 8 participants, that each has a unique style and view when it comes to how assessment is conducted. When it comes to assessment in the museum, it is shown that museum professionals are performing assessment but at a variety of levels, usually found only to fulfill an outside requirement. If, for the most part, practitioners are not using assessment on a regular basis or to its full potential, assessment opportunities are being lost.

Principle four of assessment theory states that evaluation is best served when it is an integrated part of a program, and is ongoing (Gorman 2007a). There is a need to examine why museums are not incorporating assessment from the beginning of a program and using it as an ongoing tool.

For some institutions, it is still a numbers game. This means museums are assessing their visitors, but the majority of assessment is based on numbers served and satisfaction levels. Measuring numbers served and satisfaction level was a trend in the early beginnings of assessment in museums, and plays a vital role in gathering statistics and basic data about visitors. Museums had to react to something so taking a cue from corporate visitor surveys, many museums rushed to implement a visitor survey (Korn 2007). Visitor surveys can be shallow and inconclusive according to Hudson (1993). There is a correlation between satisfaction level and learning level as seen through the contextual model by Falk and Dierking(2002a). However as education in the museum grows, assessment of the programming is not seeing a parallel of growth. If the programming is changing, why is the assessment not changing? One of the principles of assessment was to use a variety of tools to fit the changing need (Gorman 2007a).

One of the discoveries in this study was who was guiding the assessment. The majority of the institutions performed assessment due to a grant or community partnership in which the other institution required assessment. This most often created assessment through a third party, meaning someone other than the museum practitioner was creating the program evaluation. If an institution is relying on third party assessment measures, there is no guarantee that the museum is
assessing something valuable to their institution or program. In the larger picture any evaluation has a benefit, but if a practitioner is not engaged in an assessment plan, they are less likely to perform the assessment (Gorman 2007b). This also leads to the question of motivation. What is the partnering institutions motivation for requiring assessment, and who is responsible for the content of the assessment?

2. What views and attitudes do museum education practitioners have about assessment? How does this influence assessment practices in each institution?

One of the goals of this study was to document the values, beliefs, and attitudes of practitioners and the affect this had on assessment. The first principle of assessment is that these ideas do influence and direct assessment practices. It is there for vital that the ideas of practitioners be examined before making any assumptions or recommendations about current or future practice.

Overall the idea of assessment was seen as a need, but the attitudes about assessment were not as welcoming as the apparent need. There is still a great debate about what should be assessed, and how experience, learning and education play into that confusion. Without reading the biographies of each participant, one can make many correct assumptions about their position in the museum and their overwhelming concern. For example one participant called the museum visitor “student” and talked in depth about testing learning. This correlates to the fact that this participant was a school group coordinator and spent most of their time with students and school group needs. As reviewed the development of museum education and what constitutes programming in the museum has grown dramatically over the past several decades, and encompasses very diverse programs for the diverse needs or an even more diverse audience (Hooper-Greenhill 2003a). Interestingly the majority of practitioners saw museum education, and their responsibilities as a holistic experience, using museum education programming to not just teach, but engage the visitors. While this is apparent in several layers of responses, this is most reflective in the way practitioners referred to the museum visitor as “participant.” This is an indication of changing philosophies in museum education. Education in the museum is no longer just thought of as a place for learning, where educators teach. Museum educators are engaging their visitors to create a holistic experience. Practitioners are still viewing assessment, however, as a needed activity for testing. There is not much flexibility in the views on assessment that create a holistic assessment of programming. Museums are growing in the scope of their education practices but assessment is still using old models of what information is needed. If an experience in the museum is holistic, touching on experience and learning, then an assessment model should be holistic and touch on the experience and learning.

Like Falk and Dierking (1997) explained each museum visitor has a focus when they come to the museum, like a beam from a flashlight, they never see everything only what is in their beam. The practitioner has a similar fashion when it comes to their job. A person has a focus area in their job, and it is apparent in the responses about assessment and programming where each practitioner focuses their time when it comes to assessment.

Having a variety of views and attitudes influencing assessment practices creates a question for the future, should there be one person in the museum specially trained for assessment or should a museum employ all of their staff to create assessment plans for their sections in the museum. This may ultimately be answered by the available resources and structure of the museum, but it does raise the question of whose values, beliefs and attitudes are being used to create the evaluation. Another question to who is influencing the evaluation is the idea of partnering institutions requiring assessment. The overwhelming majority of participants
reported on performing assessment because of a requirement through a grant or partnership. If an outside requirement forces the practitioner to perform assessment, is it the outside party or is it the museum’s creation. In this study it was found that assessment is both created by practitioners and assigned to practitioners depending on the nature of the partnering organization or granting agency. This begs the question, of what outside values, beliefs and attitudes are influencing the assessment. If the practitioner is not creating the assessment they have no control over the content. Ultimately all information can be beneficial to an institution, but the priorities of the assessment creator may not be in line with all parties concerned. If a grant I still playing a numbers game, and only asking for facts of the situation, does this do justice to the program. How can numbers served be an indication of the quality of a program, or the benefit to the visitor. In many cases it was found that museum practitioners felt if they were meeting the needs of the required assessment, they did not have to perform their own assessment. This is an indication of a reform needed in the views of assessment. Most important to assessment theory is that assessment be used to guide improvement. If a practitioner is following someone else’s line of questioning, then how can they translate that into a benefit for their program.

3. How can results be organized and synthesized to provide standards and recommendations for future assessment practices in art museums?

One of the main factors found in practitioners was a lack of resources, including time and funding. This is an indication that there is a need for a system or framework of assessment. Many practitioners had no formal training in assessment, and performed a variety of assessment practices but with no theory backing it. The field of museum education is currently being remolded and some would say revolutionized, this is because of a great need to create a more stringent professionalization of the field. Researchers and practitioners alike are creating grounded theory, learning theory and applying other models to the museum field in order to best show the education practices in museums. If all of the programming in a museum is done under a learning theory, why is assessment not done under a similar theory. This study has shown that many practitioners are stuck, doing what they have always done. While some assessment is better then none, misguided assessment does not always have the best impact for the institution. In this case time and resources are crucial in creating and implementing assessment plans. This would indicate that assessment needs to be focused and narrowed to make sure assessment practices are seeking the right information to utilize time and resources effectively.

Another issue facing participants is not being informed on current research because of the complexities in museum experience, education, learning, and art. Again time was a factor for not keeping informed with current trends and research in assessment. This indicates a need to disseminate evaluation and assessment research to a broader audience in a more efficient way. If practitioners are informed on current trends, it might make assessment planning more accessible.

Recommendations for art museum education program assessment

The guiding philosophies and beliefs about museum education and assessment are so diverse in any institution that a universal assessment plan is impossible. However, a framework for how to perform assessment could be a starting point for future assessment. This framework could provide a foundation for assessment in the museum and give a common structure for all research to be analyzed. This would increase the communication between researchers, educators, and practitioners. There are two key models to create a framework for museum education assessment. First Kirkpatrick’s (2003) model for training program evaluation gives a structure to what is being assessed. Second, Falk and Dierking’s (2002) contextual model gives
understanding of how programs are being assessed. An examination of each model is necessary to understand why each part is essential to the final framework.

*Kirkpatrick’s levels in the museum.* In the museum, experience is the key to any learning, benefits, or growth. The experience in a museum first relates with the reaction level in Kirkpatrick’s model. Experience often leads to learning, but learning in the museum can be more complex than a training program. Learning in the museum is not just about acquiring new facts and data easily tested or measured (Rennie & Johnston, 2004). Learning in the museum is also about the long-term effects of new knowledge and understanding to gain appreciation and empathy (Falk & Storksdieck, 2005). This transfer from learning to knowledge affects a person’s behavior (Falk & Dierking, 2000), and lines up with Kirkpatrick’s (2003) model level of behavior.

In the museum, even if facts are not the objective of learning, appreciation can have profound effects on a person’s behavior and attitudes (Falk & Dierking, 2002b). In a training program, the changes in participants ultimately affect the company. In the museum field, the results go beyond affecting or benefiting the company (museum). In the museum, the results level questions, not just how the program affected the museum, but how the program affected the community. Results do occur on an institutional level, for example, an education program can influence the structure of a museum, even changing the direction of collections. However, in the museum, it is also important to factor the results and benefits seen beyond the institution. There are many dynamics to the results of a museum program seen in the individual’s social circle, the community, society and the museum (Falk & Dierking, 2002).

*The four levels as framework.* Kirkpatrick places these levels on a hierarchical scale seen in figure 11. These levels are appropriate to finding the result and benefits to a company, because the nature of learning and benefits is sequential in a training program. To use these levels as a framework in the museum, however, I have modified the levels into sectors, as seen in figure 12.

![Figure 11. Kirkpatrick’s 4 levels of assessment](image)
This modification to the original framework is necessary for two reasons. First, learning is not required in the museum as in a training program. The museum is a place of free-choice learning (Falk & Dierking, 2002b) where the style and amount of learning is up to the individual. Second, the museum experience is not only about working towards the result. In training programs, the ultimate result is positively affecting the company. This occurs through a trainee progressing through the levels. In a museum, however, visitors do not follow a regime of progression. Visitors have their own experiences depending on physical, personal, and socio-cultural context (Falk & Dierking); therefore, they drift through and around several sectors in no prescribed order. In a radial diagram, as seen in figure 12 (Gorman 2007a), there is a new perspective on the relationships of the four sectors, more applicable to the museum experience. Each sector can be analyzed alone, but there is also a relationship created within the quadrants, where an additional area can be analyzed for comparison of two different sectors. The most important feature to modifying Kirkpatrick’s model for the museum is to eliminate the hierarchy or structure of learning, because the museum is not just learning but it is experience.

**Contextual Model as Framework**

The experience is crucial in assessing museum education programming. Kirkpatrick’s model explains what is being assessed in the different levels, but does not include the complexities of the museum context and experience. Falk and Dierking’s (2003) contextual model offers a frame for factors in the museum context, influencing the museum experience, but are incomplete in assessment theory. The context of personal, social, and physical explains how each context contributes influence to the museum experience.

**Two Models, One Frame**

Through a modification of Kirkpatrick’s model, an emerging framework can be organized to fit the needs of the museum. While this structure alone is not complete, coupling it with current museum experience research from Falk and Dierking (2003) gives a near complete view of museum experience and learning assessment. Researchers can utilize these initial structures to organize how and why research is conducted.

It is necessary to combine both models into one framework to give insights into the larger picture of museum education program assessment. Figure 13 represents the combination of these models as a basis for determining what inquiries are made in this study.
In the first sector, program evaluation is divided into Kirkpatrick’s (2003) levels, however as stated before these are no longer in hierarchical order. The sectors are divided as a way to organize what is being assessed in the museum. This provides a clear delineation of what assessment measures. Next, Falk and Dierking’s (2002a) Contextual model is used as a filter to find the influential aspects to the museum visit. This provides an understanding of how the museum context influences the assessment sectors. Finally, these are projected into the methods, tools, instruments, and techniques for use in research appropriate to the sectors and contexts. Each assessment sector and each museum context require a different approach. The research methods for measuring learning is different than the research methods for measuring satisfaction, just as the components of the physical context are much different than the personal context affecting the overall experience. The combination of assessment sectors and museum contexts create a framework for this study. This is model is not proposing a universal assessment strategy for every museum, however it is proposing a universal vernacular. If museum practitioners work in the same language, comparison of projects can become more accessible. This would mean a greater ease to share techniques and results, allowing more institutions to engage in assessment while spending less time and resources on development and planning.

Limitations of the study

A limitation of the study was in the scope of the study. While efforts were made to include diverse educators from diverse institutions a blind study can only give so much information. The challenges educators face, like budget and time restraints, cannot fully be understood or analyzed in this study to indicate why assessment does or does not occur because of a lack of information. Another limitation was that this survey did not examine the actual tools currently used in enough detail. The content of the assessment practices could give greater indication of how the philosophies of practitioners affect overall assessment.

Suggestions for further research

The influence of the educator’s philosophy was fundamental in the guiding practices of assessment in each institution. This indicates a need to examine the backgrounds and professional experiences of the museum educator in greater depth. Museum education is a field, like many, where there are no standards or professional guidelines or criteria for job placement, and educators come from a wide background of experience and former careers. In the same vein, the philosophies of the museum and the other professionals that influence the education department should be examined to understand the influence of personalities on education programming and assessment. The professionalization of the field of museum education could work towards assessment in two ways; first, professionalization could actually increase the need...
for assessment, but second, assessment could actually create the need for professionalization. The dynamics of new programming emerging philosophies, diverse professionalization and assessment and accountability are all factors for further study, in what is guiding assessment.

One of the major reasons for assessment discovered in this survey was to fulfill grant requirements. This links to a correlation between the need for assessment and the purpose of assessment. If educators are only performing assessments as part of a requirement, it raises the question what is required. An area for further study is the study of grant and partnership requirements. As stated this includes an examination of who is creating the assessment, as this study indicated the great influence of philosophies about assessment on practices. There is also a need to examine what the outside parties are asking for. The agendas for any institution may be much different, while museum educators need to balance quantity and quality of programming across the department, the needs of the outside party maybe much different. Who is asking and what is being asked is an essential next step, as partnerships and grant requirements are currently a driving force creating assessment needs in the museum.

Another area for further study was found in the responses of the participants. Most of the educational programming that did not involve direct learning (e.g., school groups), like social events or lectures did not have any form of assessment. This could be an area to make great strides in program assessment. The assessment of social programming in museums creates an opportunity to study all three contexts of the museum experience in one event, where learning is not the primary objective, but learning may be a benefit. If researchers are calling for learning theory to be in place for every program (Ebitz 2007), then where do the events coordinated under the museum education departments fall? Every museum education department is different and some practitioners are responsible for more then others, but this line of research would ask where is the true benefit of the event, and why does it fall under the department of education?

Chapter Summary

The beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies of the educator greatly influence the assessment practices of an institution. This study has opened a gate for further study into the influences of assessment practices in the museum. By mapping the current influences of what affects assessment; practitioners and researchers can move forward to find a universal framework. A universal framework could be the key to comparing and sharing assessment research in a more efficient way across institutions. Opening up communication lines among practitioners and between researchers and practitioners could effectively produce greater strides in assessment research and practice in the museum.

This study identified a major deficiency in museum assessment was a foundational assessment theory. Incorporating Kirkpatrick’s (2003) model into museum assessment provides the founding framework needed to move forward through program evaluation for museums. By incorporating Kirkpatrick’s model elements, and Falk and Dierking’s (2002a) contextual model, the museum field can move towards a holistic approach to assessment to measure experience and learning and the relationship of experience and learning in the context of the museum.
APPENDIX A
Practitioner Survey Questions

Survey questions have been formulated to answer the research questions in this study. Each is based on discrepancies or inconsistencies found in the current museum education and evaluation research. Questions will be electronically formatted and distributed through survey software?

What is the current state of museum education assessment in art museums?
- What is assessment in museum education? (Falk & Dierking, 2002a; Martin, 2004; Miles 1993)
  - Practitioner questions:
    - What is assessment? How do you define it?
    - How do you react to it, how do you respond to it?
    - What is your first reaction to assessment? What do you think of?
- What are museum education practitioners assessing? (Sheppard, 2000; Wetterlund & Sayer, 2003; Williams 1996)
  - Practitioner questions:
    - What do you consider assessment in your work?
    - Do you use assessment in your work at the museum, why or why not?
    - What parts of a program do you feel need to be assessed?
- What research is being done in the field of museum education under the guise of assessment? (Pekarik, 2004; Rennie & Johnston, 2004)
  - Practitioner questions:
    - Are you informed on current museum education assessment research? Where do you find that information.
    - Are you able to implement assessment plans and programs according to what you have researched.
    - Do you perform assessment tasks that you have not read about in research? If so what are they?
- What views and attitudes do museum education practitioners have about assessment? (Kelly, 2000; Mathewson, 2003; Rice, 1995)
  - Practitioner questions:
    - Briefly describe your philosophy of museum education?
    - How do you think this influences your views and attitudes on assessment?
    - Do you share your results outside of the museum? How? In-house Reports, Presentations, Professional Publications, Word of Mouth
- How does this influence assessment practices in each institution? What are assessment practices in each institution? (Mayer, 2005; Soren, 2000; Weil, 2000)
  - Practitioner questions
    - Is assessment of programming required? By what department/personal? Are you on a schedule(required per …?)
    - Who is responsible for the assessment of educational programs in your museum?
What percentage of your time is devoted to assessment of programming?
If not you, do you know what percent of other staff spends time on assessment
Who designs the assessment? Are you aware of any standards or sources used in creating assessment projects? If yes which standards do you use?

What forms of assessment do you use?
Visitor studies, pre/post tests, focus groups, interviews, observations

How can results be organized and synthesized to provide standards and recommendations for future assessment practices in art museum? (Hicks, 1996; Korn, 2003; Sheppard, 2000)

Practitioner questions:
How are the results of an assessment used? Who uses them?
Do you think assessment has been an effective tool, how or how not?
How often is assessment integrated into a program?
Beginning, Throughout, End, Other ________

Please review the following list and mark the current programs your institution offers and the types of assessment currently involved in. (see chart below).(Loomis, 1987; Wetterlund & Sayer, 2003)

Additional Information: Name, Institution, Position, # of years worked in current position, # of years worked in museum education, # of years worked in museums How many people are employed(paid or volunteer) in the education department
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tour Programs</th>
<th>Check if your museum offers these educational programs</th>
<th>Visitor Surveys / Questionnaire</th>
<th>Staff Evaluation</th>
<th>Outside Auditor Assessment</th>
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<td>Public tours</td>
<td>Check all assessment practices that apply for each program your institution offers</td>
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<td>Special exhibition tours</td>
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<td>Informal Gallery Learning</td>
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<td>Classes &amp; Public Programming</td>
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<td>Outreach programs</td>
<td>School/teacher conferencing</td>
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Dear Participants
October 2007,

You have been selected to participate in an online survey about museum education. My name is Amy Gorman. I am a doctoral candidate at The Florida State University working on my dissertation research. This study is a review of the current assessment practices in art museum education.

The objectives of the study are to document trends and practices in museum assessment, and to examine needs for the future of museum education assessment. Your participation will not only help with this dissertation, but it will contribute to the field of museum education.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Your privacy will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. This is an online survey that poses minimal risks to your physical person. Results will be separated from your personal information, so there is minimal risk for your responses to be connected to your name and contact information. For further information about privacy policies you can contact The Florida State University, Office of Research at http://www.research.fsu.edu/humansubjects/index.html

I am the sole researcher and your personal information will not be stored with your responses to keep your responses as anonymous as possible. Data will be kept on my personal computer, which is password protected to maximize the privacy protection of your responses. All of the raw data responses will be destroyed at the end of the study, or in 6 months, whichever is sooner.

You will be asked a series of questions on your current involvement in assessment at your institution, as well as your beliefs and philosophies about education, museums and assessment that guide those practices. This link will bring you to an online survey, www.artmuseumeducation.org/survey.html, by continuing onto this survey you are giving your consent to participate. You can then continue through the online survey. The survey should take around 30 to 45 minutes.

Thank you for your time and consideration. This information can help contribute to the future of our field and your participation is a vital part of analyzing the current condition of museum education. If you have any questions you can call or email me at 850-443-3923 or akg1614@fsu.edu, or contact my major professor Pat Villeneuve at 850-644-1915 or pvillene@fsu.edu.

Sincerely

Amy Gorman
Doctoral Candidate
Florida State University
From: Human Subjects [mailto:humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu]
Sent: Friday, September 28, 2007 4:44 PM
To: akgorman@yahoo.com
Cc: pvillene@fsu.edu
Subject: Use of Human Subjects in Research - Approval Memorandum

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 . FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM
Date: 9/28/2007
To: Amy Gorman
Address: 104 Burning Tree Lane, Boca Raton, FL 33431
Dept.: ART EDUCATION
From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
Assessment Practices in Florida Art Museums

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use
of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed
by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects
Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR §
46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for
scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the
aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This
approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may
be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the
approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only
the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting
research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 9/22/2008 you must request a
renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a
renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date;
however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely
request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Pat Villeneuve, Advisor
HSC No. 2007.671
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amy Gorman, a native Floridian, studied at Florida Atlantic University, where she received a BA in art history and a BFA in studio photography. While pursuing an MFA in studio arts at Florida State University, she maintained a commercial photography studio and freelance graphic design business. Gorman continued her studies in the art education doctoral program at Florida State University. While studying she maintained her studio arts and exhibited across the state of Florida and in regional venues, while also working at a variety of museums in different capacities. Gorman is currently the Curator of Education at the Muscarelle Museum of Art at The College of William & Mary, in Williamsburg, VA.