UN-DISCIPLINING THE ART MUSEUM:

MUSEUM EDUCATORS, INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES,

AND PROCESSES OF CHANGE

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

SCHOOL OF ART

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

WITH A MAJOR IN ART HISTORY AND EDUCATION

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2018

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I offer abundant thanks to my committee members. The work you do is so invaluable. You are incredible mentors, role models, and educators. Manisha Sharma, you have had a profound impact on me and I am so grateful for the intellectual influence you have had on my academic career. Thank you for challenging me, inspiring me, and introducing me to theoretical frameworks that will forever shape how I understand my role as an educator. Ryan Shin, you have always been so supportive and generous with your feedback and time. I cannot imagine my academic experience without your support. Thank you for everything you do.

To my dissertation chair, Elizabeth Garber, I offer the most heartfelt and humble gratitude. You are wonderful. Thank you for always making me feel like a smart and capable educator and researcher. You have given me the best advice. I am where I am today because of your mentorship. Thank you for working with me from afar and being here for this incredible milestone in my life.

Finally, I must thank all of the educators who participated in this research. Thank you for your time and willingness to share your experiences. What you do inspires me everyday.

DEDICATION

Coming from a strong lineage of educators, I dedicate this to those in the world who position themselves as teachers and collaborators in learning. What you do is invaluable to society.

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ABSTRACT

Within this dissertation I explore the experiences of art museum educators (including me) who are working to bridge education and curation in the museum space. I find inspiration for this research in my own experiments with curatorial projects, the recent body of literature that calls for more integrative approaches to education and curation, and the call for museums to create more relevant content with and for audiences. Over the course of nine months I interviewed four educators, visited and documented museum sites, and reflected on my own practice in order to understand how museum educators are navigating new modes of working. In the following pages, I share the experiences and perspectives of the art museum educators who participated in this research. I then analyze the findings through two disparate frameworks in order to explain why change in museums is often difficult due to institutional structures and how art museum educators create opportunities for change through acts of un-disciplining and re-imagining museum work. Through this research, I hope to present new and different ways of understanding the work of museum educators, highlighting how their approach to the projects investigated in this project reflect significant potentiality in shifting museum ideology and practice.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

The impetus for this research comes from the continually changing roles of museum educators in art museums and the inherently linked complexity of museum practice as a field that is in constant flux. It also comes from a very personal and reflective place. As a student of art museum education and as a practitioner with museums, I use this research as a way to investigate specific aspects of my chosen profession that I have been navigating for over ten years. When I reflect on my practice I often ponder the decisions I make, from where those decisions stem, and what factors influence those decisions the most. I grapple with the expectations of my institution(s) and communities and I take note of the ever-changing expectations that are placed on professionals working in an art museum setting. In this research endeavor, I explore the personal experiences of art museum educators (including me) who are working during a significant paradigm shift in museum practice. Particularly, I explore a current movement that places education in closer alignment to curatorial practice. At the heart of my inquiry lies the effort by museums to bridge educational commitments (engagement, the public, community) to curatorial concerns (museum holdings, exhibition content and themes). Moreover, it is an investigation into how these two functions of the museum operate in tandem to provide new opportunities for community engagement, education, exhibition development and imagining how museums operate.

In all honesty I began this research project from a somewhat naive perspective. Perhaps I was overly optimistic about the transformations that I was witnessing in some museums and reading about in published material. In recent years I have visited what I

see as forward-looking spaces where museum content and educational processes were challenging museum norms. I took interest in museum practice, spaces, and literature where education and community involvement are represented more often and are situated in equal weight to exhibition content. As I began my inquiry, I hypothesized that curators and educators were working in sync with one another more frequently for targeted efforts of combining exhibition content with educational and community connections in mind. What is more, my assumption in identifying specific museums (with particular spaces where education and community were visibly present in exhibition content) was that there must be new and innovative collaborative strategies at play. Upon reaching out to museum educators, I quickly found out this is not always the case. As I will reveal in the pages of this research document, while there certainly are changes being made in the field, they are not as frequent or transparent as I imagined. Shifting practices and conceptualizations are subtle, they vary from place to place and project to project, they are often not engrained in the system of the museum, and they depend on specific individuals to lead the way towards transformation.

Purpose of the Study

In this research study I explore how art museum practice can be understood through the voices, experiences, and perspectives of museum educators who are involved in professional duties of curation, which has historically been separate from and often institutionally considered more important than the development of education. While I recognize that curators, artists, educators, and other museum professionals have been moving beyond their specialized positions in some capacity for a significant amount of time, the purpose of this research is to understand how the specific movements between

curation and education play out across different institutions and how the movements are

experienced by the art museum educators that are engaged with such practice. I am

approaching this research from a standpoint that assumes as the expectations of museum

professionals become more tightly bound and inter-connected, the attitudes, ways of

working, and the outcomes evolve. I focus on art museum educators (as opposed to

curators, directors, or artists) because, as I highlight in chapter two, the recent and

consistent focus on educational initiatives in museums places educators in a particularly

unique position. Within the last 30 years a substantial body of literature has formed,

which explores the different ways that museum practice has changed and continues to

change based on educationally-driven and community-minded motivations. These shifts

are not easy and come with added expectations for museum education workers. As noted

by the American Association of Museums (2008) report *Excellence and Equity,* "today

most museums continue to struggle with the political realities of implementing the

primary premise to combine intellectual rigor with the inclusion of a broader spectrum of

our diverse society. With increased responsibility and scrutiny, the museum educator's

role has been shifted, revised, reformed, and stretched in unimaginable ways" (p. 8).

Similarly, museum professionals and researchers like Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2001,

2007); Gail Anderson (2012); Stephen Weil (2002); John Falk and Lynn Dierking (2013);

Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (2010); Lisa Roberts, (1997); Terry Smith (2012); &

Villeneuve & Love, (2017) among many others have written extensively about the role of

the educator and education in contemporary museum practice that seeks to address a

historically perceived lack of relevancy or commitment to communities beyond the art

world. They have also situated the educator in a key role for re-conceptualizing the

purposes and actions of museums. Taken individually the ideas presented by these authors exemplify small, incremental change, but when reviewing them in aggregate it is clear that there is a significant transformation occurring in the museum field; one that is disrupting the long historical notion of what museums are and how they operate.

Since their inception, museums have been defined as being, among many other things, educational institutions and places of learning. Education in museums has historically been recognized as a key component of the museum's mission, but the design, function, and presence of education has always and continues to vary widely - especially in art museums. Policies and societal influences over the years have influenced museum practice so that educational praxis is now deeply embedded in the literature regarding museums. In many instances, education is no longer playing a supporting role to the duties of collecting and exhibition development, but rather is considered as a key element in the museum's purpose. As noted by Hooper-Greenhill (1999), "the museum's educational role is becoming more integrated into [the museum's] core identity" (p. xii). The turn of education from a peripheral role to a central role in museums has significant implications for museum professionals involved in the development of learning opportunities. It also has implications for the pedagogical ideologies that influence the ways in which education is understood and thus practiced in the museum space.

Beyond this body of literature there have been many colloquial discussions that revolve around what education *is* in the context of the museum, who qualifies as a curator, and whose voice or creative work can be included in the content of an exhibition.

As an art educator who has been practicing in the field of museum education for ten years, I have heard and been involved in many conversations about what constitutes the varied roles of education and community engagement in the museum space. I have also been a part of museum projects that are actively defying the tendency to work in professional silos and are set up to be more thoughtful in considering how we work and with whom we join together for our work. Exploring the experiences of museum educators who are navigating new territories in educational and curatorial practice is the basis of my research and throughout this paper I explore what this effort looks like, how it impacts educators' experiences, and how it informs the basis for museum work. While it is easy to situate this research into conversations about interpretation (which would make sense) it is about more than that. This project is about structured systems, normalized ideas and modes of working, traditional practice, shifting behaviors and concepts, and how all of these things effect and are effected by people operating within museums.

Posing Questions: Understanding the Art Museum Educators' Experiences

My research originates from my personal experiences as well as my interest in the perspectives and insights of colleagues in the field of art museum education. While there are many ways that educators, curators, and other museum staff are working to diversify ideas and engagement within the museum and their local communities, the processes and outcomes of bridging curation with education are of particular interest to me. I explore this inclination for practice because many practicing educators, including me, see the value in and need for this kind of work. I argue that museums can and must do better in addressing the common disassociation between the work they put on view and the

communities they serve. I perceive this research as being significant for art museum

educators, and I also believe it to be informative for the larger context of museum studies.

In order to explore these interests I pose the following research questions:

- What are the experiences and perspectives of art museum educators who are
  involved in contemporary museum practice that aligns education with curation
  (either collaboratively or individually)?

- What are the institutional structures and dynamics at play within these art
  museum educators' experiences? And how do these institutional dynamics and
  structures influence the educators' conceptualization and practice of art museum
  work?

- How are art museum educators changing normative, standard, and
  institutionalized museum practice?

Exploring the Institutionalized Tendencies of Museum Work

As I engaged with the people, exhibition spaces, the educators' practices, and

findings within this research, the notion of institutionalization and all of its implicated

complexity became key to my reading and analysis of my findings. My decision to utilize

institutional theory as a framework for understanding, which I explore at length in

Chapter Five, came out of the process through which I placed my initial findings in direct

conversation with historical and contemporary writing on museums, museum education,

curation, and collaborative practice. In so doing, I quickly realized that the stories,

experiences, and exhibition spaces of the educators involved in this research were not that

different from the stories and perspectives of writings of the past. Calls for museum

relevancy, greater community engagement, stronger educational missions, more inclusive

curatorial and educational projects, and how these measures should occur have been proposed by researchers and practitioners for decades. Upon seeing the connections between my current inquiry and the historical discourse, I asked myself questions about the nature of museums and why certain conversations are seemingly always at the fore. I also started to look into theories that might help explain the nature and structure of social systems such as museums. I was curious about organizational and institutional dynamics. I was interested about the seemingly unwavering stability of institutions. These curiosities led to the creation of my second and third research questions, and thus why I situate my research in relationship to discourse on institutional theory.

In defining the concept of institutions Scott (2001) notes, "institutions refer to relatively enduring systems of social beliefs and socially organized practices associated with varying functional arenas within societal systems" (p. 13). As explored by theorists and researchers such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Hee (2015), Lawrence and Shadnam (2009), Meyer (1977), Rowan (1977), Scott (2001, 2008), Thorton (2008), and Zucker and Scott (1996), among many others, institutional theory (a) deals with deep rooted and resilient aspects of social organization; (b) considers the processes and means by which certain behaviors, practices, rules, and beliefs become engrained in social structures; (c) explores how and why such behaviors are created and adapted over time; and (d) looks into the ways that institutions resist and produce change. In placing my initial findings in conversation with institutional theory, I make the case for why some aspects of museum practice remain stagnant and in some ways a source of frustration for museum workers attempting to shift larger (or smaller) trends in the field.

Un-Disciplining the Museum: Art Museum Educators and Markers of Change

Despite the fact that museums are, for the most part, conservative and slow moving institutions, there are incredible moments of productive work and transformation occurring within the field. The educators in this research are engaged with acts of change and what I argue are movements towards un-disciplining normative ways of working, thinking, and creating meaning in museums. Un-disciplining speaks to and extends the tenets of Institutional Theory, which focus on the key role of disciplines, professionalization, and moral standard-making bodies in the perpetuation of normative and repetitive behavior. Un-disciplining as a framework also focuses on the processual nature of museum work – whether it is institutionalized work or un-disciplining work. The analysis that focuses on un-dicsiplining highlights the actions of change and how art museum educators are working through and beyond the standard ways of operating. The actions are often subtle and discrete, but they can have lasting impact on how museum professionals imagine their work.

Turning to multiple researchers, theorists, and writers such as Ben-Ari and Enosh (2010), Darbellay (2015), Davies (2003), Holland (1999), Pieprzak (2000), Purpura and DeSouza (2013), Robinson (2018), Rogoff (2000), Rogoff and Nasar (2011), all from differing fields of knowledge, I situate the idea of un-disciplining as a key concept in the shifting practices, attitudes, and understandings of museum work. As will be explored at length in chapter six, the notion of un-disciplining a) places *process* at the forefront of how we conceptualize museums, b) focuses on the importance of moving beyond or collaborating outside of one's disciplined background as a means of creating new ideas, c) highlights the importance of reconception and reflectivity as key acts to breaking from

disciplined and redundant knowledge production, and d) explores the ways in which positionality and translation serve to challenge normative ideations in regards to how museums work and who participates in museum knowledge

Significance

When I began my research in the spring of 2015 there was not a substantial body of literature on educators' roles in curatorial processes. As was and often still is the case, the act of choosing exhibition content and the act of conceptualizing education in the galleries were two separate functions. Researchers were just beginning to address this issue three years ago. There were significant writings that *called* for more integrated models of collaboration between education and curation (Hooper-Greenhill, 2005, Roberts, 2001, Villenueve, 2007), but very few focused on the *lived* experiences and perceptions of art museum educators. Most of the writing functioned as an appeal to action, which is important and inspiring, but not telling of the daily lives of educators in the field. What is more, the literature that did focus on art museum education and collaboration was centered on community-based practice. This is, of course, not a bad thing. However, there was not a lot of material connecting educators, curators, and community together with the intention of making exhibitions and museums more relevant, applicable, and considerate of a broader range of people. In the summer of 2017, which was in the midst of my research, a new anthology entitled *Visitor-Centered Exhibitions and Edu-Curation in Art Museums* (Villeneuve & Love, 2017) was published. This seminal collection of essays was right in line with my research, as it places the educator's voice firmly in the discourse with various museum constituents regarding education, curation, community, and the collaborative actions that bridge the

historical disconnect between all three. Instead of seeing the curatorial, educational, and community-based functions of the museum as separate, siloed, and exclusive spaces, the chapters in this book bring these practices into conversation with one another. What is more, they highlight the everyday experiences of museum educators who are navigating the restrictive boundaries of museum work. The ideas presented throughout the book bring the theories of art museum education into direct contact with the practical ways that educators work, which is incredibly important to students of the museum field. Upon reading through the book, I immediately compared my initial findings to the ideas in each chapter, drawing connections between the authors' statements and the findings from my research. Extending the associations I found and placing the findings into conversation with different theoretical lenses, I place my research into the historical and contemporary trajectory of art museum educators reflecting on their practice and openly sharing their experiences.

In his essay "Re-configuring Museums," Peter Welsh (2005) argues that continued self-reflection and theorization on behalf of museum professionals "can help museums to better understand how they have positioned themselves for the future" (p. 103). His argument is based in an analysis of the larger socio-cultural significance of the museum, which encourages museum professionals to theorize their practice as a way to account for the complexities that surround their institutions and the way they approach museum programming. He further argues that understanding the professional, institutional, and social complexities that surround museum practice can lead to more effective museum models. In a later article entitled "Preparing a new generation: Thoughts on contemporary museum studies training," Welsh (2013) furthers the

significance of professional reflection and theorization as a way to conceptualize and re-configure the ways that museum professionals are being trained in the US. He proposes a new approach to museum training that does not separate students into defined areas of expertise, but rather provides them with a more complex understanding of the various professional roles within the museum (p. 444). He is not suggesting a lack of specialization in curatorship, education, conservation, etc., but does see potential in more interdepartmental training. He is speaking directly to the kind of practice I investigate in this research, practice that mixes and mingles positionalities, ideas, duties, and roles for everyone involved in building museum content.

Welsh (2013) advocates that a better understanding of museum practice via the voice and perspectives of museum workers is key to the ways in which today's museum workers are actually practicing. When museum workers insert their voices into the larger conversations about what they do and how they are expected to work, this informs how future museum workers are trained. It also allows current and future workers the ability to hear what is going on around them. As mentioned above, this lack of voice on behalf of the educator is not due to the lack of practice. There are instances wherein educators are in fact taking on roles outside of the root of education, but if we take on Welsh's position, we see a need for educators to talk about what they are doing and reveal how they are adjusting to the desire or demand that they step into new professional roles.

Having museum educators speak about these experiences is important to the field, because they can reveal new insights about educational practice. As David Carr (2009) explains:

Progressive art museum education depends on the way its practitioners talk about their work and continuously redefine their practice through a fluid and inspiring vocabulary. When disciplined and articulate museum educators speak to each other about what they do, the vocabulary they use matters deeply: it evokes assumptions, clarifies objectives, and implies experiential dimensions. When these things remain unexplored, the value of the learner and the complex qualities of museum experience may be diminished. (p. 222).

Thinking about education through a collaborative and inter-, trans-, multi-, un-disciplinary lens reveals nuanced understandings and new ways of speaking about education in the museum space. Having conversations and articulating the varied approaches to museum-specific learning through varied perspectives is key to uncovering and promoting new educational modes of working.

Another area of significance/relevance as far as the educators and the educational role are concerned, can be found in museum educator Eileen Hooper-Greenhill's comment that "the educational role of the museum has become even more significant" (1999, p. x). Bearing in mind the increased weight of education in museums, Roberts (1997) notes that educators are at the forefront of the shift towards negotiating multiple meanings / content and that "they stand to play an important part in adapting the institution" to more inclusive and discursive practices (p.3). Willamsun (2007) extends this sentiment and emphasizes how museum educators "are in a unique position to facilitate a rethinking of the traditional organizational hierarchy of museums" (p. 93). Thus, through their training in education and audience engagement, educators are able to challenge hierarchical structures and highlight the varied interpretations in order to create

meaningful experiences for the visiting public. Their experience as the connective link

between the museum and the public has become a qualification that is invaluable to the

contemporary theoretical and practical underpinnings of museum functions.

Another thing to consider in regards to education in museums is that it is no

longer relegated to the "education room," but takes place in the whole museum and is

"now accepted as covering exhibitions and other aspects of public provisions such as

events and publications" (Roberts, 1997, p. 4). Again, this places educators as central to

the changes within institutions given the broader scope of museum education within the

institution. This shift is important to consider, because educators are collaborating with

more departments and community members, they are also negotiating education into

more spaces of the museum. It is in this arena that I am setting up my research to look at

educational models that are more embedded in exhibition development. It is a specific

way of understanding education and museum practice through the unique perspectives of

museum educators. This is relatively new practice if we look at the field of art museums

in its entirety. These acts of transvering professional positions (on ones own or through

collaboration) challenge the nature of siloed professional structures in the museum space

and complicate museum practice in profound ways. While many museums remain in the

tradition that separates roles and duties into respective professional categories, other

museums are experimenting with and complicating the very nature of how museum

workers conceptualize their practice and thus how museums function. It is in these

experimental spaces where I see potential for researching the current inclination that

favors fluidity, flexibility, and complexity. Because museum processes seem to be

moving towards a more un-disciplining form of professionalization and collaboration, I

place my research into this discourse, in order to understand how this is actually working for all involved in the creation of exhibition content and educational experiences. Most importantly though, I insert the educator's voice as an active, creative, and thoughtful member of the new form of museum-practice.

What Remains: Laying Out the Remaining Chapters

In this chapter I have briefly presented the inspirations for my research and given an insight into how I frame the experiences of the educators who graciously participated in my inquiry. In Chapter Two, "Education Meets Curation: Tracing The Path Of Museum Education Into The Exhibition Space," I situate my research study into the historical and contemporary trajectory of discourse on art museum education and the continued centering of educational work into the fabric of museums. In Chapter Three, "Educators In Practice: Interviews, Exhibition Spaces, and Reflections On Self," I lay out the methodologies and structures that guide my approach to this research. In Chapter Four, entitled "Marking Our Stories: Experiences And Perspectives Of Art Museum Educators," I present and lay out in detail the findings of my interviews, observations and self-investigations. I explore the larger themes that were pulled from this study and describe the intricacies of the similarities and differences across all participants. In Chapter Five, "Institutionalized Practice, Art Museums, and the Educator's Experience," I place these findings into conversation with the underpinnings of institutional theory. These epistemological frameworks emerged from my grounded-theory analysis, and are used to understand the museum educators' experiences within a larger socio-cultural system. In Chapter Six, "Processes Of Change: The Educator's Role in Un-Disciplining

Museum Practice," I explore the progressive and new conceptualizations of art museum education and the educator's experience as an act of what I describe as *un-disciplining*. Finally, in Chapter Seven, "Making Sense And Meaning: Understanding Our Practice In Museums," I briefly re-visit my research questions, discuss the implications of my research and introduce further areas for study that my research does not address.

CHAPTER TWO:

EDUCATION MEETS CURATION: TRACING THE PATH OF MUSEUM

EDUCATION INTO THE EXHIBITION SPACE

I turn to Luttrell's (2010) notion of "knowledge frameworks" in this chapter as a

concept that allows me to "draw upon a wide array of knowledge sources" in order to

contextualize my study (p. 162). Luttrell makes the case for researchers moving beyond

the standard review of literature in building a framework, and to also incorporate personal

practice-based experiences; journal reflections; the perspectives of other practitioners;

daily observations; online sources; and other non-literary sources (p. 162). I utilize my

own and others' reflections and observations in this chapter, because I feel that they serve

as legitimate tertiary sources of knowledge. These first-person accounts serve to reaffirm

what literature suggests about the experiences of museum educators that are grappling

with the ideas that I explore in this research.

I weave personal insights, thoughts, and ideas among those of my colleagues and

the standard literature review in order to place the perspectives into conversation with

one another and close the gap between academic theory and everyday practice. I do this

because I have candid conversations with art museum educators on a regular basis whose

ideas, concerns, and experiences have influenced my interest in this research. These first

hand accounts, displayed as separate quotes throughout the chapter, also speak to my use

of grounded theory, wherein I cyclically re-visit literature, interview transcripts, notes,

and journal entries throughout the research and analysis processes to determine

connections between these sources.

In this chapter I introduce the ideas and contexts that informed my initial interest in this study. First, I explore the importance of the "Educational Turn" as it is written about at length in order to give light to the fact that education is seen as key to the mission of many art museums and how this turn speaks to a specific type of museum practice. I lay out the history of ideologies, policies, and trending practices that continue to prioritize the role of education in museums and I further explore how this history is a catalyst for the type of museum education that I investigate; education that is woven into the exhibition space and is directly related to curatorial content. While the focus on education in museums has manifested in many ways (programming, K-12 outreach, community partnerships) the intentional bridging of curation with education speaks to a more recent inclination that many people are attempting in their practice (O'Neill, 2010; Smith 2012; Villeneuve & Love, 2017). It is one way among many, through which museums are addressing the call to education and the call to be more meaningful and relevant to their communities. I then introduce real life contexts in which I have seen these types of educational practices taking shape in order to demonstrate how the melding of curation and education manifest currently in museums. Finally, I highlight various ways that museums are attempting to be more mindful of and collaborative in the planning and implementation of curatorial projects that include education.

The Educational Turn and its Influence on Museum Practice

"The Educational Turn" is a phrase that has seen a significant amount of use in recent years and has maintained traction in regards to contemporary art, curatorial practice, and museum education (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999; O'Neill, 2010; Noever 2001; Roberts, 1997; Smith 2012; Villeneuve & Love, 2017). Contemporary artists, curators,

educators and other museum professionals have published a substantial amount of literature that explore the implications of "the educational turn" in museums and how it influences the ways that museum workers approach their profession. What these writings highlight is a paradigm shift in contemporary museum practice, which puts educational goals and objectives at the forefront of museum exhibitions and stresses that educational development be in conversation with the museum's collections and the exhibit planning.

One could argue that most museum professionals have been a part of educational initiatives throughout museum history, but it is only within the last 15 to 20 years that education has become central rather than peripheral (in theory and practice) to the way that museums and thus curators, artists, and other museum workers conceptualize their roles and the role of the museum. Instead of education being supportive to the traditionally predominant curatorial functions within art museums, it is now taking (in some instances) an equal position within the development of museum content and exhibition design. The museum visitor's encounter with the material objects in the museum space is the crux of this newfound focus amongst professionals in the field. As noted by Anderson and Arnold-de Simine (2012),

> In this new emphasis on the "museum encounter" as a performative and inter-
> subjective "event"—sometimes referred to as the "educational turn" in museum
> curatorship—a new type of "inclusive museum" has emerged in diverse
> geographical and political settings. The inclusive museum seeks to recover the
> museum's social role as a purveyor of shared, collective meanings precisely in
> departing from its high-modern predecessor and in forging "open representations"

that acknowledge the diversity of the interpretative community thus interpolated.

(p. 12)

Looking at the education that takes place within the gallery and further exploring the collaborative efforts that inform this type of museum education, I focus the research on the intersections of two important aspects of the art museum's functions – that of the curation (objects, collection, research, preservation) and of education (interpretation, access, community engagement). More specifically, I concentrate on how museum educators are involved with and negotiating their roles in this new model for educational work. Historically and arguably contemporarily these two functions are relegated to very specialized and often disconnected places of practice within museum design. In more standard modes of working, the collection and exhibition content are developed first with little to no input from the educator and with little consideration for the viewer's experience. The default mode is to write informative labels based on the curator's expertise and academically situated interpretation, with that message being prioritized and non-negotiable. As Leana, one educator interviewed for this research reflects,

> It is rare that educators, or communities for that matter, have input in the way a curator is imagining an exhibition. More often than not when we do insert ourselves our opinion is seen as just that, as a suggestion with little weight. It doesn't happen the other way. The curator's vision always makes the cut.
>
> (interview with Leana, February 2015)

So we are left to wonder, with these continued traditions of silos in museum work and a demand to make learning more encompassing of the exhibition as an educational

encounter: what does the educational turn, with an emphasis on curatorial and educational mingling, mean for art museum educators?

Histories, Policies, and the Role of Education in Museums

It is interesting and somewhat perplexing to speak of "the educational turn" in art museum practice as a recent turn, because one can argue quite convincingly that museum practice has always been concerned with education to some degree. Betty Lou Williams (2007) places education as a goal for museums since their inception in the 19th century (p. 58). Similarly, in the essay "Six Themes in the History of Art Museum Education," Melanie Buffington (2007) traces a rich history of museum education in the U.S. that begins in the late 19th century, and she follows the educational goals well into the 21st century. So, why then are we speaking of "the educational turn" as contemporary, and what are the implications for understanding this turn as it is currently being defined? The answer to this question is complex and indicative of the numerous factors that have historically influenced and continue to influence the way that museum practice is theorized and ultimately realized in museums.

The conversation about the role of education in museums may seem trite or perhaps unnecessary given this long history and the fact that today most museum workers recognize the need for and presence of education in museums. However, there are still misconceptions about education as far as *what* constitutes education in contemporary museum spaces and who should be involved in the process of educational and exhibition design. It is necessary to look at this history in order to clarify the specific ways that education has functioned in museums, how educational programming has become

engrained in the fabric of museum practice, and how the contemporary "educational turn" is a part of this trajectory, yet distinctive and thus worth investigating.

Looking back at the history of education in museums we can see a variety of pedagogical ideologies and approaches to programmatic structure. We can also see clear shifts in how museum professionals have understood the role of education as part of the museum experience. Melanie Buffington (2007) identifies formal education programs that existed as early as 1870. These early programs were created for the growing middle class and consisted of lectures, studio classes and gallery talks, which were focused on the idea that museums could serve as a way to improve society (p. 12). As noted by Betty Lou Williams (2007), in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, U.S. museums "believed that their mission was to serve the needs of industry, history, and scientific inquiry and to provide enculturation and aesthetic appreciation" (p. 58). While the pedagogical goals varied among different types of museums (science vs. history vs. art), the way in which education was structured was relatively consistent within the field. During these early years, museum education was "mainly understood as the delivery of information to learners whose task was to absorb as much as possible. Knowledge was understood as objective, external to the knower, and transferable" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. xi). In other words, museum education in the 19th and 20th centuries was by and large an authoritative practice, wherein museum staff members were seen as cultural experts tasked with the duty of disseminating their expertise onto the visiting public. Educational programs were based around the objects within the museum's collection, and were created so that the public could better understand the world around them. Displays were often didactic and based in systems of expertise and classification. Even as education

began to expand from elite courses in enculturation to include children's classes, K-12 / school-based programs, and teacher education, the systems of hierarchy and "museum as expert" were kept in place.

Pressures to transform museum practice became prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, at a time when the U.S. was experiencing larger political, economic, and social reform. People began to question the Euro-Western focus of many museums and began to demand that museums become more inclusive and considerate of non-western perspectives. "The U.S. public called on museums to include individuals, topics, themes, and cultural traditions formerly omitted from the dominant canon" (Williams, 2007, p. 58). As a result, museums turned to educational programming to increase minority representation through community outreach projects and other civic-oriented programs. In many instances, education became a mobile component of the museum that could reach more diverse populations and new audiences. Organizations such as NEA began to fund community-based projects, thus compelling more museums to take on such initiatives (p. 59). In this shift, educational programming became synonymous with community outreach and civic duty, which was not necessarily the role prior to this historical moment. Educators took on the role of liaison between the museum and the public and developed programs that could connect the museum to audiences that were typically left out of the conversation. While the educational goals were based on inclusion and diversification, the museum's collections and scholarly interpretation of those collections remained central to the mission and the ways that educational programming was implemented.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the role of the museum continued to transform based on social, political, and economic forces, and the demands placed greater emphasis on education as a key (if not the key) component of museum practice. Most notable was the drastic reduction in government funding to the arts and humanities that came through conservative reactions to the support of controversial artists and art projects with tax payers' money. While traditional education programming such as tours, lectures, K-12 education, and community-based initiatives were maintained in museums, education became a way for museums to draw in larger crowds and thus more money. As a result of economic hardships, museums "turned their attention away from adding to their collections to increasing educational services and programs for the public" (Williams, 2007, p. 59). Educational programming became a part of the tourist draw to museums and trended towards entertainment in many regards. Education was seen as a money making tool, in which more programming could draw in more paying visitors. Museum workers, especially marketers, were enthusiastic about education as a way to bring more people in to the museum, and this marketable recognition only further solidified education as a central museum function.

Larger conversations about general education in society also affected museum education in the 1980s. In the early '80s, reports including *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), *High School* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1983), and *Educating Americans for the 21st Century* (National Science Board, 1984) were published, calling attention to the need for education reform in the United States. As a result of such reports museums were identified as important sites for informal learning and were seen as significant

contributors to and collaborators within the larger educational system. In response to such reports it was recommended that museums build more museum-school partnerships and on a more holistic / organizational level it was suggested, "that education become mandated as the overt mission of museums" (American Association of Museums, 1984). Through such recommendations, the obligations and priorities of museums turned from the duty to collect and preserve and began to make bigger strides towards education. *Museums for a New Century: A Report of the Commission of Museums for a New Century* was another report that encouraged more development in education. It proposed "the need for research on teaching and learning in museums" and "the restructuring of the roles and responsibilities of museum educators, the changing educational objectives in museums, and the importance of policy to support education measures" (Williams, 2007, p. 60).

While there were many specific recommendations in this report, what is notable is the fact that the educational function of museums is being recognized as and pressured to be a specialized profession within the museum system. Despite the long history of education in museums, it is only within the last thirty years that "educators have worked on establishing a professional profile within the museum organization" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. 4). While education-based practices have long been a part of museums, it was not until the early 1970s that professional, education-focused organizations, journals, and research forums started to emerge (Ebitz, 2005, p. 154). Establishing a recognized, professional identity has aided in the turn to education and established educators as valued museum workers in their own right. It also gave museum

educators a place to make public, reflect upon, and learn about the field of museum education as a studied practice.

In 1992 another report was published by the American Association of Museums (AAM), entitled *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* (Hirzy, 1992)*,* which further solidified education as a central task for museums. In this report it was recommended that: museums designate education as the central mission; museum departments collaborate on educating the public; museums commit to serving the broadest spectrum of society; and they increase opportunities for professional development of museum educators (p. 4). A report published by AAM entitled *Mastering Civic Engagement* (2002) extended the conversations about the need for museum educators' professionalization in the museum and furthered the argument that research, teaching, and public commitment be top priorities for all museum professionals.

Despite the fact that there has not been a larger report that focuses on museum education in the last 15 years, it is clear that museums have traditionally responded to larger social trends, economic forces, and ideologies about education and the role of the museum in civic discourse. Whether increasing adult education programs, creating new programs for school children, becoming civically engaged with the community, or working on collaborations, the presence of education in museums has shifted based on societal influences and the changing needs of the public (Buffington, 2007). This response to outside forces is unlikely to change, but *the ways* in which museums approach education will continue to shift based on how museum staff members perceive the role of education. These perceptions have been key in redefining the role of the museum in society and have ultimately placed education as a central component to

museums' purpose. Buffington (2007) notes that, "as museums changed from palaces for the scholarly elite to educational institutions for everyone, the role of education within the scope of museum also changed" (p. 18). Education has become more essential to the function of the museum, and now many museum workers accept and recognize "that educating is as important a function as collecting and exhibiting" (p. 18).

Contemporary Museum Practice:
Bridging the Divide Between Curation and Education

As demonstrated above, the history of museum education is complex and full of nuanced changes, influences, and differences in approach. What is important to note in regards to "the educational turn" is the way that the above-mentioned policies and societal influences have affected museum practice so that education is now deeply embedded in the structure of said practice. Education is no longer playing a supporting role to the duties of collecting and exhibition development, but rather is considered as a key element in the museum's purpose. The turn of education from a peripheral role to a central role in museums has significant implications for museum professionals involved in program development. It also has implications for the pedagogical ideologies that influence the ways in which education is understood and thus practiced in the museum space.

One of the most significant turns in pedagogy and museum programming is the transition from object-focused to audience-focused styles of learning. While the traditional model for museum education highlighted the collection and authoritative expertise of the museum curator over the varied interpretations of the public, more contemporary pedagogical models favor the notion that knowledge is produced with audiences rather than transmitted to them (Buffington, 2007; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999;

Roberts, 2007; Villenueve & Love, 2017). Villenueve (2017) makes the case for visitor-centered exhibitions as a way to bridge the gap between the expertise provided by a curator and the general interests of museum visitors. She defends the position of museum visitors and notes that it is "inefficient and unrealistic" for museums to expect visitors to think like a curator when coming to a museum" (p.7). Their knowledge is not less than or inferior to the curator's knowledge, it is simply different and thus worth considering when building exhibition content. I echo these sentiments in a journal entry from my research.

> The conversation I had with visitors today reaffirmed my feeling that I need to challenge problematic curatorial projects. Despite what some people may think - just because viewers are not "experts" in a particular subject - it does not mean that they won't call us out when they see an oversight on our [the museum's] part. Their point was spot on and I did not defend the curator's choices. I agreed with my audience. (Personal Journal Entry, November 2016)

With different perspectives coming into the museum space, Hooper-Greenhill (1999) advocates for theories in museum learning that support the notion that, "people are active in constructing their own particular interpretation …according to their existing knowledge, skills, background and personal motivation" (p. xi). In this vein, the scholarship put forth by the museum staff is considered one interpretation among many, not more important or less important, but equally important to the way in which information is exchanged. Understanding education as the existence and the legitimacy of multiple meanings represents a paradigm shift in museum practice and according to

Roberts (1997), indicates "a significant moment in museum history, for both museum educators and the institution as a whole" (p. 3).

Allowing for diverse interpretations of the exhibition content demonstrates an attempted break in the historical structure and functional modes of the museum. Furthermore, it situates museums in a place to be more considerate of different learning modalities. This speaks to a different type of inclusivity in museum practice, one that extends beyond multiple perspectives in museum content. It recognizes and situates the different ways of learning that are possible in museum spaces. As Black (2010) mentions,

> The opportunities for museum learning tend to be unpressured and open-ended. Museum display and programming can involve all the senses and create diverse stimuli and responses. This works with a wide variety of audiences, and can reflect a range of opinions, interests, needs and expectations. (p. 271)

As far as the educators and the educational role are concerned, because "the museum field has settled more firmly into patterns that emphasize the importance of successful relationships with audiences…the educational role of the museum has become even more significant" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. x). Bearing in mind that with the increased weight on education in museums, educators are at the forefront of the shift towards negotiating multiple meanings and content and "they stand to play an important part in adapting the institution" to more inclusive and discursive practices (Roberts, 1997, p. 3). Willamsun (2007) extends this sentiment and emphasizes how museum educators "are in a unique position to facilitate a rethinking of the traditional organizational hierarchy of museums" (p. 93). Thus, through their training in education and audience engagement,

educators are able to challenge hierarchical structures and highlight the varied interpretations in order to create meaningful experiences for the visiting public. Their experience as the connective link between the museum and the public has become a qualification that is invaluable to the contemporary theoretical and practical underpinnings of museum functions.

Another thing to consider in regards to the educational role of museums is the fact that education is no longer relegated to the "education room," but takes place across the whole museum, and is "now accepted as covering exhibitions and other aspects of public provisions such as events and publications" (Roberts, 1997, p. 4). Again, this places educators as central to the changes within institutions given the broader scope of museum education within the institution. This shift is important to consider, because not only do educators have to collaborate with more departments and negotiate education into more spaces, other members of the museum staff have to involve themselves with educational initiatives. This is where a body of literature from museum professionals comes into play, and the "educational turn" becomes more relevant to the conversations put forth by other museum workers such as curators, designers, and marketers. In essence all staff members are taking on small roles in the educational process, and whether they are museum teachers, artists, curators, volunteers or paid staff, they must acknowledge "how the educational role has become part of cultural politics" (Roberts, 1997, p. 4). These politics demand that all museum workers be more considerate and inclusive of a larger demographic and less concerned with the institutional vision.

In their anthology *Curating and The Educational Turn,* Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (2010) demonstrate how curators, artists, and critics are in fact dealing with the

shift towards audience inclusion and more educationally concerned endeavors. The editors themselves speak to the predominance of education within contemporary curatorial practice. Contemporary curating is marked by a turn to education. Educational formats, methods, programs, models, terms, processes, and procedures have become pervasive in the praxes of both curating and the production of contemporary art and in their attendant critical frameworks. This is not simply to propose that curatorial projects have increasingly adopted education as a theme; it is, rather, to assert that curating increasingly operates as an expanded educational praxis. (p. 12).

They also note how this educational focus is breaking down traditional practices of curatorial authority, which often privilege the "internal organization of the art - as enacted by the artist, producer or author" over the "external organization through different modes of distribution, reproduction, and dissemination" (p. 19). Here they argue that contemporary curatorial practice should be more concerned "with open-ended cultural exchange" rather than "the supposed authorial primacy of the curator" (p. 19). Within these ideas, there is a clear continuation of the educational modes discussed above, wherein the voice of the audience is considered relevant to the interchange of ideas. The act of curating is no longer separate from education nor is it inconsiderate of an audience's potential contributions to the formation of knowledge.

A similar text entitled *The Discursive Museum* (2001) presents conversations that were part of a conference where the turn to educational practices and audience engagement in museums was the organizing theme. One of the presentations given by Hans Belting echoes the criticism of the self-serving museum and again highlights the need for audience engagement as a way to combat traditionally irrelevant museum

practice. He brings up the point that, "museums traditionally concentrate on exhibitions, not on what actually *happens* in exhibitions or what *could happen* in exhibitions" (Belting, 2001, p. 80). He also looks at the events that play a role in public engagement such as lectures, tours, and art excursions only to emphasize that such activities "make the public passive or keep it in a condition of loyal passivity" (p. 80). Again, we see museum professionals challenging the inherent structures of museums, calling for more nuanced understandings of how they can balance their expertise with the audiences' interpretations and voice.

It is apparent that many museums and museum professionals are taking on or are at least aware of the educational turn and the focus on bridging the curatorial and educational divide. As an educator who advocates for learning and public engagement in museums I see this turn as an advantage for museums and their pedagogical motivations. As more museum professionals understand the value of education, its place in the museum is validated and there is greater opportunity to advance theoretical and practical understandings of museum-based learning. Furthermore, as more museum professionals consider education as part of their duties, there are additional occasions wherein the public can be a part of the cultural exchange and dialogue. There is also the advantage of having different professionals at the helm of the educational experience, and thus different types of opportunities to engage with art content and processes. The community, the curator, the educator, and the various other museum professionals may approach a learning opportunity or body of work in different ways, making the exhibition and its subsequent programs richer and more complex.

There are obvious issues that arise as a result of more people assuming the role of educator, especially given the fact that the turn to education is a relatively new concept. Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (2007) speaks to these issues and calls attention to the fact that within the discussions about education in the museum, "there is no single view of what learning and education mean" (p. 2). This is true even among educators, and adding other professionals into the conversation only further complicates the ideological and practical applications of "learning" and "education." These words "are understood by individuals in very different ways, depending on their experience of educational systems and of learning and teaching styles" (p. 2). In any given museum there could be (and arguably often are) several different ideas about what constitutes an educational experience, a successful exhibition, and a worth-while collaboration.

While the inclusion of many voices in educational processes of museums can clearly benefit the institution and the public it servers, this added complexity does not come without obstacles. Despite the larger consensus that museums should function as places of learning and that more museum staff should be involved in the educational process, there are still tensions that exist in regards to *how* learning should take place. Understanding how education functions in the museum space is problematic, highly complex, and inconsistently defined among professionals in the field. Some museum workers still see the value in and thus advocate for object-based, didactic learning, while others are pushing for more learner-centered approaches. These two ideological bases bring up "old tensions between the two extremes of reaching a general audience and producing scholarship" and perpetuate the divide between professionals within the museum (Roberts, 1997, p. 6). This idea is more recently supported by Kaitavuori (2013)

where she notes, "In this polarized mode, the division of labour between curating and educating has been described as caring for objects versus caring for people; or aesthetic versus educational; or scholarship and research versus public education" (p. 8). That is not to say that either perspective should be valued over another, but understanding the implications of different forms of learning and when they work best is one issue that is yet to be fully explored.

Another tension lies in the fact that there is still a debate about *where* education can take place in the museum. "For some [the educational role] refers to the purpose of the museum as a whole, and for others, 'museum education' means the work carried out by specialist museum staff that is relegated to classrooms or 'educational corners'" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, p. 4). The idea that education should remain separate from the gallery space is associated with outdated ideas about education and does not take full advantage of the educational potential that lies in the exhibition, which is arguably still the heart of the museum experience. As argued by Hogarth (2017),

> Exhibitions are the primary vehicle through which museums enact their public mission, using space, time, objects or specimens, text, and increasingly, experiences. If education is at the core of the public mission of museums, then it's reasonable to say that exhibitions are the primary education program that a museum offers. (p. 23)

As many authors have noted, the viewer's experience through education is often not a consideration in exhibition development. Creating an exhibition without the viewer's experience in mind is problematic, and separating the educational component into different physical spaces only extends this problem. According to Hooper-Greenhill

(1999), "it is still the case in many museums that exhibitions are produced without much thought at all for who is going to visit them, or how they will be used" (p. 15). While this goes against the notion of public engagement and forethought to education, it is still a prevalent form of exhibition development.

The physical characteristics of the museum space and the way it allows viewers to *experience* objects has significant implications for developing and conceptualizing education. Because traditional education is often separated from the experience of the museum space, "much, if not most, of the potential for learning is ignored and the potentially most significant elements of museum-based learning are negated" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, p. 38). Those attempting education-oriented projects in museum learning need to understand the unique qualities of the gallery space and capitalize on what they lend to learning. In fact, despite the impetus to separate education from exhibitions, there are many people who argue that exhibition development and educational intentions are inseparable. As noted by Karen Knutson (2002), "the decisions made during the creation of exhibitions reflect foundational beliefs about what it means to educate and what it means to know" (p. 6). Thus, removing the educational opportunities from the exhibition space and the objects that are supposed to encourage learning does not necessarily reflect thoughtful practice. Instead, such practice perpetuates the hierarchical division of museum structure and does not allow for cross-disciplinary discussions about the nature of learning in museums. More creative or open-ended learning is often removed and relegated to a separate space.

Creating more effective learning opportunities requires a rejection of the traditional notion that the various players in the museum have separate roles and are

disengaged from one another. Instead, more instances of dialogue should be generated, through which the expertise of all museum staff as well as museum visitors can be considered. These conversations need to reflect not only ideas about the content of any given exhibition, but also ideas that challenge and inform museum practice. It is clear, based on the ideas presented above, that the role of each player (be it the curator, the educator, the artist, or the community) is of value to the function of the museum.

Another thing that museum educators are responding to is the overall call for museums to be more civically engaged and responsible in their exhibition and program development. Interpretation, which is at the heart of this research, is a powerful form of communicating a museum's message and is seen as a rich place for civic engagement. What is more, beyond calling for the diversification of learning in museums, people have started to place pressure on museums to be critical, inclusive, and multi-vocal. As explored by Elizabeth Wood (2013) because interpretation is shaped by the dominant culture and people in power, museums have a responsibility to mount and interpret exhibition content that is diverse in perspective and critical in scope. She calls for museums to "take advantage of their role as social institutions where difficult topics can be dealt with appropriately" (p. 218). She also hits at some of the most important ideas in the motivations for bridging education, curation, along with community and that is to "recognize that museums must work toward creating conditions where visitors can connect with the meaning of an exhibition and connect the ongoing struggle for power and change" (p. 219). Of course this sentiment is situated in a much broader civic discourse, and is pointing towards the larger dynamic of museums serving the public.

However, I also see the visitors' connections to the museum being embedded in the conversations of power and change within the museum.

Edu-Curation, Collaborative Practice, and Breaking Museum Silos

As people in the field continue to theorize on and practice more visitor-driven exhibitions, "Edu-curation" is a term that has surfaced amongst museum educators that names a specific and evolving framework for museums to consider. Like any model, Edu-curation is complex, varied and reliant on the people and places that are attempting to engage with education-centered curation as a pedagogical methodology. What is important to mention is that naming the practice is a way of owning the necessity of continued research and development and lessens the siloed museum structures that impact exhibition and education development.

While there are many iterations of the idea, proponents of Edu-curation acknowledge how the barriers between curation and education are dissolving and advocates for a shared responsibility amongst all museum employees for serving their audiences (Feldman, 2017, p. xi). The uses of edu-curation manifest in many ways, again depending on the institutional support for such endeavors, the needs and involvement of the community, and the goals of the museum in general. Some tenets of Edu-Curation as laid out by Love and Villeneuve (2017) are:

- Envisioning exhibitions as non-hierarchical and collaborative;

- Including underrepresented voices in exhibition development;

- Facilitating collaborative practice and reflection; and

In the 2017 publication *Visitor-Centered Exhibitions and Edu-Curation in Art Museums,* authors Villeneuve and Love present the perspectives of art museum educators,

professors, directors, and curators, among others who are directly involved in projects that align curation with education. As the authors note, "to present collaborative, visitor-centered exhibitions as envisioned by edu-curation, museums will need to transform their organizational structures, breaking down a hierarchy of curatorial prestige and moving functions out of discrete silos" (p. 19). Much of this re-structuring comes in the form of collaborative practice and more open communication amongst museum staff.

One way that some museums are trying to encourage inter-departmental dialogue and community rapport is through collaborative initiatives. Instead of determining objects for display, and thematic content and educational programs in isolation, some institutions are beginning to play with more cooperative approaches to museum practice. Hooper-Greenhill (1999) argues that some of the most successful exhibitions involve a team, "where expertise and approach are shared and negotiated" (p. 19). In a similar spirit, Falk (2016) criticizes the misguided nature of the current debate, "which tends to frame the problem as an either–or issue," and speaks to the potential of collaboration to "strive to meet a diversity of visitor needs, creating *both* exhibitions that attain the highest standards of intellectual excellence and integrity, *and* exhibitions that seek to pique the interest and generalized understandings of diverse audiences" (p. 357).

In the essay "Experiments in Integrated Programming," Sally Tallant (2010) coins this turn to collaboration as "new institutionalism," which is a concept "characterized by open-endedness and dialogue" (p. 187). New institutionalism also "places equal emphasis on all programmes and creates spaces and modes of display that reflect this, including archives, reading rooms, residency schemes, talks and events as well as exhibitions" (p. 187). In exploring the idea of "new institutionalism," Tallant reiterates

the sentiment that such practices challenge the division of labor, hierarchy, and professional disparities that exist when museum workers work in isolation and without regard for others' specialized duties. Collaborations between curators, artists, educators, and community members are seen as key to the development of exhibitions and programming that "can achieve a genuinely engaged but complex renegotiation of the operation of the gallery or museum" (p. 190). This idea of re-negotiation is extended by Boast (2011) when she notes, "since the 1990s, museums have been promoting their now realized postcolonial status through inclusionist programs in exhibitions, shared curatorship, and use of collections" (p. 56). In the act of re-negotiating, collaborative efforts begin in the museum and extend outward to involve the visitor and surrounding communities. Education is not seen as more important than the other facets of the museum experience, but the "turn to education" in this particular instance highlights the leveling out of hierarchy, which leads to more considerate and engaging museum practices. The focus on education and community elevate their status in the museum onto equally footing as historically more empowered positions.

Williamsun (2007) argues for a working model that can establish "an institutional model of collaboration that values the expertise of both the curator and the visitor" (p. 93). His model is articulated slightly differently from Tallant's, hers including artists, curators, educators, *and* communities. Williamsun focuses his model on stronger collaboration between curator and educator as a way to engage the visitor. He does not necessarily advocate for collaborations that include artists and visitors. Instead, he focuses on the historically contentious divide between content (curator) and learning (educator), and he suggests an alliance between the two professions is a valid and

necessary step in exhibition development. Beyond the act of collaboration, he proposes

that "museum educators must have time to think of themselves as curators, and curators

must have time to think of the themselves as educators" (p. 93). Within this

conceptualization, the roles of the curator and educator become blended as each attempts

to move beyond their specialization and understand the processes of museum practice

through a different lens.

Karen Knutson (2002) explores and offers yet another model in her essay

"Creating a Space for Learning: Curators, Educators, and the Implied Audience." Within

this essay Knutson demonstrates how exhibitions and education are affected when other

museum professionals such as the architect and exhibition designer are involved in the

processes of design and implementation of an exhibit. Through her research she

investigated the conversations that various museum professionals had in regards to their

"beliefs and values about art and about learning about art in museums" (p. 6). In this

particular model the curator still had a significant amount of authority over the formation

of the exhibition. The architect, educator, and exhibitions team served as consultants that

utilized their expertise to conceptualize and design spaces, programming, and exhibits

that would best illuminate the content and engage the visitor. This collaborative model

was interesting in that it demonstrated a comprehensive consideration for how the

physical design of the exhibition space could best serve the objectives of audience

engagement. Beyond the creation of public programming such as lectures, talks, and

workshops, the educator was consulted about signage and the placement of various

objects in order to ensure the effective presentation of ideas. In essence this model

focused on the structure of the exhibition as an educational medium and explored how content and education could be linked in the gallery space.

Laura Peers and Alison Brown (2003) introduce other ideas about collaboration in their book *Museums and Source Communities*. They explore various forms of collaborative practice in this text, and focus on projects that involve the community in as many levels of development as possible. They note:

> The selection of artefacts for display, the writing of label text, the enhancement of database entries, the storage and conservation of collections, the design of special storage facilities for sacred/sensitive materials and human remains, the development of educational programmes, the selection of gift shop stock, the choice of logo designs, are all areas where source community members should be consulted and where their input is invaluable. (p. 7 -8)

In this particular model, Peers and Brown deal with the historical disconnect between the goals and perspectives of communities and the goals and interpretations put forth by the museum (p. 6). It is a much more involved, time consuming, and expensive endeavor, but it is a model that is necessary if museums are committed to addressing issues of access and ethics within their practice (p. 8). This form of collaboration honors the expertise of community members and exemplifies the most progressive attempt at re-imagining how a museum can function.

Numerous other researchers and museum workers explore the idea of collaboration and team-based approaches to museum practice (Black, 2010; Cooper, 2013; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999; Roberts, 2007; Strachan & Mackay, 2014) and it is clear that the way collaboration takes form is highly dependent on the specifics of context.

Some museums are invested in working closely with their surrounding communities, other museums keep the collaborations within the institution, and other museums still do not embrace the idea of collaborations at all. There are various factors such as professional ideologies, time, funding, connections to the local community, and institutional goals that play into the level of collaborative efforts in a museum space. Even within a single institution, the presence of partnerships and teamwork will fluctuate from project to project. What works in one particular instance might not work or be feasible in another. An important thing to keep in mind is how "the educational turn" is arguably at the heart of the turn to collaboration. That is not to say that partnerships and teamwork did not happen in museums prior to the focus on education, but there is a greater consideration for voices in addition to the curator's since education became a central concern for institutional practice.

Museums Bridging the Divide: Visible Indicators of Collaboration and Edu-Curation in Exhibitions

Moving outside of the existing literature and written explorations that discuss educationally driven exhibitions, there are various museums that are putting (to some degree) these very ideas into practice. The design of exhibitions in many art museums is aesthetically different than what we might expect, incorporating different and varied learning opportunities. While traditional modes such as intro panels, didactics, and extended labels are still featured in these spaces, they are not the only ways in which information is exchanged. The shift into learning through and engaging with exhibitions is evidenced by educationally curated gallery spaces and that offer more compelling ways

for visitors to understand the art on view[1]. In an attempt to make museum collections and

exhibitions relevant, interesting, and considerate of diverse populations, there has been an

upsurge in exhibits and museum spaces that offer greater opportunities for communities

to take a more active role in creating content with the museum (Golding & Modest, 2013;

Smith, 2012; Villeneuve & Love, 2017). These spaces also offer content that appeals to

interests beyond the art historical canon.

For example the UnMuseum at the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati is an

educationally run and curated gallery space where exhibitions are developed with

educational and interactive experiences in mind. The Dallas Museum of Art has a similar

space called the Center for Creative Connections that displays original works of art;

museum staff collaborate with community members and artists to develop exhibitions

and programs with the visitor's learning experience in mind. MoMA's Artists

Experiments is an interdisciplinary initiative in which artists are invited to take on

educational roles and educators are brought into conversations about learning in the

galleries. Many other art museums now incorporate interactive prompts, guiding

questions, and varied learning opportunities throughout their exhibitions. All of these

spaces represent new concepts in museum development and serve as rich sources for

understanding how educators are involved in curatorial and artistic endeavors.

Education, Collaboration, and Edu-Curation

Throughout this chapter I have focused heavily on the educator and the turn to

education in museums as a key factor in contemporary museum practice. While this may

seem problematic in some ways, as I am also exploring collaboration and the concept of

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[1] Educationally curated gallery spaces are spaces in which the bridging of curation and education are the goal. These

leveling out of hierarchy, I do this in order to focus on the experiences of museum educators who are navigating new modes of practice. That is not to say that the curator, director, or community voice is not important. They are equally relevant and implicated in this research. As people have written about the need to curate with education in mind; as many people are experimenting with more collaborative and Edu-Curatorial modes of exhibition development; and as we see an increasing number of museums with indicators of this type of practice, I cannot help but wonder how art museum educators are negotiating this turn in their practice. Hearing from art museum educators who are curating and collaborating with curators and community brings out nuanced professional insights into how museum educators experience and understand their roles. Reflecting on these experiences allows us to better understand how the shift towards collaborative or curatorial practice is impacting art museum education.

CHAPTER THREE:

EDUCATORS IN PRACTICE: INTERVIEWS, EXHIBITION SPACES, AND

REFLECTIONS ON SELF

Within this research I look to others' experiences as well as my own as a way to

gain insight into current shifts within art museums that call for a deeper connection

between museum collections, the exhibition space, and learning. More specifically I seek

to understand the role, perceptions, experiences, and daily practice of art museum

educators within this particular change. Throughout this chapter I lay out the theoretical

and practical conceptions from which I construct my research methodologies. I describe

the multi-method approach to this research, which centers on the interviews and first-

hand accounts of practicing art museum educators, and is supported by studied

documentation of museum spaces and educational material; my own reflections and

reflexive research; and constant comparative and grounded-theory analysis. I place this

research in context, describing the four educators and their affiliated museum sites. I also

describe my role as practitioner / researcher and the ways in which I incorporate my own

professional practice and insights into conversation with the art museum educators

interviewed. Throughout the chapter I illustrate the ways that I collected, presented,

interpreted, and analyzed the information that was gathered throughout this process.

Lastly, I address the limitations and delimitations of my research.

Interpretive Research: A Quest for Understanding

I situate my research within an interpretivist paradigm, with each of my chosen

methods leading to a further understanding of art museum educators and education. I am

drawn to the ontological position of interpretivist research because it "portrays a world in

which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing" (Glesne, 2011, p. 8).

Glesne further argues, "what is of importance to know, then, is how people interpret and

make meaning of some object, event, action, or perception" (p. 8). I am not taking an

objectivist, critical, or emancipatory position in this research, but simply want to better

understand. As noted by O'Toole and Beckett (2013) interpretivist researchers tend to

describe and find meaning about people or situations because of a desire to understand

how something works and what makes people act the way that they act (p. 38). Glesne

further argues that, "assessing the perspectives of several members of the same social

group about some phenomena can begin to say something about cultural patterns of

thought and action" (p. 8). In this particular case I assess the perspectives of several art

museum educators (including myself) in order to understand our thoughts and actions in

the larger cultural patterns of museum practice.

In-Depth, Semi-Structured Interviews: Hearing and Listening as Research

In order to investigate how art museum educators are conceptualizing their roles

in a museum environment that is shifting professional practice from siloed to hybrid and

more collaborative practices, I interviewed art educators that are currently in museum

roles that give them occasions to step outside traditionally defined educational duties.

Given that I am interested in greater connection between curatorial efforts, education

efforts and related content, I recruited art museum educators that are actively engaged in

practices that afford them the opportunity to specifically bridge these two roles within the

museum. More specifically I recruited and interviewed educators who are actually

curating objects within a space and within an educational context and/or are involved

with curators in the selection of objects for display or conceptualization of how those objects are used for public engagement.

Because I am interested in these art museum educators' perceptions and their lived experiences in practice, I use in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews. As noted by Irving Seidman (2013), "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of a particular experience" (p. 9). Kathleen de Marias (2004) argues the goal of the qualitative interview is to "construct as complete a picture as possible from the words and experiences of the participants" (p. 52). Wellington (2015) further argues that interviewing as a form of inquiry "allows a researcher to investigate and prompt things that we cannot observe…eliciting the interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings, and perspectives" (p. 71). The semi-structured element (as opposed to structured or unstructured) seeks to balance a degree of organization that is needed to ensure a common set of data is gathered with giving room for response, opinion, and reflection in the investigative framework. As noted by O'Toole and Beckett, (2013) semi-structured interviews allow "the opportunity for the unexpected insight to be collected," and for the interviewer to " seek clarification, invite expansion or explore a response further" (p. 133). Throughout the interview process the interviewee and I referred to the script and questions, but allowed for reflection, tangents, and unexpected ideas to guide our conversation. The interviewees knew of my general interests and were able to speak to things that were most notable to their experiences.

As much as the interview process can feel formal and prescribed, I make a point in these interviews to elicit the stories of the participants. While some questions of the

interview are more guided and driven to specifics, others are open ended and ask the interviewees to tell me more about a particular experience or program within their practice. In the first chapter of his book "Interviewing as Qualitative Research," Irving Seidman (2013) states, "I interview because I am interested in other people's stories. Most simply put, stories are a way of knowing" (p. 7). I focus on this idea of interviewing and storytelling in preparing my interview questions, and even though I give each interviewee a list of my questions ahead of time I allow space for them to guide the conversation. As argued by Clandinin (2013), storytelling is a way to honor lived experiences as a source of important understanding and knowledge through the exploration of the stories that people both live and tell (p. 13). In essence, the stories that the educators shared were an essential component of the research and allow us to know more than we would have known otherwise.

Four Participants: Introducing the Educators

I began the recruitment process for this research by making a list of museums that are known for their attempts to draw greater connections between their collections, exhibitions, and visitors. Specifically, I spent time searching for curatorial initiatives that centered education in their descriptive text or vice versa, or educational initiatives that centered on the curatorial. I also spoke with other museum professionals about my research interests and took note of any museums they recommended as potential sites. Additionally, I took notes at professional development conferences such as National Art Education Association (NAEA) of educators who were presenting on issues related to curation and education. After developing a comprehensive list of museums of interest, I put an open call out to educators, seeking participants to take part in my interview

process (Appendix A). I emailed 12 educators and heard back from five who were interested and willing to be interviewed. Through the follow up process and planning, one educator moved on to a new position and no longer wanted to participate. With one interviewee out, I was left with four educators and their museum sites as well as myself and my current museum site as the focus of this research.

After the final four educators had been identified, I arranged interview times with each participant. Out of the four willing educators I was able to interview two educators in person and two over the phone. The interviews took place between February and August of 2015. Prior to each interview, I first went over the consent form and explained the participant's rights within the study and further explained my research interests and why they had been chosen as a participant (Appendix B). I spent 1 - 2 hours interviewing each participant about their practice, and made sure that the interviewee felt comfortable taking the conversation in the direction they saw fit (see Appendix C for interview questions). While I had a list of interview questions that I wanted the educators to consider, I gave each educator the list and asked each to answer the questions freely, with encouragement to add anything she or he felt was important to the topic at hand. I used an audio recorder and research journal during each interview, taking notes and marking particular moments that stood out. All of the participants began by first going through the questions in order, but as soon as they felt more comfortable they all jumped to particular questions they felt drawn to answer and explore. In every case, each participant answered all of the questions and they all also added ideas, thoughts, and things to consider that went beyond the interview script. In addition to the interview process, I also visited each site and had research participants send or give me any

documentation that they felt related to our discussions on educating and curating as a collaborative and educational process. I explored the galleries (which are explained in detail later in this chapter), documenting the spaces and taking notes about the spaces. I also used this time to also reflect on the interviews and journal about the interaction, my initial thoughts, and subsequent questions.

Educator One, Leana.[2] Leana is a museum educator at an art museum in one of the largest metropolitan areas in the southwest United States. With a PhD in Art History, she has been in the profession for over 23 years and has been at the SW Museum of Art (SWMA) for nearly 16 years. The SW Museum of Art has nine different collection areas including Western Art, Asian Art, Contemporary Art, and Photography and holds over 17,000 objects. The SWMA also has an education-specific gallery that promotes visitor engagement and interaction with works of art from the collection. Leana, as the Curator of Education, is the lead organizer of the interactive space and also leads educational collaborations with curators in the different collections areas. Leana and I met at a café and afterwards she walked me to the various spaces in the museum that she thought relevant to our discussions. She left me on my own to explore the museum and make observations.

Educator Two, Katalina. Katalina is a museum educator at an art museum that is located in a smaller city in the western United States. With an MA in Education, she has been a museum educator for over 22 years and at the Museum of Art and Craft (MoAC) for 12 years. The MoAC has over 90,000 objects and eight collecting areas that represent different arts throughout the world. There are five curators for this museum and Katalina has 3 other educators whom she supervises. Katalina is the main contact for

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[2] All individual and museum names have been changed for the sake of anonymity.

the collaborative efforts with curators and exhibition designers. While this particular museum does have an interactive gallery, there are no educators on that committee, and Katalina is sometimes consulted when that particular space is being curated. After the interview I spent time exploring the galleries, making sure to visit particular spaces that Katalina wanted me to visit. She also asked that I come back to see a particular exhibition, which was set to open two months after the interview.

Educator Three, Analis. Analis is a museum educator at an art museum in a medium sized city in the southwest United States. With an MA in Art History and PhD in Art Education, Analis has been working in museums for over 12 years and has been focused on education for roughly 8 years. The SSW Museum of Art (SSWMA) has six collection areas including Western Art, Contemporary Art, Modern, and Latin American Art and it houses over 8,000 objects in each of these areas. The SSWMA has two full time curators and two full time educators. The museum has a separate education space and more recently opened up a community gallery. Neither of these spaces incorporates original works of art from the collection, but this particular site and educator were chosen specifically because of the collaborative efforts with curatorial staff. Analis and I spoke over the phone about her practice. After our conversation she sent me different exhibition materials, pictures, and documents to utilize for my field notes. I was also able to visit the SSWMA at a later date when some of the exhibitions were still on view.

Educator Four, Stella. Stella is a museum educator at a large museum in a large metropolitan area located in the Midwest. She has been at The Midwest Museum of Art (MMA) for 4 years and came straight out of graduate school, where she was studying Art Education. The Midwest Museum of Art has over 20,000 objects in its collection and has

ten different collection departments ranging from Art of the Americas to Contemporary

Art. Stella works with a large group of curators, educators, and exhibition designers.

She is not in a managerial position, but is tasked specifically as the educator on

interpretative initiatives in the museum. While the MMA has an interactive learning

space that incorporates art from the collection into an educationally focused context,

there was no educator on staff for that space at the time of the interview. Stella was

chosen to represent the Midwest Museum of Art for this particular research and was

recommended by a senior staff member from the museum. I had visited the MMA prior

to my interview with Stella, but was unable to coordinate a site visit at the time of the

interview. Stella agreed to do a phone interview with me, which lasted about 1 hour and

20 minutes. She also sent me installation shots, object labels, extended gallery text, and

educational handouts that were associated with the exhibitions we discussed during the

interview.

Self-Reflection and Disciplined Noticing: Situating Myself in the Research

In order to place myself into the context of this research I turn to tenets of auto-

ethnography, self-reflexivity, and ideas of disciplined noticing. Because I am a

practicing art museum educator and I am taking on projects that allow me to

conceptualize my profession through curatorial motivations and duties, my personal

experiences are relevant to the goals of my research. I felt it appropriate and potentially

fruitful to understand my own views on contemporary educational practice in which

educators are directly thinking about curatorial processes and choice. That being said, I

did not want to focus solely on my practice and myself. Instead I chose to intersect my

experiences, perspectives, and insights within those of my interviewed peers — critically

examining the similarities and differences across each one of us. I place my perspective alongside those of my respected colleagues in order to understand the ways in which curatorial duties or interests inform our practice as educators.

Multi-Vocality through Auto-Ethnographic Research

One concept that I adopt in this research and that highlights the use of my perspectives alongside various educators' voices is that of multi-vocality. This idea serves as a bridge between my auto-ethnographic approach and my use of in-depth qualitative interviews. Multi-vocality is a way of de-centering my voice as the dominant voice in the research and instead situates it in conversation with other perspectives. I reject the tendencies that place auto-ethnography as a form of subjectivist research wherein "the researcher places themselves as the focal point of the study" (Preissle & Grant, 2004, p. 176). Davis and Ellis (2008) note that "auto-ethnographic narratives still have tended to imply the ethnographer's 'truth' and privilege the voice of the ethnographer as the main character in the story" (p. 285). By employing the notion of multi-vocality I challenge my position as the focal point, and seek to limit the privileging of my voice over others' voices.

In that spirit of rejecting a single, self-reflective "truth," I turn to a form of auto-ethnography that has evolved from a primarily introspective endeavor into a multi-voiced narrative technique. In this form of self-investigation, researchers have begun to weave their stories with those of others in order to co-construct stories with research participants (Davis & Ellis, 2008, p. 288). Through the lens of multi-vocality, "the researcher's story is not the focal point; instead, it enhances the understanding of the topic" (p. 287). This is a relatively new conceptualization in auto-ethnography and is one way that researchers

are using to address the criticisms that auto-ethnography is singular and thus limiting. In describing more multi-vocal and inclusive ethnography, Davis and Ellis note that "ethnographic techniques that enable us to closely examine interactive events and at the same time deal with issues of reflexivity, subjectivity, emotional expression, modes of description, and narrativity have evolved into creative techniques that also let us understand and give voice to the multiple participants we study" (p. 287). This is where the in-depth interviews come into play and serve as a space to cross-compare our collective voices and investigate the specific function of museum education I focus on throughout this inquiry.

In a similar vein, many other researchers (Frank, 1995; Bruner, 1990; Etherington, 2004) make a case for making sense out of one's own and other people's experiences in new and different ways. Bruner and Frank separately argue that as we read them, perhaps we will be changed and find new meanings in our own lives as we resonate with participants' stories of lived experience, both through the content of those stories and the ways in which they are told. The broader definition of auto-ethnography implicates it as the "study of a culture of which one is a part, integrated with one's relation and inward experiences" (Davis & Ellis, 2008, p. 284). The premise of auto-ethnography extends the researcher's personal narratives and experiences into a larger cultural, social, or political context. The researcher thus incorporates the "'I' into research and writing, yet analyzes him- or herself as if studying an 'other' " (p. 284). Thus, the auto-ethnographic process involves deep reflection and rich description followed by taking a critical step away, from which one can determine the ways in which

the personal narrative fits into the contextual narrative. My influence to choose this method comes from the notion that,

> the writer interjects personal experience into the text as in the confessional tale; and more akin to autobiography, to investigate self within a social context…using narratives of the self, the researcher goes on to say something about the larger cultural setting and scholarly discourse, taking a *sociological* rather than a psychological perspective. (Gleasen, 2011, p. 247)

Through the act of interjecting my own voice into the context of the museum space, the end goal is to understand more about museum practice and how my experiences might elucidate something *about* educating in an art museum. As pointed out, this is not about internalizing my research (psychological) but rather it is about placing my narrative into the context of museum education as a professional practice (sociological). It is also about looking closely at my own prejudices, perceptions, beliefs, and ideas about museum education as a means to place those into conversation with other educators in the field. Through the process of embedding my own voice alongside those of my colleagues, I try to strike balance between both positions and avoid the inclinations of self-study to be self-indulgent, egocentric, and self-contained (Etherington, 2004, p. 31). I make sure to take note of where I find similarities with other educators and where I have differences.

Reflexivity and Disciplined Noticing

Due to the nature of my research and that I am not only investigating myself, but am also personally tied to the practice I examine in others, I focus part of my methodology on being aware of my bias and position as a participant-educator and

researcher. Reflexivity generally involves "critical reflection on how the researcher, research participants, setting, and research procedures interact and influence each other. This includes "examining one's personal and theoretical commitments to see how they serve as resources for generating particular data, for behaving in particular ways…and for developing particular interpretations" (Gleasen, 2011, p. 151). As part of my narrative, I will continually re-visit and critically examine my position both in my research process and in my practice as a museum educator. These critical examinations come in the form of questions that I pose to myself and answer in the context of each respective situation.

Because the auto-ethnographic part of my research is embedded in subjective interpretation, it is key that I used this opportunity to reflect on how my own "social background, assumptions, positioning and behavior impact the research process" (Hannick et al., 2011, p. 19). By being reflexive I "ask questions of [my] research interactions all along the way, from embarking on an inquiry project to sharing [my] findings" (Glesne, 2001, p. 151).   As Glesne suggests, I ask these questions of myself and record my reflections in my journaling, notes, and interpretations of my connection to other researchers. In so doing I inquire and reflect upon the specific context in which I am working as an educator and researcher.

In a sense I investigate through two different lenses: one into my topic and the other into my "self" and the ground on which I stand" (Glesne, 2001, p. 151). This allows me to be reflective of myself as a researcher and as a museum professional.   As noted by Etherington (2004), "By allowing ourselves to be known and seen by others, we open up the possibility of learning more about our topic and ourselves, and in greater depth" (p.25). Furthering that idea, Etherington explores the notion that reflexivity challenges us

to be more fully conscious of our own ideology, culture, and politics and that of our participants and our audience (p. 36).

In relation to my research specifically, I turn to *interpersonal* reflexivity, which "recognizes that the research setting and the inter-personal dynamic between the researcher and participant can influence knowledge creation" (Hennick, 2011, p. 20). As I weave my voice alongside and within those who allowed me to record their professional insights, I reflect upon these intertwined stories. Throughout the reflexive process I find similarities and differences in the subtle ways we understand our practice and I pose questions to myself about why I comprehend these experiences the way(s) that I do and why the educators might understand their particular practice in the ways that they do. I begin with the transcriptions of interviewees, find similarities in my own journal entries, memos, and thoughts, and make connections between my experience and my colleagues' own perspectives. This research is not about them, or me, but about *us*. This extension of reflexivity informs the unique nature of my research. While the overall idea of reflexivity explored above is applied generally to research and my position in the context of exhibition creation, interpersonal reflexivity is focused on the ways in which the interactions between researcher and participant influence what new information comes to light. It also informs how I am interpreting the information I have gathered throughout the research process.

Setting the Stage for Research of Self: My Practice and Background

I am currently a museum educator at a small university art museum in a medium sized city in the southwest United States. With an MA in Art and Visual Culture Education and PhD candidacy in Art History and Education, I have been working in

museums for over 10 years and have been studying art, art history, and art education for over 15 years. I have been in my current position as Curator of Education and Public Programs for three years at the University Art Museum (UAM), which has over 40,000 objects in its collection and has particular strengths in photography, prints, and works on paper. The team I work with is relatively small, comprised of only eight full time employees and no full time curator during the time of my research. We did have an interim curator who was part time. I am the only educator on staff at the museum and work closely with all members of the team in order to think about museum exhibitions. During my time here I have curated or co-curated three different exhibitions, all of which have taken very different forms.

As I explore further in Chapter 4, part of my interest in this topic comes from a very personal place of longing for and working towards more direct connections between the collection of a museum and educational goals of the museum. In my own personal experience, throughout my 10-year career, I have always felt a slight disconnect between the development of educational material and the content that was the basis for that material (chosen objects, themes, and ideas in exhibitions). This interest has guided me to inquire about the processes and structures in museums that make claims to learning and yet fall into patterns that do not necessarily reflect opportunities for learning.

Document Analysis and Observation: Searching for Connections in Multiple Places

In order to triangulate my research and extend the type of information collected, I also use facets of research that focus on observations and the analysis of documents pertaining to a studied place, event, situation, or experience. In this particular case I began first making observations within specific galleries (see more detailed descriptions

of each space below). I documented object label samples, took photographs within different gallery spaces, and wrote descriptive field notes about the layout, the perceived educational objectives and methods, and their relation to objects in the various exhibitions that were made available to me by the interviewees. According to Glesne (2011), visual data, documents, artifacts, and other unobtrusive measures provide both historical and contextual dimensions to the research process (p. 89). These documented materials are used in order to visualize the actual manifestation of the educator's work inside the exhibition space alongside museum objects. They are referenced as a way to confirm, complicate, and in some cases challenge the perceptions of the educators as revealed through the interviews. They also add nuanced and varied layers of comprehension into my inquiry.

As a way to deepen my study of particular spaces and documents, I also incorporated observations and field notes in the form of thick description into my collection process. As noted by Sustein and Chiseri-Strater (2002), "without writing, the sharp, incisive details about people, places, and cultures are lost to us" (p. 56). While visiting exhibition spaces, I took note of, described, and made initial assessments about the function, layout, and consideration of education within these spaces. I walked through each space observing and interacting with the learning prompts put forth. I would then give myself 45 minutes to sit and write detailed notes about the space, my experience, my initial perceptions, and jot down questions to consider further[3]. I allowed myself time to analyze what I was seeing and did not take notes from an objective or removed position. As related to reflexivity (described above) and Grounded Theory

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[3] Due to the fact that I could not visit Stella's space during our interview, I gave myself the same amount of time to take notes on the exhibition documents she sent me for my research.

(explored below) I utilized thick description and made space for theorizing and subjectively placing meaning on what I was seeing, feeling, and hearing during my visits to the museums. Thick description is defined by Denzin (1989) as a description that goes beyond the simple or bare reporting of an act, but describes and investigates the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of action (p. 39).

Space One, Leana's Documented Practice

Interactive Gallery is a part of the SW Museum of Art and is one of the spaces I visited when interviewing Leana. The Interactive Gallery has been operating as an educationally curated space for over 23 years and has been in three different spaces in the museum throughout those years. The gallery has taken on many different forms and Leana has re-conceptualized its use during her career. At the time of my research the gallery was an open space on the 3rd floor of the museum. While it was a separate space, I was delighted (as indicated in my notes) that it was not tucked away in a corner or in the basement level of the museum. It was easily accessible, connecting to other gallery spaces on the floor. There were original works of art on view in the gallery and as Leana stressed in her interview they were not considered part of a de-accessioned, educational collection[4]. The artworks were behind larger displays of glass and had other objects surrounding them, as a way to inform how a viewer might read the work. For this particular rotation of artworks the interactive gallery was focused on the idea of storytelling through art and the displays encouraged people to imagine a story based on

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[4] It is common for museums to have "Education Collections," which are comprised of artworks that are not a part of the accessioned works of art. These are often objects that museum visitors can engage with more directly (touching, looking closer, having out for longer periods of time).

what they were seeing[5]. The objects were set up in what were labeled as "Rooms," and read like a diorama in a history or science museum. There were a total of eight works of art on display, ranging from oil painting, to lithograph, to bronze sculpture. While each object was used to explore the idea of stories in art, they all did not necessarily lend themselves to the same story or interpretation. For instance, one particular painting in the exhibition depicted a woman standing near a house, looking into the distance just past and over the museum visitor's shoulder. The objects around the painting and the accompanying prompts asked visitors to consider what might be going inside the home, what the woman might be thinking and doing with her time, who else might be in the story, and what happened before or after that moment.

Another image was an abstract, somewhat space-themed scene with bold colors; explosive shapes; and a deep, rich, black background. This particular set up focused on the stories of journeys. There was a sculpture of a rocket near the abstract painting as well as an old, tattered journal, an unfolded map, and a metal tool or lunch box. There were extended labels on the wall and on a table nearby that encouraged visitors to write about travel, wanderings, and journeys. The main prompt of each section started with, "A Story Begins…" and then offered different ways of imagining the story. While some of the guiding questions and prompts asked visitors to reference the artwork and diorama directly, other questions extended the story outside of the room, compelling visitors to write about recent or upcoming travel and how they felt about that experience. Near some of the prompts and images the SWMA had printed and incorporated visitors' stories into the exhibition space. These printed stories read similarly to other museum produced

[5] This gallery was re-conceptualized every 9 to 15 months and will be explained in chapter 4 when I cover the interviews in more depth.

content and elevated the audience written stories into conversation with what the museum staff had written. There were also three tables in the gallery space that had paper, pencils, books, and prompts for writing more stories. People were encouraged to take their stories with them or post them in the gallery to share with future visitors. It was also suggested that visitors take their experiences and potentially newfound ways of looking into the rest of their museum experience.

While visiting the SW Museum of Art and the Interactive Gallery, Leana encouraged me to also wander through other galleries because there were more examples of interpretative materials that she had been involved in creating with curatorial staff. There were two additional galleries in which I noted educational interpretive material, all of which were in the form of extended labels that compelled viewers to dig deeper, ask questions and think differently about the objects on view.

Space Two, Katalina's Documented Practice

The second space I visited corresponded to my interview with Katalina from the Museum of Art and Craft. While there was a separate interactive gallery within this museum, Katalina could not speak to the processes within that space because curatorial staff ran it with no educator on that particular committee. Instead, Katalina advised me to visit two specific exhibitions—one that was on view during the time of my visit and one that I came back to when the exhibition of interest was open to the public. These were exhibitions for which she had been directly involved in the planning of layout and the educational components as part of the overall design.

The exhibition that was up focused on Brazilian popular art and culture and displayed over 300 objects in four separate, but connecting, galleries. The exhibit

included prints, colorful ceramic and wood folk sculptures, toys and puppets, religious art, and festival costumes. Throughout the exhibition, interspersed with the museum's collection, were opportunities to engage with the material more directly and understand their contexts more in-depth. Videos of dancers were placed next to costumes; music was playing in relation to different instruments and objects; and guiding questions were sprinkled here and there asking visitors to draw connections between their own lives and the objects on view. In the middle of one of the galleries where prints were the main focus, there was a printmaking station, which allowed visitors the opportunity to experiment with varied printmaking materials and processes. An educator or volunteer was posted at this particular station (times were listed on the table) whenever more involved processes were available.

Two months later I came back to the MoAC to explore the other exhibition that Katalina had asked me to observe. This particular exhibition, *A Color, A World,* [6] was comprised of more than 130 objects from the Museum's collection and other private and public lenders. It was focused on a particular process and source of pigmentation and displayed the use of pigment in historical paintings, textiles, ceramics, prints, contemporary consumer products and packaging, and a variety of home décor items, among other things. The exhibition spread out through five different galleries and was consistent with the previous exhibition I had studied at the MoAC in terms of layout and educational presence. There were a variety of ways and opportunities in which moments for more engaged and extended learning were present. There were the expected traditional labels and didactic material to read, but there were also documentary

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[6] Exhibition and programming names have also been changed for the sake of anonymity.

photographs that pictured the process of pigment creation, maps that placed the trajectory of pigmentation production into historical, contemporary, and global contexts. There were sections in the exhibit that allowed visitors to grind source material and create powdered color. There were samples of fabric dyed at varied points in the stages of pigment creation and there were contemporary consumer products displayed in a section talking about current dying technologies.

Space Three, Analis' Documented Practice

When visiting the SSW Museum of Art, similar to my visit to the Museum of Art and Craft, Analis recommended that I visit multiple exhibitions at various times in order to see her collaboration with curatorial staff in action. At the time of my research this particular museum incorporated educational interventions less frequently than the two previous sites. The galleries that incorporated such interjections were smaller, with fewer artworks and potentially less opportunity to integrate educational prompts and material into the fabric of the exhibit. I spent my time observing several different exhibition spaces and making notes about what I saw and how I understood the educational function within these separate spaces.

One exhibition entitled *Western Iconography* had over 70 color block and lithograph prints, comic books, comic book images, and posters that explored notions of "The West" as portrayed through historical popular culture. The images were displayed in a traditional fashion with a larger, descriptive panel serving as the introduction and smaller, descriptive texts placed throughout the exhibit that introduced major ideas and themes within the show. The educational and community component came through the addition of what were called "Critical Reflection Labels," which were written by

community members and placed alongside some of the museum staff written labels. These labels served as additional information from a non-museum voice and allowed a different, often critical perspective to be on view. There were eight community labels that challenged ideas such as race, gender, masculinity, and whiteness.

Another exhibition at this museum site, *Human Landscapes,* had an interactive component, in which magnifying glasses were left in front of a particular work of art and visitors were asked to look closer, describe the details, back away and describe the painting again, comparing and keeping tack of the ways in which close observations influenced their looking. There was only one interactive educational component for one object among many, but again, this was a smaller gallery with less than 50 artworks on view.

The last exhibition studied at SSW Museum of Art was a particularly interesting exhibition, in the fact that Analis chose to negate the use of objects, favoring oral histories, graphic design, and artist collaborations for exhibition content. The exhibit was organized in part of the museum that is considered a historic property. It does not function like a traditional art gallery space, but is more in alignment with history or cultural museum display. In the re-installation of this historic property, Analis moved away from the objects that were representative of domestic spaces of the eighteenth-century southwest United States. Instead her curatorial project displayed video, architectural blue prints, urban planning documents, written and oral histories, audio components, historic photographs of the people and buildings, as well as newspaper clippings about the property.

Space Four, Stella's Documented Practice

As mentioned above, I was unable to make a site visit to The Midwest Museum of Art while I interviewed Stella. I had been to the museum space just five months prior to the interview and was drawn to speak to somebody from the MMA because of that visit. After our interview Stella emailed me installation photographs, photographs of individual works of art, object labels, extended object labels, and photographs of specific educational prompts, spaces, and materials based on the conversations we had about different projects. She also sent me links to the museum's blog and reviews of the exhibitions when they were available.

The first exhibition that she sent material for was based on the material culture of a particular time period and group of people. *Markers of Greatness* was an exhibition of over 120 objects that incorporated ceramics, weaponry, metal sculptures, and a large sampling of textiles from the MMA's permanent collection as well as objects on loan. This particular exhibition spanned roughly four galleries. In one of the galleries, which contained a large grouping of textiles, there was a learning space that focused on various processes and materials used for weaving and dying. There were eight small (roughly 12" x 14") woven tapestries hanging in the space with written labels and diagrams describing the methods of weaving. There was also a prompt that encouraged visitors to touch the different woven samples, taking note of the differences in structure, texture, and feel. Within this same area, on an adjacent wall there were three different loom samples. There was also a laminated key that identified different types of weaves with a symbol, which helped visitors, as they moved through the rest of the exhibition, take note of textiles that were woven a particular way based on the symbol on the object label. The

educational component within the exhibition was directly related to the learning in the rest of the space.

The second exhibition, *Dust into Dust*, was focused on one artist and a particular body of work from that artist's early career. *Dust into Dust* was comprised of over 30 oil paintings, sketches, drawings, and some of the artist's notebook pages. Of particular interest for the educational components in the exhibition was the theme/subject matter of the artist's paintings, which focused on issues of water, erosion, and environmental change. While most of the paintings and drawings were created from 1930 - 1960, there were supplemental elements that connected the issues of water, land, and the human experience to contemporary times. Within the exhibit there were documentary photographs of actual erosion and water shortages that spanned the time period of the created paintings and beyond. There were also videos and slide show images that incorporated government documentation of land use and damage over time. There was also an interactive component that invited community members and museum visitors to upload their own images depicting their experiences with drought, water depletion, and a changing landscape. These images, along with facts about water evaporation and water preservation, were looped through a screen in the gallery.

Space Five, My Own Documented Practice

As indicated earlier, I have been in my current job for close to three years and have worked closely with curatorial staff on and off with the goal of bridging educational objectives with the curatorial vision. I do not have a dedicated space to realize these objectives but have had opportunities to brainstorm and implement learning moments alongside exhibition content. Once the exhibitions with which I was involved were

installed, I dedicated, just as I had for the other spaces, 45 minutes to 1 hour reflecting on the layout of the exhibition and the incorporated learning components. I also wrote in a research journal throughout the process of each project, reflecting on my experiences and thoughts about the entire project.

The first exhibition that I worked on closely with the curator was a traveling fiber-based exhibition entitled *Fabrication*. This was a small exhibit that displayed nine fabric-based installations—some traditional and others more experimental in nature. For example, there were more conventional representations of fiber art in the form of quilts, but there were also experimental pieces such as woven sculptural installations that were made of multiple materials including glass. The exhibition focused on the connection between process, tradition, and experimentation in fiber-based art. Each artwork had an extended label that I co-edited with the curator, explaining the artists' processes and larger conceptual ideas for their particular piece. In a small space just off of the main gallery I built two large, interactive, chicken wire sculptures that were suspended from the ceiling. I left long strips of cloth, yarn, twine, colored duct tape, and other materials, inviting visitors to weave into the collaborative shapes. The materials were set in bins on a table next to the sculpture. We also placed three small stools in the space, inviting visitors to sit and stay for longer periods of time. Along the back wall there was also a floor loom, which had been set up and installed by a partnering art educator and weaver. We made a simple wall label with directions on how to use the loom and posted them for visitors to read and follow.

The second exhibition was much more involved and comprehensive. In this particular curatorial project I was tasked with creating educational material for a traveling

exhibition, *A Painter's Hand: The Monotypes of Adolph Gottlieb*. *A Painter's Hand*

contains over 40 monotypes, which were the last body of work created by the painter

before his death. The content of the exhibit focused on his life history and role in the art

world. There were also sections that focused on the monotype process, as it was

something he only did for this particular body of work. As a painter he had never created

monotypes, and thus monotyping as a process for him was unique to his history and

biography. For this particular endeavor, I partnered with the interim curator and a local

artist in order to conceptualize how we might teach our visitors about Gottlieb through

the process of making. The local artist was commissioned by the museum to create

monotypes in their own style and concept while contemplating Gottlieb's style,

experience, and motivations for making art. The installation, entitled *Call and Response*,

resulted in 12 original monotypes, seven wooden sculptural pieces, a lithograph press in

the gallery, and video documentation of an interview with the artist exploring her process

of making monotypes. We also invited community members to make monotypes and

installed them alongside the artist's installation for the duration of the exhibition.

Uncovering Meaning Through Grounded Theory

In a very general sense, grounded theory is defined as "a methodology for the

purpose of building theory from data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 1). Glasser and

Strauss (1967), early proponents of grounded theory, defined it as an inductive strategy

whereby the researcher discovers concepts and hypotheses through constant comparative

analysis. These very simplified definitions get at the heart of grounded theory and its

purpose to formulate new ideas or understandings about a specific phenomenon. It is a

qualitative process that consists of "examining data and interpreting data in order to elicit

meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (p. 1). In other words, grounded theory takes the findings or data of research and moves them into larger socio-cultural contexts through constant analysis. Many proponents of grounded theory agree that it is important to be able to move beyond the local setting of research and engage with more formal ideas at a more general and removed level (Gleasen, 2008, p. 35). Grounded theory allows me to take the information gathered and draw connections between those findings and larger philosophical and epistemological frameworks in order to render new ideas about my understanding of art museum education.

Hennick et al. (2011) point out that "grounded theory is not a theory itself: it is a process for developing empirical theory from qualitative research that consists of a set tasks and underlying principles" (p. 208). In other words, it is a system of analysis that allows researchers to ground their findings in theory. It is a cyclical system that highlights the constructivist and subjective ideas discussed above. In the context of grounded theory, data collection and analysis do not happen separately, but rather "analysis evolves as one collects and interprets data" (Charmaz, 2009, p. 160). Bowers and Schatzman (2009) discussed the difference between traditional analysis as an ordered way of thinking and grounded theory analysis, which is less ordered and more emergent. Looking at the implications of ordered analysis, they take issue with the fact that in ordered methods of analysis "concepts of the discipline would be brought to the data, not derived from the data" (p. 100). The concern stems from the fact that true analysis should emerge from the data discovery. Otherwise, there is simply an overlay of disciplined thought into a specific situation. To summarize, the underlying principles of grounded theory I use, as explored by Hennick et al. (2011), are as follows:

- Data analysis is a circular process rather than linear.

- Verbatim transcripts are used in analysis, allowing researchers to understand participants' views in their own words.

- Data collection and analysis are interlinked.

- Analytic and reflexive memo writing is used.

- Analysis goes beyond description to develop explanatory frameworks.

Searching for Connections & Meaning

I began the coding and analysis process when I finished my first interview and site visit. I transcribed the interview with Leana the day after the visit and then plugged the transcription into an excel spreadsheet in order to begin the process of coding and assigning meaning to the conversation. I transcribed the interviews sentence-by-sentence and highlighted words, phrases, or ideas that were meaningful throughout the transcription (see Table 1). After I transcribed and highlighted particular words, I placed them into categories regarding what larger idea the educator was referring to when answering the question. Particular themes such as educator training, audience age and learning level, types of learning, power within an institution, and layout of a space began to emerge. I created a new document with these themes noted as the organizing headers and continued to add to these categories with each new interview and museum visit. I began mind-mapping the ways in which these themes were discussed across the collected information as a way to organize the findings. For instance, "Audience" was one theme that kept coming up in the interviews. It was identified as an important idea in Leana's interview and then was brought up in each of the other interviews and my own journaling. The ways in which audience was discussed varied across these sources and

thus those differences were highlighted in the audience mapping sequence. Similarities

were also noted.

Interview Transcribed	Meaning	Theme / Code	Notes / Thoughts
And I think that it is becoming **progressively blurred**. And I suspect it should **be even in how educators are trained**…I don't think they are trained in curatorial practice and I suspect that's changing in how they're trained. And they shouldn't … they have specific functions but when it **gets to the gallery they shouldn't necessarily be different**.	PERCEPTION OF BLURRING DUTIES OF CURATORS AND EDUCATORS Training	**Academic Training:** *PERSONAL PERCEPTION OF HOW ACADEMIC TRAINING MIGHT BE AFFECTING HOW THESE ROLES ARE BLURRED - DISCIPLINES?*	**Personal idea** = curation and education should not necessarily be different in the Gallery. Exhibition content and pedagogy should be more seamless.
was all about **interactive spaces for families and children** - which is the gallery I curate…though I will say - in the course of having done it for 23 years. I **care less and less about the specific child target and more about the nature of the interaction**.	LOOKING AT PEDAGOGY (NATURE OF LEARNING) AND AUDIENCE.	**Pedagogical Considerations:** *Education designed with the nature of learning as interactive NOTE: Interesting AGE of AUDIENCE does not indicate the educational model*.	The nature of learning / looking at pedagogy design rather than audience. Not to say that the audience should not be considered
So I am looking for **interactions that are scalable** and that help whoever walks into that space. So **they can have a good experience**…so they can have a different experience maybe than what they anticipated. In a positive way - **but I am not thinking so much that I need to appeal to a 7 year old**. Less and less and less as time has gone.	CHANGE OVER TIME - THROUGH EXPERIENCE / EDUCATOR IS LOOKING AT THE AUDIENCE IN A DIFFERENT WAY.	**Audience:** *rather than SEPARATING learners into specific categories - education in the gallery space is designed to incorporate all LEARNERS*	Audience and learning are continually changing. Adults can learn through interaction also.
If you looked at images of every exhibition I've curated …over the last 23 years **you'll see there is a visual difference in those exhibitions.** Because they **are far more visually sophisticated** and far more **in alignment with the demeanor** of our other galleries than they would have been when I first started.	EXHIBITION'S VISUAL / AESTHETIC DIFFERENCE HAS CHANGED OVER TIME - TO BE MORE IN LINE WITH THE REST OF THE MUSEUM	**Aesthetics of Curation:** *Over time have become more in-line / reflective of the other spaces in the museum*.	Is this about Legitimacy? What constitutes legitimacy? Institutional Pressure?

Table 1. Sample of transcribed and coded interview.

Next, I turned to my field notes and journal entries related to Leana's space and began to look for meaning within those notes. Again, I circled particular words, themes, and ideas that stood out and seemed meaningful. I wrote down the already identified themes from the interviews and placed appropriate items from my own notes into these categories when appropriate. I added new theme categories that had not been obvious or perhaps even present when I coded the interviews and I compared the coded information at that point. Then, I combined the transcriptions into a memo document in Microsoft Word and made notes of my interpretations and wrote down questions for further investigation or for scrutiny into my reading of the material (see Figure 1 & Figure 2). I assigned codes and numbers (C2, C3, C4, etc.) in order to refer back to the original document and assigned code. These memos also led me to investigate my topic through new secondary and written sources. For instance, when educators spoke about training, I turned to professional development material and recently published material about advanced degrees in art, art education, and museum training. When educators spoke about legitimizing their space through aesthetics I looked into literature about art museum spaces, use, and aesthetics. Each theme was investigated further and circled back into what was being said and practiced by the art educators in this research.

Memos & Reflections RE: Coding
Title

Traci Quinn
Author

CODE C2: Are roles becoming more blurred because of academic training? Are museum practitioners introduced to a variety of different museum practices? IS THIS ABOUT DISCIPLINES or is this about INSTITUTIONALIZATION? How is the institutionalization of the museum as a political, cultural, social, economic place affecting HOW museum educators or museum professionals in general being trained? This training speaks specifically to academic training that takes place in universities that offer museum education programs. *** *FOR FURTHER REVIEW / DATA - CHECK INTO MUSEUM EDUCATION PROGRAMS OR MUSEUM STUDIES PROGRAMS AND THEIR CURRICULA!*

CODE C3 AND C4: Looking at the nature of learning as interactive and not AGE specific. There is this idea that educational components in the gallery should be generalized in the sense that anyone - from a diverse group of ages - can engage with artwork on view. (IN The EDUCATION GALLERY there is still a lot of text in the images of the space / curriculum that is present in the space currently. Based on the design of the gallery space young children (pre K - 1 or 2nd grade) might need an adult to help them read the stories. The design of it still reads as playful / youth focused so it somewhat contradicts the interview CODE A7. FAMILY space still reads as a family space. What does this mean? How do I address this?

Transcription

Coding Memos

Section 3

Section 4

+

CODE C7: Where does the pressure to 'look' a certain way come from? What does it mean for an educational space or museum space to be more seamlessly incorporated into the rest of the museum? This is something that comes up in other interviews (▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮). So there is something to this desire. ***FURTHER REVIEW / DATA* the *desire for educational spaces to be more integrated.* Institutional pressures? Legitimacy (a component of institutionalization) What other factors have to do with this? Design as an important component of this.

CODE C14: Do art educators look at why people visit museums? The focus on education is central to museum practice because of change in policy, etc…Is there any research out there beyond FALK that looks at the relationship between AUDIENCE motivation and EDUCATION - Also - look at ▮▮▮▮▮ research and how they turned to Audiences for advice on what they wanted to learn ***FURTHER REVIEW / DATA* on educational practice that does or does not incorporate surveys.

Figure 1 & Figure 2. Samples of memo writing and reflections on assigned codes.

The same process was used for the other interviews, site visits, field note journals, and photographs. Notes were taken, ideas were pulled from those notes, and findings were organized according to themes. If themes fit into already existing categories, then I placed them into that category and conceptualized how and why they fit into that

category, making distinctions and drawing comparisons across educators. If new themes emerged I would go back to old transcriptions to make sure I had not missed the idea in previous coding attempts. This kind of analysis / coding happened throughout the transcription process and I made sure to compare individual interview codes to each other as well as compare individual coding to what I had collectively grouped during my analysis. For instance, when I coded Stella's interview, I compared my findings to the themes I had identified in interviews with Leana and Analis, and I also compared these findings to the themes that I collected and combined in my reflective memos.

Using the methods of in-depth interviews, direct observation, self-reflexive auto-ethnography, and grounded theory I attempt to better understand how museum educators conceptualize their roles as they shift from their professionally defined role (as educator) into roles that are often defined as distinct from education. I see potential in utilizing a multiple methods approach because it allows various perspectives and a variety of contexts to be considered in the research process. Auto-ethnography allows me to insert my voice into the narrative as a practicing educator. In-depth interviews allow me to explore other practicing educators' conceptualizations of their roles as they shift between varied roles. Direct observation lets me to observe the ways in which these perceived behaviors and professional shifts are actually taking place in everyday situations. Finally, grounded theory provides an opportunity to analyze the data in a way that positions the findings in a broader theoretical context.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are several limitations and delimitations that must be recognized as a part of this study. As far as delimitations are concerned, there are a few decisions that I have consciously made which affect who I am including in my research and the type of museum practice I will study. The first delimitation I have made is to interview and consider only the perspectives and experiences of art museum professionals that are considered educators, rather than explore the experiences of various museum workers such as curators, artists, directors, and administrators. I am focusing on educators specifically because of my position as an art educator within the museum and my interest in their professional experiences. Another delimitation that is worth noting is that throughout this research I look at museum practice that deals specifically with the direct relationship between art, exhibitions, and education within the gallery setting, and the development of in-gallery learning. In other words, museum programming such as K-12 tours, community outreach, and lectures will not be considered in this research. That is not to say those programs did not come up in my discussions with the interviewed educators, but they are not the focus of my explorations.

Limitations to this study include the number of participants who agreed to participate and thus the number of museums represented in my findings. While I hoped to reach a greater number of educators, only four agreed to participate in the end. In no way will such a small sampling be representative of art museum practice and/or spaces as a whole. It is a very limited view. However, I feel as though these limitations are set by the newness of such practice and the availability of full time workers to dedicate time to a project such as this. That being said, the participation of even a small number of research

subjects still reveals trends and implications for the field of art museum education and museum practice in general. As must be expected, there are also the limitations of my own bias and preset beliefs about the field of art education within the context of museums. There are also limitations that come with the methodological approaches I have chosen for this research. By situating my research in an interpretivist paradigm, and by using interviews, auto-ethnography and grounded theory, I am aware that my findings are subjective (rather than objective) and reflective of very specific ideas. Part of my responsibility and thus strong focus on reflexivity and disciplined noticing (described in depth above) is to stay in touch with and maintain transparency about my biases in research and analysis of my findings.

CHAPTER FOUR:

MARKING OUR STORIES: EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF ART

MUSEUM EDUCATORS

In this chapter I lay out the detailed findings that are revealed through this

research. As one might assume, each educator's interpretation, story, and place of

practice is different from that of the others, but certain similarities bind these museum

educators to one another and highlight the nature of contemporary art education museum

work. As I tell these stories, I draw connections between the experiences, tease out the

subtle ways in which those experiences compare and contrast, and highlight noticeable

takeaways from each interview and exhibition study. These takeaways are moments of

heightened interest for me as the researcher, in which I make strong notations in the

interview transcripts, my field journal, and coding process. The takeaways serve as

descriptive moments that stand out and emphasize the uniqueness of a space and educator

in a particularly significant way. This chapter is organized based on the major themes

and ideas that were revealed across each encounter I had with the educators and the

complexity of these themes is presented by placing the educators' perspectives and

experiences alongside those of their contemporaries. This chapter is about revealing, not

about my interpretation of these findings. In chapters five and six I delve into deeper

interpretation about the findings and place them into frameworks for understanding using

Institutional Theory and theories of (un) disciplining.

While there are obvious differences each educator brings to the conversations about education and curation, there are larger overarching ideas that they each touch upon in their interview. Some of the ideas they discuss are obvious, due to the very nature of what it means to be an educator in a museum (of course an educator should talk about audience), and the fact that they were responding to my research questions (if you ask about collaboration people will talk about collaboration). It is the nuanced details within these guiding ideas that are of particular interest and will be explored at length in this chapter. The ideas that each educator explores as a significant theme in this research are: audience; pedagogical considerations; aesthetics in the museum space; collaborative functions; power, responsibility, and intentionality; museum knowledge; personal experiences; and resources for practice.

People at the Center of Our Work

As could be expected, the museum's relationship with people is a key concept that each of the educators talks about and continually brings up when reviewing their involvement in curatorial processes. The terminology used and the roles of the public vary within and across situations, but nevertheless, the responsibility of educators to consider and respond to their audience through exhibitions is an important factor that each educator discusses. Amongst the different stories and perspectives of the interviewees, the terms "audience," "visitor," "community," and "learner" are often used inter-changeably and refer to a myriad of publics who visit the museum, participate in museum functions, serve as consultants or experts, inform museum content, or challenge museums. These varied labels and roles are complex, and in this research are contextualized in terms of how the museum educator attempts to meet particular needs of

a visitor or community. These roles and identifiers also highlight how the educator's

function is central to conceptualizing how people might spend their time engaging with

an exhibition space or museum.

Educator as Advocate

Within this research the educators take a leading role in advocating for and

working with people who visit their institutions in order to expand the ways people

experience, learn from, and engage with art museums and their content. What is more,

they advocate for ways in which museums work with, learn from, and engage with their

publics. In terms of exhibitions and organizing museum content with potential museum

visitors in mind, educators continually think of their audience and keep them at the fore.

Their role tends to bridge and re-imagine what the community might want and expect

from a museum. Among the information gathered from interviews, field-notes, and self-

reflection, it is clear that each educator's support for audience and community in museum

content is complex, yet focused and intentional. The advocacy for the public spans many

aspects of their work, from creating content with community, to consulting community in

content production to simply reminding other museum workers that there is a larger

audience to consider, and thus varied learning opportunities to present.

Considering our Audience and Communities. Simple, yet common, instances

of audience advocacy start with the ways in which information is presented to visitors

and the type of material that is put forth in a museum space. Time and time again, the

educators spoke to the act of being more cognizant and purposeful in presenting to

multiple audiences. For instance, in referring to her particular role as a text editor for the

curators' interpretative materials, Stella insists that content be visitor (rather than expert) focused when she states,

> I'm just thinking about visitor needs and trying to make things really, really clear. I look for art historical jargon and think, OK now…is this a teaching opportunity for us to teach a concept? Can we make this a teaching moment? Or is this just a word that nobody cares about because it is just a really fancy word? (interview with Stella, May 2015)

In a similar vein, Leana noted,

> We need to understand that the average visitor may not be interested in the level of expertise that a curator presents. It is our job to think about what the people who walk through our door might be interested in seeing or doing. We need to ask ourselves, and more importantly our colleagues, who is this for? (interview with Leana, February 2015)

Analis also aligns herself with responsibility to the visitor within the planning for exhibitions. "We need to think about all of the people we are speaking to. We are not just talking to art lovers…art experts, or at least we shouldn't be" (interview with Analis, August 2015). I echo these sentiments in a research journal entry written about an exhibition for which I was planning interpretive material. In one particular entry I write,

> our priority right now is better serving the University community, which of course includes our art students, but should extend into other areas like American Studies, Sustainability and Environmental Studies, Women's Studies, Chicano & Chicana Studies, Museum Studies, and so many others of course.

I go on to ask, "Where do we find relevant points through which the museum can serve these students' learning experiences?" (Personal research journal entry, June 2015)

Each of these instances speaks to a particular position for educators, in which we are playing a mediating role between the museum and the audience. Specifically, we encourage more attentive and complex understandings of *audience*. The comments make a strong case for centering exhibition design and content around *who* might enter the museum - not just *what* a particular exhibition is about. In this instance the educator recognizes the potential for varied interests among visitors and thus drives the conversation towards people.

Turning to our Audience and Communities. Another prevalent way that museum educators advocate for their community is by actively involving them in choices about learning, content, and an exhibition's purpose(s). This is a much more involved process and, at times, it flips traditional methods of museum planning on their head. Of course, depending on the museum and project the role of the public differs slightly, but the connecting factor leads back to instances in which community involvement informs the development of an exhibition either through ideas, feedback, or content production. At the center of these community-centered partnerships is a desire for wider ranging knowledge and interaction with the museum and a de-centering of the museum as the only content producer.

Talking about one particular instance of community involvement, Stella describes the collaborations for *Markers of Greatness,* in which local weaving experts are consulted in order to make the exhibition content more versatile, accessible and understandable to everyday visitors. In her interview she notes,

We had several meetings with the education director, myself, the curator, and area

weavers…a weaving guild and a professor who teaches fiber art. As a group we

brainstormed, thinking about how we could emphasize the importance and tedious

and arduous nature of weaving. What came from these conversations was a way

to use one of the galleries in the exhibition to illustrate the weaving process, from

shearing a llama to the various ways that a fiber is interlaced to create different

patterns and different textiles. (interview with Stella, May 2015)

She went on to explain how the community members that they partnered with developed

additional materials, based on research they did with the collection, that were included in

the exhibition.

We all went to textile storage and [the curator] pulled out textiles for them to look

at really closely, to study, and take notes. They went back to their studio and

made enlarged samples for us to hang in this gallery, that we called the weaving

gallery. (interview with Stella, May 2015)

In this particular case, the exhibition was already in the planning stages, but the museum

turned to textile and weaving experts from the community in order to collaboratively plan

informative and visitor-centered learning opportunities. The knowledge that the weavers

brought to the conversation opened up different ways of understanding material,

expanding from the written didactics that were prepared by the curator and educator.

Katalina also includes community members in the development of educational

and exhibition content. Slightly different from Stella, Katalina and the collaborating

curator had formal evaluations for visitors and museum members to fill out. In planning

the exhibition they shared the material with viewers ahead of time, asking them specific questions about their experiences and preferences.

> We did an informative evaluation and asked the public specific questions about their experience. Questions like: Did they like the proposed music? What did they want to do based on the given exhibition information? What would be an interesting idea for us to incorporate into the exhibit? Then we responded to that…in terms of the way the exhibit was designed and what we had for people to do in there. (interview with Katalina, March 2015).

In further discussing this particular survey and what they found, Katalina stresses how she would never have thought to include specific material and types of learning opportunities had they not surveyed the public. This points to the very specific ways in which including community in exhibition development has direct impact on the way information is presented and understood by people.

Analis has a more extensive, long-term, and involved community relationship through which she develops community-focused exhibitions. In a particular project she works with a specific group of people on an exhibition for 1 - 2 years. Throughout this time the participants respond to various museum content and then create their own works exploring particular ideas found in various galleries. At the heart of her collaborations, Analis stresses the desire to include more interpretations and ways of knowing in the gallery. In speaking to this mode of working she notes that she is "thinking about who is telling the story to the point that objects' exhibition texts are written collaboratively with participants in order to make space for other voices to bring multiple perspectives" (interview with Analis, August 2015). In this case the audience and community become

content producers, label writers, and co-curators of an exhibition. Their perspectives are still reflecting on ideas present in the museum's other galleries, but they shift into a diverse range of understandings and expressions of particular viewpoints based on the participants' rather than the museum's interest and knowledge base.

Learning in the Museum: The Nature of Gallery-Based Pedagogy and Curriculum

Not surprisingly, the nature of learning within museums was also a central theme that each of these educators explored. As with the focus on the audience, it is the intricacies within this theme that are of most interest to my research. Of course an educator should be focused on learning, but within the context of collaboration and exhibition design the way in which learning is framed takes on specific qualities and considerations. There are also unique challenges that arise. The participants in this research examine the different ways that learning is presented in a museum space; the varied modalities that can exist in an exhibition context; considerations of educational design in learning; the type and variety of information museums present for people to contemplate; and who has the power and ability to engage with and make museum material.

How We Learn: Different Ways of Knowing

Pedagogy, or the methods through which learning occurs in museums, is a key interest to these museum educators. More specifically, each of the educators explores how learning can and does take shape in an exhibition space. One of the guiding points is revealed through their discussions regarding a continued reliance on, yet desire to move beyond, text-heavy material. Each educator speaks to an assumed ineffectiveness and frustration with long wall labels and heavy handed written materials, but often maintain

the use of text as a primary source for communication. In her interview, Analis

mentioned (more than once) a common understanding amongst museum workers that

people often do not read text in an exhibition. In referring to a specific project and

didactic she says, "I don't know who reads it…we all know the statistics about how many

people read when they are at an art museum, and I see it happen all the time when people

just walk by [a label], especially when it is just too much" (interview with Analis, August

2015). Similarly, in reflecting on the features of certain objects and their relation to text

in one exhibition, Katalina notes,

> These are things that are used as implements really - in special ways. There is
>
> that formal, beautiful element but then there is this context in which this thing was
>
> used and I wonder, how can you convey this information without tons of text?
>
> Some people like to write a lot of label text, you know? And some tend to get a
>
> little label heavy. I wonder if this is the best way to communicate about the
>
> uniqueness of these things. (interview with Katalina, March 2015)

Leana also reflects on the changing ways in which she thinks about the use of text as a

form of education. "The first exhibition I ever did for a family gallery, there were so

many words on the wall," she said laughing. "Oh, my god! It was such a lesson. Each of

the objects had a whole lot of didactic material around it, and there were worksheets and

everything. It was a very work heavy exhibition" (interview with Leana, February 2015).

Continuing in that line of thinking she notes how her practice has changed over

time. When referencing a recent exhibition in her space she spoke to the conscientious

avoidance of text and also a more thoughtful use of text. "I try to be sensitive to the

words on the wall, and not use a lot. And what words there are, I want to make sure they

are not telling you what to do, but are more modeling how you might do something. We

are going to give some cues; like here are some ways you can think about this. Try this.

(interview with Leana, February 2015). In other words, her text often functions as a

guiding tool rather than a didactic one. This simple transition in how text is used in an

exhibition space highlights efforts by educators to consider the complex ways that people

learn. In the case mentioned above, Leana is still relying on written language to guide

her visitors, but the function is different from a traditional use of translating facts from

the expert (museum) to the learner. Instead, she encourages a different approach to the

information and opens up engagement, suggesting new ways of relating to the objects. In

my field notes about her exhibition space I note,

> Leana has created an interesting and relatable way for people to look at art. In her
>
> current exhibition she sets the stage for viewers to find a story. There are
>
> different displays, and each encourages us to imagine the people, places, and
>
> events of another time or space. The prompt, "The Story Begins…" compels us
>
> to thing beyond the art and engage with it in an open and creative way. She is
>
> engaging our imagination! (research field notes, February 2015).

Thinking back to Stella's project with local weavers (which was explored above), there is

also a strong consideration for how people learn. The point of having the local weavers

create material for the exhibition was centered on the goal to incorporate interactive

learning through more tactile modes of engagement.

> We wanted to create an environment where visitors could come up to and feel and
>
> touch. They [the weavers] used larger cord and yarn so [visitors] can actually see
>
> how the textiles are interlaced, and then the textiles are labeled with little

emblems that match the samples in that gallery so visitors can make connections

between the technique and the objects on the wall. (interview with Stella, May

2015)

My field notes from Stella's space reflect similar observations of how people were

presented with material.

There is a lot of information in this space. The gallery guides are well-

designed, but what grabs my attention is the different forms of engagement.

There are beautiful weaving samples that I can touch and see, showing me

different techniques. There are photographs of llamas, alpacas, and sheep next

to samples of their fur. This must be the source material! There are also samples

of natural materials that are used to dye the fibers. There are so many ways to

engage with the process here. (research field notes, May 2015)

In referencing a long-term project, Katalina speaks to the goal of incorporating as many

different learning modes into the exhibition as possible. She states,

We have some interactives planned - we are incorporating different I-Pads that

will have images of the bugs - images that were taken through a microscope.

There will be an area where people can fool around with some images of the

dying and pigment processes. There will be color swatches on a board to look at

and feel. There will be maps that show the migratory and trade patterns. It

is incredibly full! (interview with Katalina, March 2015)

In speaking on an entirely different project, Katalina continued this thread and stressed

the importance and consideration of technology as a mode and tool for learning in the

exhibition space. In this particular case she had to fight for the use of technology in

contrast to very traditional forms of art making. The idea centered on participants creating digital works of art referencing the shapes, colors, collage techniques and content from works on view in the gallery.

What was great about this project was it incorporated a widely used technology, an app, into learning. It eliminated the conflict that comes with using wet material near an object, but still allowed the audience to create something visual and play. It was tremendously popular. (interview with Katalina, March 2015)

In my journal and reflections about my own practice, I note various instances in which I incorporate different ways of learning into the exhibition space. With one particular project, I continually speak to my co-workers about the need to present the material with minimal text and variation in presentation, and thus accessibility. Because the project revolved around working with a contemporary artist, I came up with the idea to interview her, record her process of making, and incorporate a short video in the installation rather than settling on what I refer to in my journal as the "read-only" default. I also brainstormed with the artist ways in which the art making process could be made available to the audience. Through our conversations we came up with a plan to incorporate a printing press into the exhibition (as it was a monotype exhibition) and also host a day for printing with people, with a resulting installation of community work alongside the artist's original monotypes. The educational ways of knowing were multi-faceted and based in the desire to expand modal opportunities for learning. There was text, there were moments for observations of the artist through video, and there were opportunities for making.

What We Learn: Building Complexity in Exhibition Content

Connected to these explorations of *how* the public learns in an exhibition space is the idea of *what* they can learn. Each of the educators interviewed in this research bring up the role of education in the expansion of content beyond the canon of art history. Common things that each of them discuss are the notions like having multiple points of access (in terms of content not just learning style); contextualizing works into historical, social, or political moments; increasing diversity of ideas; and including multiple perspectives in exhibition interpretation and content.

Leana discusses the idea of complexity in exhibition content by first criticizing the museum's constant reliance on what she refers to as a "de-contextualized" art history. In speaking on her experience with exhibition planning and standard practice she highlights her frustration with the overuse of the art historical canon. She notes, "art history is just *one* lens, and of course we still install everything according to art history as if that is the way, but that is just a way. Art history is simply one framework and sometimes it is particularly useful, but not always" (interview with Leana, February 2015). She goes on to further question how museums often frame art without consideration for purpose and context. She notes,

> If you think about it, Renaissance paintings tended to be in churches. If you can't imagine it in a church, or why it was made for a church, then you lose something. Or looking at a landscape – you have to be able to imagine what it feels like. An artist paints it because they want you to imagine the landscape. They don't do it so you know when they were born, or who they studied with. (interview with Leana, February 2015)

Katalina also tasks herself with contextualizing material in a larger socio-cultural conversation when she has the opportunity to do so. She begins her exploration of this topic by asking the question, "what percentage of people walking though the door are Pre-Colombian experts, or experts on Chinese writing, or scholars of a particular artist?" In a thoughtful reflection about her own question she says,

> it is important to give viewers tangible, relatable information. We cannot continue to only put up shows with so little for people to grasp on to, but we do. Our exhibitions need to include objects and stories that are relevant and relatable. (interview with Katalina, March 2015)

> In a passionate statement regarding her role in the curatorial process and a desire to complicate the stories museums tell, Analis says,

> I am looking at ways to engage communities. We do not need the same goddamn narrative, or the same monograph or the same story 100 times over. My caveat is to fight for what is relevant to the community I am working in and with. (interview with Analis, August 2015)

She goes on to insist on multi-vocality in the exhibition's narrative.

> I am really thinking about the way in which we are not the authoritative voice. I want to make space for other voices to come in and fill the space so that it's more layered, it's more dense, it has more points of access, it's just more. (interview with, August 2015)

When asked to give an example of how she has broken the singular narrative with a curator on board she spoke to a particular project wherein community members were invited to write alternative labels for an upcoming Western Art exhibition. She felt the

exhibition was problematic and exclusive due to the focus on mostly white men as creators and the subjects of the artworks. Working closely with community members, eight labels were written from various perspectives, including a young girl who wrote in response to a popular and stereotyped depiction of a Native American child. In speaking to this particular label Analis says,

> So I had a 6th grader come in and respond to a work depicting Little Beaver, the really racist cartoon character. Her first sentence was, "This is racist," and then she went on to describe why it was racist. It was particularly powerful that these words were coming from somebody so young. (interview with Analis, August 2015).

> Like Analis, Stella also works to bring local stories and pertinent issues to the

fore. In her recollection of the exhibition *Dust into Dust* she notes,

> At the time we were in a pretty bad drought, so we thought that there was some current relevance to what happened during the time the artist was making work…around the Dust Bowl. Along with the artist's work we included photographs of the current water crisis that was hitting us hard. We also worked with a state organization where people could upload their own pictures of drought. We had a monitor in there that was looping those images with some more scientific facts on how the water was evaporating from local aquifers. Some of the contemporary images were eerily similar to the paintings. I feel the connection was a very real one. (interview with Stella, May 2015)

In my own journal entries, which reflect my thoughts on plans for a re-installation of the permanent collection, I ask myself,

How can I make this more accessible and relevant to those who may not know or

care about a particular art topic? The art content is always here, always. So, what

can we do to make this interesting to our non-art visitors? Or perhaps just show

that this art is not created in a bubble. Art has context and the museum needs to

enhance rather than remove that context. Who else could this appeal to? (Journal

entry, May 2015)

Aesthetics and Learning in the Museum Space

Directly related to the exhibition content and incorporating multiple modes of

learning in exhibits, each educator explores how the physical space and the long

established look of an exhibition affects their practice. The considerations for space

come down to how museum workers (from educators to curators to directors to exhibition

designers) conceptualize an exhibition layout and the aesthetic design for a particular

body of work or show. There are moments in which educators stress their own desires

for the art displays to fall in line with the aesthetic norm of the rest of the museum. Then

there are moments when they question the need or demand to do so. Again, as is the case

with every identified theme, each person has a slightly different experience with space

and aesthetics, but the ways in which they navigate education inclusion within a

museum's spatial design are significant moments to consider.

When discussing her experiences as curator for the educational gallery in SWMA,

Leana reveals her desire for the space to feel like the rest of the museum and not like an

afterthought or completely separate area altogether. Inserting this discourse into the

trajectory of her tenure as an educational curator she notes, "over the last 23 years there is

a visual difference in the exhibitions, because they are far more visually sophisticated and

in alignment with the demeanor of our other galleries than they would have been when I first started," (interview with Leana, February 2015). She goes on to talk about the space and how she does not see the need to create a specifically child-friendly atmosphere, but rather an environment that appeals to adults and children at the same time, through the use of "inviting yet sophisticated design choices that encourage creative intrigue for anyone." She also tells of her aim to make the space visible and directly a part of a visitor's journey. She reflects,

> That is what I will say is a little different from some other spaces you might look at, where the family space is in the basement, or it has double doors closing it off from the rest of the galleries, or it is in a different building altogether. Here the educational space is curated to be a part of and look like the rest of the museum. It feels pretty seamless. (interview with Leana, February 2015)

Leana continues on and talks about her intentions to transfer the strategies for learning, which are the focus of the educational gallery, into other galleries.

> So to me there is a synergy between the learning gallery approach and what we do in the rest of the museum. To a greater or lesser degree, I can only implement it so far. I have done it with some curators, but not others. (interview with Leana, February 2015).

The idea for Leana is that after visitors have spent time in the educational gallery, they will be able to use the educational approaches in other parts of the museum where similar prompts are present. The issue is that she is not always able to make them a part of other galleries. Analis speaks of similar issues regarding opportunities to insert varied ways of learning into exhibition spaces. In her case the use of more interactive prompts is

something she has used before with one particular curator who is often open to the idea. However, the decision to incorporate such moments is not always hers or the curator's to make. She recalls a recent moment wherein she realizes the incorporation of educational engagements would no longer be a part of exhibitions in her institution. She says,

> So with our fall exhibition, the curator and I tried to develop an interactive that was about people experiencing the process of art making. As we had done many times before, we developed this plan and presented it during a meeting, but our director was like "no. That doesn't go here. That goes in the creative space. We are not having that here. Period." That is one of those moments and it comes down to aesthetics and he didn't want that there. He felt it was disruptive. We didn't end up doing it at all. We just cut it. (interview with Analis, August 2015).

Continuing this conversation about aesthetics in the museum, Analis recalls one of the exhibitions that she curated with people as part of a community-based project. She speaks about the self-directed pressure she put on herself for this exhibition, stemming from her colleagues' and her own expectations. She says, "there were times I was stressing myself out. People assumed that the installation would not look good, so I worked really hard to make it legit" (interview with Analis, August 2015). She goes on to explain how her co-workers' reactions to the exhibition were positive yet slightly offensive.

> When it opened I got so many people talking about how amazing it looked and how they were impressed with the way things were laid out and the quality of

work and the consideration in hanging. They were all surprised. Which is pretty

pejorative. (interview with Analis, August 2015)

In speaking about experience with space and aesthetics as they span her 16-year

career at MoAC, Katalina also had memories about distinct moments when she was

involved in exhibition development. In telling a story about her experience collaborating

with curators and exhibit designers, she highlights instances in which she is the sole

advocate for different learning opportunities in galleries early on in her tenure. She

reflects,

> I remember having a conversation with them and I was like if we are going to
>
> have an interactive component it needs to relate directly to the object that it is
>
> referring to. I also kept telling them it needed to be right next to the object,
>
> physically. They didn't get it and they said things like "It does not look right. It
>
> does not belong there." In their minds education was in a section and it was over
>
> here way in the back. It was really hard. It was *really* hard. I remember running
>
> out of the building after a designer, chasing him to see if we could get this
>
> interactive thing done for the gallery. (interview with Katalina, March 2015).

Katalina continues on and talks about a small, yet significant, change in some attitudes

over time. She happily states,

> more recently, for the plans on an exhibit that is in the museum right now the
>
> exhibit designer actually called me to say, "don't you think we should have more
>
> interactive components in this exhibit?" So that is a real reversal. I tried to
>
> convince the curator of the need, and the director, and they were just like "no,"

but I have a colleague now that is on board. We get the job done sometimes.

(interview with Katalina, March 2015)

While visibly frustrated at the limitations set up by the director and curator, she was

optimistic with the change in the designer's perspective and the potential for more

successful additions of interactives into galleries.

In my own experience with the incorporation of educational elements into exhibit

spaces, I too am often *the* advocate for diverse learning material and moments. In

relation to the project *Call and Response,* I make notes of a meeting wherein I had

brought up the idea of having a demo and maker space near the exhibition. Afterwards I

reflect,

> The idea of a monotype station was shut down. I understand the concerns of
>
> everyone, given that this is an exhibition on loan. Although I did propose an
>
> installation with no wet material, we will rely solely on text for the main space.
>
> I am happy that my boss gave me permission to plan an installation with more
>
> engaging material. It will be in a completely separate area, but at least it extends
>
> the learning opportunities beyond the read-only default. (research journal,
>
> December 2015).

Like my contemporaries, whom I interviewed for the research, I also struggle with and

conceptualize what is aesthetically appropriate in exhibitions. I find myself in a curious

struggle to legitimize my practice through design and visual museum standards. I

continually write in my research journal about self-doubt and unease regarding *Call and*

Response. The decisions about wall color, layout, the community installation, use of a

press, and inclusion of video were all made in conversation with the artist, exhibit

designer, curator, director, and me. In my notes I question some of the decisions and their influence on aesthetics.

> Today we painted the galleries and I wonder if they are too child-like. The use of blue and red were based off of the pallet that Heidi used in her monotypes, but I feel a little unsure. I think the curator is annoyed with our palette. Maybe we re-paint and use more sophisticated colors. (research journal, February 2016).

Time and time again each of the educators tell stories about the challenge to include learning opportunities within an exhibition. There are expectations about the aesthetics of an art exhibition, which often work counter to the incorporation of educational material beyond text. The conversations about exhibits, design, and education revolve around where learning opportunities should be presented, how they should be presented, and at what level of frequency. There is also dialogue that centers on who has the authority to make decisions about the design, with the educators often advocating for more learning opportunities against other perspectives that focus on the exhibition looking "right" and legitimate. Of course the education and good design are not mutually exclusive, and this is also at the heart of the educator's thinking and experience with curation.

Collaboration Within the Museum: Breaking Silos of Practice

Earlier in this chapter the idea of collaboration was brought up in terms of working with audience and community, but there is another way that these educators explored collaboration, which comes from within their institutional structures. While the act of collaborating is not always separated so neatly into categories of people on the "inside" and "outside" of the museum, how educators talk about the internal

collaboration informs this study in specific ways that are different from collaborating

with community. In speaking about their modes of working with their co-workers, they

describe how internal collaboration functions, shifts, at times breaks down, and ultimately

impacts their approaches to education. They talk about the subtle ways in which working

alongside colleagues informs the creation of exhibitions and occasionally alters the

informative material they generate for visitors. The intricacies of these internal

relationships highlight the very nature of what it means to work in a museum where

educators are involved in the development of exhibits.

Out of the educators that I interviewed, Stella's institution, The Midwest Museum

of Art (MMA), has the most consistent collaborative model as far as internal organization

is concerned. As she noted in our discussion, the MMA has an exhibition team that

consists of an exhibition manager, an educator, the graphic and exhibition designers, and

the individual curator who is involved with each particular exhibition. The team meets

throughout the process of conceptualizing and implementing a show and Stella is

involved throughout the entire process. When talking about her role on the exhibition

team, Stella focuses first on her main responsibility. She explains,

> I review all of the exhibition text and in some cases, if it is a specific interpretive
>
> project or space within a gallery, I will write that text. Institutionally, it is a part
>
> of the routing process. I get it, review it, send it back to the exhibition's team,
>
> then to our copy editor, who then works with the curator, and then we send it off
>
> to the graphic designer. So, that is pretty formalized. (interview with Stella,
>
> May 2015)

In continuing the conversation about her experiences with the exhibition team, she speaks about the group's objectives to incorporate education and come up with specific learning goals to incorporate into exhibits. She says,

> Something we are working really hard on is coming up with a formalized interpretive plan so that we can work early on with the curators and come up with major take-aways from which we build material. Sometimes that manifests as text-only and other times it becomes much more involved, like in the weaving collaboration. (interview with Stella, May 2015)

 In either case, Stella stresses the collaborative nature of the projects, during which each of the team members is thinking about the exhibit as a whole - from the main ideas, to educational guidance, to the design of graphics and layout. Teamwork is embedded into the museum environment and everyone expects to be continuously involved.

Leana has a similar experience at the SW Museum of Art, wherein there are collective efforts to plan for exhibitions. Although not as ingrained in the fabric of the working environment, Leana speaks about her time spent on different organizing teams, especially for reinstallation efforts of the permanent collection. She reflects on the team's efforts at brainstorming installations with a mindful focus on the museum's spatial uniqueness for learning.

> With the reinstallations, it was drawn out meetings, sitting in an office playing with possible layouts and item lists with the curator, director, educator, and exhibition designer. Our focus was looking at the space and thinking beyond the checklist, because it is a 3-D environment. It is not a check-list, it is not a book. It is an environment. (interview with Leana, February 2015).

She goes on to emphasize the team effort in remaining cognizant of the three-dimensionality of the museum learning experience as a way to avoid traditional thinking about how we organize information. "We are not writing a thesis or dissertation for our peers. We are presenting information to a diverse group of people and being on a team helps to reiterate that function of our work."

Within each to these spaces there are specific tasks that the teams are focused on addressing. The collaborations are intentional and directed towards a goal of focusing the exhibition concepts towards the experience of the learner. In Stella's case the visitor is considered from the very beginning, as the team comes up with learning objectives and desired experiences. In Leana's situation, the nature of learning in a three-dimensional environment guides the development and choices presented to visitors when they visit the museum space. At the heart of these conversations is a thoughtful consideration of an exhibition's purpose and functionality.

The other educators I interview talk about lesser efforts (on an institutional level) to conjoin education and exhibition content, and discuss how these efforts manifest through either smaller group discussions or individual partnerships. None of the other museum sites in this study, including my own, has a collective working structure for exhibit planning and each is arguably operating under a more siloed organizational set-up. In these spaces, the collaborative work tends to hinge on the individual efforts of educators and specific curators[7]. Katalina, Analis, and I all comment on the ability to work with certain curators and not others. There is also a sense that the collaborative

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[7] Stella and Analis also speak to the role of individuals within their collaborations. Just because the museum has a more focused collaborative effort does not mean that the individuals are not influencing the direction of the exhibitions. The difference is an institutionalized effort in planning versus individual efforts to develop exhibitions and education.

efforts are inconsistent in terms of when and how they come to fruition. In discussions about her experience Katalina states,

> The exhibit plans go up and down in terms of how they engage educators. The
> way our institution works is that it is very individually based, so that curators
> have their own way of working. The approach to work is based on who they are,
> what their preferences are in an exhibit, their social skills, stuff like that. Even
> though I always like it when we are included very early on, that often doesn't
> happen. It is just all over the map. (interview with Katalina, March 2015)

Similarly, Analis explores the irregularity of cooperative work in her museum. In talking about the different curators and their willingness to develop ideas with an educator she says, "so even now, we have two different curators and two different approaches to working. Our Western Art curator is usually open to including education [staff], but with our chief curator, she does not make a lot of space to collaborate" (interview with Analis, August 2015). Analis goes on to explain the nature of her working relationship with the chief curator and emphasizes the fact that she is often delegated to copy editing extended labels and sees this effort more as a required duty rather than an actual collaborative endeavor. Even Stella highlights the influence that individual curators bring to projects. Despite having an official structure for interpretive collaboration within her museum she sees variation depending on with whom she is working. She notes,

> So, our planning is pretty formalized, but a willingness to actually take my
> suggestions is based on the individual curator. Because what isn't
> institutionalized is whether the curator has the final say or I have the final say.
> Of course there are going to be some things where I am like "No I really don't

like this idea" and the curator says, "No, I really want this idea in there." We

just have to come to some sort of compromise if that is the case, and that always

depends on the individual too. Some people aren't as willing to compromise.

(interview with Stella, May 2015)

In my own reflections about collaboration experiences, I also write about having varied

access or planning time with different curators. In a journal entry about one exhibition I

note,

I think the lack of meetings is definitely affecting the cohesiveness of an

educational plan. The last time we collectively met about the exhibit was over two

months ago. I have no idea what objects are a part of the final checklist or what

the curator wants to say specifically. I will probably have to create material after

the fact, which is standard, but not ideal. (journal entry, March 2015).

When reflecting on another exhibition with a different curator I focus on the ways in

which our meetings are guiding the educational direction and purpose. I write,

Today's meeting was incredibly helpful. The curator brainstormed different

ideas with me about potential educational prompts. In the end we felt that

focusing on the process of art making would be easy, informative, and more

engaging for visitors. He listened to my concerns about lack of engagement and

he really worked with me to figure out a solution. (research journal, June 2015)

What these stories suggest is that in museums where there is not a formal structure in

place for more collective efforts, the reality of collaboration comes down to the

willingness of individuals. That is not to say that a standard, institutionalized model is

better than no structured form of practice. In fact, some of the most interesting ideas for

the educational extension of museum exhibitions come in less formalized moments of conversation.

Building Collaboration Through Conversations and Sharing

When speaking to all of the educators about their collaborative work, an interesting thread emerged that connects each of our experiences to one another. The simple act of talking with colleagues surfaced as a key and sought after way of working. While this may seem obvious when thinking about the function and objective of collaborative efforts, it is certainly not the only component of comprehensive and cooperative projects. Of course we know that collaborations entail more than simply talking to one another, but the intricacies of the educators' stories emphasize a particularly strong outcome and need for more personalized moments of sharing. These instances are not directly tied to the structures of meetings or planned work sessions, but usually occur in spontaneous moments of discussion. Nevertheless, they are cited as significant times for learning, reflection, and conceptualizing educational material.

When Leana takes time to reflect on some of the most informative times she has shared with curators, she talks about more casual and intimate exchanges. She laughs as she says,

> The curious thing is that when you hear curators talk about objects, they can be incredibly passionate if they are just kicking back in the vault. Like when you ask them, "Why do you love this?" it is amazing to hear what they have to say and what they know. And the minute you start to put it on a checklist, in a catalogue, in a label, that dies. So you need those moments, to say, "wait a minute, if you

have human response here, informed by study, let's bring that out." (interview

with Leana, February 2015)

Similarly, Katalina reflects on these personal and unanticipated moments with curators.

In one story she recalls driving to a meeting with a curator and explains how the car ride

was more useful to her than the actual meeting. In re-counting the particular instance she

remembers,

> [the curator] had just come back from the Bay Area and she had all of these
>
> photographs that talked about meeting artists and how their work connected to the
>
> heart of the exhibition. She talked about their practice and their social context. I
>
> got more perspectives and I came to a better understanding about what we were
>
> doing. It was really helpful. Even though the scheduled meeting was a bust, the
>
> car ride allowed me to get deeper into the whole idea. (interview with Katalina,
>
> March 2015)

In furthering her reflections on experiences of simply talking to curators in passing, she

mentions her desire to hear the curators' stories as much as possible.

> You know, hearing the curators talk about their passions is so useful. We are out
>
> there and working with the public and we have very little time to do research so
>
> we rely on curatorial perspectives. We have to listen. In these passing moments,
>
> the act of listening is so important.

> Stella also recalls the impact of more intimate conversations with her colleagues.

In thinking back to a successful moment with a particular curator she highlights how the

casual conversation influenced not only her understanding of the content, but what she

wrote for interpretation and how she wrote it as well. She notes,

There was so much rich back-story to what the exhibition was about and she went

on these really great tangents, talking about things I had no idea existed. I told the

curator, "these are really good access points!" So, we decided to incorporate

interpretive panels that were based on these interesting bits of information. We

used a lot of this tangential information with the leading phrase "did you know,"

which came directly out of that conversation as well. (interview with Stella, May

2015)

In my own reflections, I talk about one occasion where I was invited to visit a herbarium

with a curator who was interested in incorporating plant samples alongside botanical

drawings in an upcoming exhibition. During our visit to the herbarium we were able to

hear the personal stories of a biologist in practice and get his expert perspective on the

various drawings we had in our collection. Beyond giving me useful information for tours

and hands-on programming, the casual recollections about the act of a biologist's

fieldwork inspired us to incorporate some of that material into the exhibition space. The

herbarium loaned the art museum a plant press similar to what a 19th-century biologist

would take out into the field when collecting and it informed the ways in which the artist

of the exhibition most likely worked. While only a minor addition to the exhibition, the

inclusion of such material gives audiences a different object and thus concept to consider.

In my journal I reflect,

I am grateful that Julia invited me to meet with the biologist today. After hearing

about his experiences in the field, we are now hoping to display a plant press

and photograph alongside the plants and drawings. I don't think this would have

even crossed our minds had we not listened to his stories. (journal entry, July

2016)

In considering these intimate and often transitory moments of conversation, what is

important to remember is the way in which this form of communication is sometimes

richer and more accessible than an already developed plan. Getting ahead of the final

production of content can inspire unique and perhaps unnoticed understandings of art

objects. Based on these educators' desires for more points of access and tangible or

relevant information for diverse audiences, these conversations seem fundamental to

more nuanced educational content. It is not formalized collaboration, but in these cases it

was a crucial component that opened up the exhibitions' potential.

Responsibility, Intentionality and Power in Museum Practice

Woven through each interview is a constant awareness of an educator's role, their

given and assumed responsibilities, their intentions for pushing a particular goal, and the

power that they have within their institution to meet their objectives. What is more, these

notions of power, responsibility, and intentionality expand across each museum worker's

position and also implicate the larger institution as well. We have already seen instances

of power and responsibility at play in some of the stories above (like the moments when

decisions for education are made by curators or directors), but in this section I revisit the

more pointed moments where the interviewed educators talk explicitly about these ideas.

In sharing her own perspective about the responsibilities of educators in

relationship to more curatorial focused work, Leana makes a point to clarify the need for

each skill set in exhibition development. In making her case she highlights the necessary

function that each player contributes to an exhibition's vision. "You need to have equal weight," she argues.

> You need to have specialists [curators] that know the art objects thoroughly and you need a generalist [educator]. You need to have the people that know the potential of certain objects and those stories, but you also need the empathy that educators excel at to balance out that scholarship" (interview with Leana, February 2015).

Analis conceptualizes the roles of educators and curators in an almost identical way, to Leana. In reflecting upon her characterization of these two positions within the museum she says, "curators are experts on objects. As educators we become experts on facilitating conversations whether we are physically present in the museum or are depending on an educational interactive to drive [the experience]." (interview with Analis, August 2015). She goes on to say,

> we need all perspectives in the room, although it does not always happen that way. I am often not at the table for scheduled meetings, but I insert opinions anytime I have the opportunity. In fact, I often refer to myself as the squeaky wheel. I am not afraid to ask questions and make sure they hear my concerns. I think asking questions when you are thinking about putting out your permanent collection speaks to a curatorial practice. I am asking about [the curator's] intentions for display. I have a list of questions going about who and what I am going to ask.

Related to this, as well as her explanation of the value of intimate conversations above, Katalina reiterates the importance of her relationship to the curator in her ability to

imagine stimulating moments for learning. She highlights her focused intentions to listen and be heard.

> Our curators, they do field work and they can tell us how an object is used in a particular way and why it is valuable because it is constructed like this - you know. Things you would never know on your own. My job is to think about this research and draw connections outward to a general audience. It is not always easy, especially when we don't have access to the information, but I seek it out when I can. It is also my responsibility to put my ideas out there. A lot of the time, not always, but often I have to make the effort. It is a priority.
>
> (interview with Katalina, March 2015)

In my journal entries I find ramblings about my own and my institution's intentionality and sense of responsibility. In one case, the writing came after a tour in which visitors rightfully criticized the stereotypical depiction of African art as it was presented in an exhibition *Sowing Seeds*. While I professionally had zero say in the way in which the information was organized and presented, I was the representative for the museum in that moment and felt personally responsible for the way in which we were displaying content and in this case offending our visitors. After that tour I wrote in my research journal and reflected on my role as an educator. I posed the question, "what is my role in this museum if it is not to challenge dated and clearly racist depictions of artists and the art production of an entire continent? What is my role if I am not thinking about the visitor?" I am clearly emotional about my experience and continue my journal entry by making a list of future intentions and objectives. I tore this page out of my journal and placed it in my office space as a daily reminder to hold myself accountable. I list several, self-

determined responsibilities for myself as the museum educator. The list has grown since, but as of that date it read,

> Challenge your peers and their perspectives when you know they are problematic; think about who might walk through the door and how your work might affect them; be present in planning phases when possible; be proactive in knowing what is happening and what might be on display; and do not defend positions that you do not agree with. (research journal entry, October 2015).

Directly related to the roles, responsibilities, and intentionality of individuals are the institutional or collective equivalent of those concepts. The assumed or stated intent of the museum as a whole and intentions as defined by collective staff are things that the educators brought up in various moments of their interviews. The discussions revolve around the motivations of the museum and how at times there is a slight, but impactful relationship between theory and practice. When talking about the frequency with which education and curation are conceptualized together, Leana speaks specifically to the influence of the director.

> A lot of it has to do with the tenure of the institution, which is largely set by the director. So when I came in to this museum I understood, in talking with the director, it was said that education was key. And he did want to establish this pairing between education and the curatorial. So the spirit is there. Where the flesh is weak, as is true in most places I visited, the challenge lies in implementing that kind of practice and creating equitable space for curators and educators. (interview with Leana, February 2015)

Katalina also speaks to the larger ideologies that guide the museum's mission and how that directly impacts how she imagines and practices her work. "The philosophy of the museum is to be inclusive and community-based, and work with all different ages and levels. And that is pretty much the overall way that we do things" (interview with Katalina, March 2015). She places this in a positive light and mentions the positive aspect of having these guiding ideas when developing and advocating for certain programs, interpretive plans, and programming. She notes,

> That is pretty much where we are coming from, from an all-inclusive base and we are working on a strategic plan right now that incorporates some current trends in museum pedagogy. It is an asset to have these larger goals out in the open, as far as staff. It gives me leverage to push for more inclusive material. If we say we are inclusive, let's be inclusive, and not just through programming. Inclusive through what we put on display.

In one of the final journal entries wherein I write about my own practice, I also reference a slight disconnect and potential to leverage larger institutional goals. In the course of my research and writing we hired a new director whose vision was different than the previous interim director. In reflecting on this shift in direction for the museum I write,

> There is a sense that we will be opening up our exhibitions and programs to be more interdisciplinary and dynamic. The content and perhaps educational material can really be implicated in this change. This could be great for my interest in creating deeper connections between the exhibit and education. It is hard to create interdisciplinary programming when the objects on our walls lack diversity of ideas.

Questioning Our Intentions and Thinking Beyond Our Practice

Another interesting thing that several of the educators contemplate relates to the normalized and assumed conventions of our practice, and thus our intentions and actions as museum educators. The very nature of museums, art, education, and the reasons that people visit are on the minds of these educators. In a reflective comment Leana says,

> You know, museums are places you *can* learn, but I don't know that's why people go. If you look at John Falk's research and you look at the five motivations, learning is something people value, but it is not something beyond [they] want to see something new or [they] want to stimulate [their] mind a little. People don't walk into an art museum and say "you know, I really want to improve my art history today or I want to improve my understanding of Chinese Ceramics." Lately I have been thinking about that and do not want to force our educational mission onto people. (interview with Leana, February 2015)

Katalina also takes note of the ways that our communities' expectations may be different from what we assume about education and the larger function of museums.

> You know what is happening now is that people are looking to museums for community engagements, not just one, disciplined-based art history. So we are really looking at how social change and the way that we can be a home for community members to come and talk about difficult topics and feel safe and supported…and really just deal with important issues. (interview with Katalina, March 2015).

Analis says, "You know, I am really trying to think about what it means to be an art museum, what the word art means and what the word museum means, and what my role

as an educator…or squeaky wheel really means" (interview with Analis, August 2015).

She goes on, "you know sometimes it is good to step outside of our routine and push

those boundaries. It is also good to question what we are doing and why."

In these instances of reflection these educators are moving between the routine of

their daily practice and their desire to know more and understand the changing field of art

museum education. It further highlights the awareness of their practice and their

audience, with a focused line of questioning about what we do as museum workers.

Power and Influence Within the Museum Space

Existing alongside these explorations of intentionality and responsibility and at

the heart of each of these educator's experiences is the long-standing manifestation of

power and hierarchy. While this notion has been explored at length in the written content

about educators in museums, it is something that came up consistently throughout the

interviews. Regardless of whether the museum has a formalized collaborative working

structure or not, the separation of power in favor of the curator is present and noticed by

the educators I interviewed. It is worthy of discussion because it has tangible

consequences for educators and their ability to do their job.

Leana's reflections on this idea are especially pertinent and sum up the underlying

issues of power distribution in museum practice. She says,

 In regards to the alignment in responsibility and authority, the curator is always

 seen as the authority over their objects. The educator is often given the

 responsibility of interpretation but not always the authority. So, very rarely would

 I be able to go to a curator of an exhibition and say, "No, I don't think this object

 does what you want it to do." Sometimes I will, but not always with great success.

Quite frequently a curator will say "but that's not what I want to say about the

object. That's not how I want to present this material…or these aren't the words I

like" and that is perceived as being ok. So, it's an inequitable relationship.

(interview with Leana, February 2015)

Katalina brings up specific examples and also speaks to her experiences within the

inequitable power dynamics of her institution. She seems to reluctantly accept the fact

that the power imbalance exists, "The structure is pretty hierarchically set up so that the

curators are above the educators pretty much, which I think really is rather unfortunate,

but that's the way it is, so I work with it" (interview with Katalina, February 2015). In

revealing certain instances that demonstrate this power (beyond what can be inferred

from previous themes) she explains,

One of the worst experiences I ever had with a curator was influenced by her

perceived power over educational staff. She walked into my office and basically

demanded that I create interactives for an upcoming exhibition she was

working on. I was like "give me more," and rather than sit down with me, she

walked out.

Katalina continued this conversation and emphasized her constant push and pull with the

curator throughout the planning process. While she ultimately came up with what she

deemed as a successful interactive, it came at the expense of her energy, with constant

requests for information and her own time spent on research. Directly connected to ideas

presented by Analis above, Katalina was tasked with the responsibility to come up with

engaging educational material, with little to no power or information from the lead

curator.

Working within the most streamlined institution as far as collaborative efforts is concerned, Stella also highlights the noticeable power of the curator over all other players in the development team. She notes,

> The project manager makes sure everyone is on task, but she is not, nobody, really, is in a position to make decisions. Certainly the curator voice, there is still a lot of authority in that because it is their vision that is the primary task (interview with Stella, May 2015).

She also speaks to the shift in power and expectations once she was hired and the re-structuring that occurred in order to incorporate an educator's perspective in exhibitions and interpretation.

> In the beginning there were certainly some issues, it was a little bit uncomfortable. I was new to the museum and this position was relatively new so the curators were not used to having somebody impede on their work, or even have a second opinion really. So that was a little uncomfortable at first, but once I built a rapport with them things settled.

Resources for Practice: The Impact of What We Have

Along with the personal dynamics that define power and influence in the museum are issues of access to other, indirect resources such as grant money, space (as explored at length above) and collections. Often times having direct contact with these essential forms of support has significant impact on the ability of educators to navigate the divide between exhibition content and education. Sometimes the educator is at a loss due to lack of access and other times this form of capital helps legitimize and prioritize the efforts of educators. In either case, their stories speak to the importance of such functions

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in the creation of equitable opportunities for educators and communities within art institutions.

In her exploration of audience engagement and what she views as successful program development with curators, Katalina references the influence of funding as a motivating force for bridging the curatorial and educational functions of museum practice. She notes,

we received funding for this project and I think that really put a focus on audience engagement. It was early in my employment here, but it is one of those times where I remember a lot of hands were on deck, including education. I think the money had an impact. You have to answer to your funders and they were looking for more in terms of education, exhibitions, and audience engagement. It forced our hand in some ways. (interview with Katalina, February 2015)

Looking to the function of the funder within the art museum, Analis also talks about the power of financial capital in the museum dynamic. In specifically referencing the different constituents to whom museum workers are obligated she says,

Curators answer to funders. We [educators] answer to our general audience, and most of the time the demographics of the funder and the audience is very different…usually. We [educators] are responding to people coming through the door so there is a big disconnect. It puts us in a complicated place as museum representatives. (interview with Analis, August 2015).

Similarly, Stella speaks about a curatorial collaboration that was largely motivated by grant funding. She makes note of the fact the museum staff obviously initiated the

project, as they sought out the funding in the first place, but she also highlights the fact that her access to collections and her involvement with curators was much more extensive because of the funder's expectations. She states,

> I am much more involved with what is traditionally considered the curator's duties. Because we have these objectives, which we promised our grantors, I think I have been included in things that usually fall to the curator, only the curator. But in this project we were more collaborative. I think the grant was influential to that. (interview with Stella, May 2015)

Beyond funding, the educators also talk about collections as a valuable resource to which they have varying degrees of access – in some cases no access at all. In each of the educator's stories, their connection to collections is an important part of how they are able to conceptualize their practice and their relationship to the communities they serve. All of the educators (except for Leana) have restricted access to objects and thus constrained power in decisions regarding how they are framed. In her interview, Katalina says,

> so, we have our collections and the collections responsibilities are divided geographically so each curator is in charge of the objects that fall under their purview. The collection is their baby. I have access, but cannot handle them or organize them for display. (interview with Katalina, February 2015)

I also reflect on the lack of access to collections as a prohibitive marker of my practice. In one particular journal entry, I write about a project in which my ability to use the collection was limiting.

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A few weeks ago I inquired about using some specific photographs for a

collaborative project. I was not immediately told no, but other staff seemed

uncomfortable and hesitant to let me use the images. Eventually, I was granted

permission to use fewer items, with the assistance of the curator. The idea I was

hoping to explore seemed lost and I dropped the work from my project altogether.

(research journal entry, June 2015)

In her interview, Leana specifies direct action she has taken in order to gain access to

objects for her educational gallery. She reflects,

You know, I was not always able to curate for educational purposes. It has taken

time and support of my director. It really was a culture shift. The collection does

not belong to the curator. It belongs to the museum. I don't know how many

times I had to say that and it took some convincing for people to get on board

with me using the objects. The objects are mine just as much as they are

curatorial staff['s]. (interview with Leana, February 2015)

What each of us reveals in our exploration of resources is that access to certain

components of the museum is not easy to come by for museum educators. Space,

collection access, and funding all have a direct impact on how the educator can engage

with the museum and the community. Each story shows moments in which the museum

structures in place are limiting, challenging, tested, and shifted to benefit a more

educationally driven and community-minded form of museum practice.

Education, Training, and Museum Knowledge: How We Know What We Know

Another idea that each educator explores in their interview is that of education

and training as it relates to their practice. Everyone cites larger ideologies that motivate

their museum work, and they also speak of specific instances in their education or professional development that emphasize their relationship to museum education as a field of study. Sometimes these reflections highlight guiding principles that have been learned and are still influential; sometimes they reveal trends in the field of art museum education or museum practice as presented by organizations such as National Art Education Association (NAEA) and American Association of Museums (AAM); other times there are strong criticisms of how these professional associations position their respective fields. What is important to note is that the educators draw inspiration from various forms of educational training, maintaining certain values and rejecting others.

In speaking about her educational background, Katalina emphasizes her training in early childhood education. She notes, "I have a master's degree in early childhood and elementary education, so I am very interested in working with developmental levels – appropriate developmental levels. I really try to think about Howard Gardner's approach to multiple intelligences" (interview with Katalina, February 2015). She goes on to talk about other frameworks that influence her understanding of museum education. "Another place I look to, which came after I started to teach in museums, is MUSE's approach to looking at things from different perspectives, this kind of choice-based learning." Beyond these specific influences, Katalina mentions how she tries to stay on top of current trends in the field. She places her vision for education in alignment with community participation, diversity, interaction, and inclusive practice – all of which are much more current conceptualizations of museum education

Stella traces the trajectory of her education beyond her formal training in art history and art education. She makes a direct connection between professional

development and how she is beginning to conceive of her practice through curatorial

modes of operating. She notes,

> this connection between the programming, curation, and interpretation was not
> really a part of my education. It seems like this concept of blending curation and
> interpretation is relatively new so what does that mean? It seems like at AAM
> this year one of the pre-conference themes was about this kind of interpretation.
> There are different educators that are working together across institutions and
> everyone is trying to figure out what interpretative planning looks like and trying
> to make that more consistent across museums. I am right there with them. It is an
> interesting moment. (interview with Stella, May 2015)

Leana also points to her experiences with AAM and her recent trips to the national

conference. In talking specifically about conversations on the changing ideation of

curation in relation to education, she says,

> there is a huge upswell of conversation. Here at AAM, all the conversation was
> about the role of the curator and how it is not about sitting over there writing a
> paper. Museums are about people and experience and people are really talking
> about this and the skill set of the educator. So, I think we will start to see a little
> shift in the training and the blending of these roles. (interview with Leana,
> February 2015)

Another way that the educators in this research inform themselves on contemporary

practice is by studying other museums and becoming students of the museum field any

time they visit other institutions. Several of the educators mention spaces that influence

their conceptualization of art museum education, curation, and community collaborations.

In her interview, Leana speaks to other institutions from which she sees this kind of practice working. She says,

> what education *should* do and *strive for* is a more holistic approach, which includes curatorial, but I don't know how many places that [sic] have achieved it. Minneapolis Institute of Art, you should go there. The TATE Modern in a way. I like what I see in Dallas. It's not a common thing, but the places that do it well are worth visiting. (interview with Leana, February 2015)

She also speaks to museum experiences that inform her as to what not to do. Turning to TATE again she laughs as she reflects,

> they had the Blake Turner exhibition. They had six huge rooms of Turner. I got to about room three [sic] and was like, can I leave now? I am so bored with Turner. He has three compositions and four palettes. I don't know if museums are supposed to be experienced with that much saturation. You know. . . I am an art historian, I get it. But really by room five I was just so exhausted and it all just started to look the same. So is that an accomplishment? (interview with Leana, February 2015)

Stella also speaks to her practice and how it is informed by what she sees in other institutions. She notes,

> something we've done here, which is something they have done at the Manchester Art Gallery in the UK, is bringing in contemporary works to other parts of the collection. Sometimes as a counter point – sometimes to show that there is continuity in ideas. (interview with Stella, May 2015)

Throughout my practice during this research, I also look to other museums for inspiration. Of course, the very nature of this inquiry positions me to learn from my peers, but there are other spaces that I visit where I take note of the way they approach education with community amongst curatorial projects. In the interview with Analis we started talking about our habits when we visit museums and each laughed at our tendency to take photographs of labels and educational spaces rather than our favorite artwork. I said, "it is interesting because I feel like when I visit museums it becomes a professional holiday. At some point I start taking pictures of labels and interesting interactives. I start to take note of what they are doing rather than what they are showing" (my insights during an interview with Analis, August 2015).

Listening to Our Experiences, Learning from Our Stories

Throughout this chapter I have teased out the connecting ideas, perspectives, experiences, and themes to which each educator in this research reveals in their interviews and places of practice. Their experiences, while distinctive in many ways, also have numerous similarities that I see as significant characteristics of these educators' positions in contemporary museum practice. Upon writing this chapter I have taken note of the un-changing structures and ideologies that run throughout these stories and are also present in the historical trajectory of literature about museum education. In spending time with the information gathered through the interviews, site visits, and reflective journaling, I have come to recognize the slowness of change that impacts the working experiences of these educators. I also acknowledge the richness that exists in understanding of how they navigate their complex roles during a remarkable shift in the museum field. I highlight moments from this research that echo the sentiments of museum researchers, theorists,

and practitioners from over the past fifty years or more, as it is clear that there is something specific about museums that delays transformation and maintains normative expectations. I also take note of the instances where change is occurring. Despite the fact that it is gradual and at times difficult to detect, there are important shifts taking place that are re-making the nature of museums and the ways that they function. I use the next two chapters of this research to explore these dynamics, which situate art museum educators in situations that simultaneously expect and obstruct change.

CHAPTER FIVE:

INSTITUTIONALIZED PRACTICE, ART MUSEUMS,

AND THE EDUCATOR'S EXPERIENCE

Throughout the process of listening to museum educators, looking at exhibition

spaces, writing my own reflections on practice, revisiting my literary sources, and

digging into new resources, I continue to ask myself questions about art museum

educators' experiences and why they exist as such. I find the dynamics of our situations

intriguing because there are deep-rooted principles and values that impact our practice in

comparable ways. Despite marked differences in the researched museums' geographic

locations, related demographics, size, collections' emphasis, and myriad other

characteristics, we express perspectives, concerns, and practices that are strikingly

similar. To clarify, it is not simply that there are common experiences between us (of

course that is one thing we look for in research), it is about why and how these shared

experiences unfold. It is clear that there is something about the nature of these related

viewpoints and experiences that is worthy of attention and further understanding.

What is more, I am also intrigued by the fact that our stories are not unlike

conversations that have been a part of museum discourse for a significant amount of time.

In fact, upon comparing the initial findings from my research with historical (dating as

far back as 1958) and contemporary literature about museums, education, audience, and

curation, I observe deep-rooted issues that continually resurface and are repeatedly a part

of museum education discourse. I wonder, what is inherent in this persistency?

Pondering this trajectory has led me to think about the institutionalization of museums,

education, and art (separately and as they intersect) and how institutional patterns

function at individual and systemic levels. In relation to the specifics of my research I reflect upon institutionalization and the educator's role in the determined drive for museums to be more community and audience minded, specifically through exhibitions and bridging the curatorial-educational divide (Belting, 2001; O'Neill & Wilson, 2010, 2014; Rogoff, 2008; Trant, 2008; Villeneuve, 2016). These reflexive observations and a desire to conceptualize some of the dynamics presented to me in my research process drive me to explore my second research questions:

What are the institutional structures and dynamics at play within these art museum educators' experiences? And how do these institutional dynamics and structures influence the educator's conceptualization and practice of art museum work?

In order to explore these questions, I first lay out the fundamental tenets of Institutional Theory, and describe how scholars have come to use this epistemology to understand organizational structures. I then weave some of the initial findings of my interviews and site visits into conversation with widely recognized regulative, normative, cultural-cognitive mechanisms of institutionalization. I conclude the chapter by discussing the ways in which the educators realize pressure in varied ways due to their personal values and beliefs and the specificities of their museum work environment. By using institutional theory as an analytical framework, I explore the art museum educator as an actor in the larger socio-cultural make up of museums. I tease out the ways in which the specific themes identified in chapter four can be understood through an institutional discourse, highlighting the effects of institutionalized structures on individuals but also revealing how people have an impact on institutions. I am not proving or testing this

theory, but rather utilize its central concepts to discern the contemporary experiences of

art museum educators as entrenched and active in a long, traditional, and ever-changing

conceptualization of their profession. Through this analysis I argue that art museum

educators are constantly negotiating the professional position, values, and beliefs within

the highly institutionalized context of the museum field – a field that as described in

chapter one, is continuously shifting its values and structures for serving the public. I

place myself and the museum educators interviewed for this research into the historical

and contemporary lineage of museums as institutional forces and processes.

I further argue that the educators (including myself) involved in my study are in

situations wherein there are expectations and forces for change that are met by resistance

due to long-held beliefs, habits, and arrangements. Living our professional lives in-

between these divergent conceptualizations of art, museums, curation, and education, the

educators who are represented in this research experience the effects of these larger

socio-cultural ideas through daily practice. We reconcile the stability of what has always

been expected of us, what we learn, and how we have been trained with a certain level of

uncertainty. We perpetuate habitual ways of working, while simultaneously becoming

agents for change as we conceptualize our work through new and creative ways.

Institutional Theory: Introducing the Framework

I cannot count the number of times I have heard museums referred to as

institutions. The term is often used in discussing museums, and while yes, museums

are institutions (that is the basis of this chapter) it is rare that people look at the specifics

of what classifies them as such. Furthermore, it is even more unusual to find literature

that explores the specificity of institutional theory as it relates to processes and structures

that impact the people acting within art museums. Institutions do not come into existence haphazardly, and they do not change quickly nor disappear with ease. They are social structures that are resilient and lasting across time and space. In order to understand the ways in which art museums as institutions function and how this is directly referenced in the art museum educators' stories, I first define the underlying facets of institutional theory.

Institutional Theory as a Way of Understanding

Institutional theory is a "theoretical framework for analyzing social (particularly organizational) phenomena, which views the social world as significantly comprised of enduring rules, practices, and structures that set conditions on action" (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008). "It is a theory that is concerned with the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure and it considers the processes by which structures, including schemes, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior" (Scott, 2004, p. 410). As an analytical framework, institutional theory helps people to explore the taken-for-granted actions, behaviors, and physical manifestations of particular social experiences.

The concepts of institutions and institutionalization have been defined in diverse ways, with considerable variation among approaches. Historically and contemporarily, institutional theory has been used to understand and analyze three larger systems - those of economics, politics, and sociology. Obviously within these larger functions of society exist sub-systems (education, healthcare, familial structures, religion, and other socio-cultural forms) that have been studied at length. The subjects of my research (museums, education, organizations, and art) fall with the socio-cultural realm of institutional studies

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which is informed by the writings of theorists and scholars like Spencer (1884), Friedson (1970), Durkheim (1889), DiMaggio (1983), Rowan (1977) , Meyer (1977) Cooley (1909), Zucker and Scott (1996), Thorton (2008), Hee (2015) , Lawrence and Shadnam (2009), among many others. These researchers have taken socio-cultural systems into consideration throughout the history of sociological investigations, and their ideas, while varied and numerous, continue to influence the way people approach social systems today. Within the framework of sociology and institutionalization, scholars continue to examine the established fields that make up our societies, the ways in which individual actors are empowered and constrained by normative beliefs, and how symbolic systems - cultural rules and patterns - shape specific and also general social life (Scott, 2001, p. 18).

In this research I turn to the defined interests of institutional inquiry as it is laid out by Lawrence and Shadnam (2008). I focus on the institutional context of a set of institutions (art museums); the cognitive frameworks for social actors (professionalization and influential training of art museum educators) and how these frameworks both constrain and enable action; the dynamics of the institutional context (how educators practice and theorize our role); how the art museum as an institution is changing (and resistant to change); how the different museums relate to and differ from one another as spaces of shared institutional measure (art museums as a field); and how actors (art museum educators) have an affect on the institutional context (their museum and the museum field in general) (p. 2289). I situate my analysis in the interpretivist, social-constructionist epistemology of institutional theory, which "expects change everywhere and tries to find an explanation when it confronts stability" (p. 2291).

Organizations, Institutions, and Institutionalization

As defined by Scott (2001), institutions are multi-faceted, durable social

structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources that

exhibit distinctive properties of being resistant to change, of being transmitted across

generations, and tend to be maintained and reproduced (p. 49).   Although institutions

were identified early on by social scientists, organizations as a distinctive form of social

structure and area of interest did not come into the picture until much later. Early work

connecting theories of institutions to organizational patterns came about in the 1940s with

the emergence of organizations as a recognized field, wherein "scholars began to connect

institutional arguments to the behavior of organizations" (p. 44). With this merger, social

scientists began to analyze and explain organizations through the foundations of

institutional theory. In some of the earliest work Merton (as cited by Scott, 2001)

discusses the processes within organizations that produce disciplines, normative order,

and an environment where people " 'follow the rules to the point of rigidity, formalism,

and ritualism' " (p. 23). This normative order, while often analyzed through a critical

lens, is not always viewed negatively or as a lack in organizational fields. As Lawrence

and Shadnam (2008) point out, when organizations align their structures with the

institutional context, and thus normative behavior and formalism, they gain legitimacy,

resources, stability, and better chances for survival in their perspective field (p. 2290).

Legitimization and factors of institutional survival are key elements in understanding the

power of normative patterns for organizations. As noted by Scott (2001), legitimacy "is a

generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or

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appropriate within some socially constructed system," and thus seen as valid and acceptable (p. 59).

As people continue to intellectualize the relationship between institutional theory and organizations, scholars build upon and at times challenge the historical tenets introduced above. Neo-intuitionalists shift the discourse "away from an early focus on shared norms and values to an emphasis on shared knowledge and belief systems," highlighting the fact that "behavior is shaped not only by attention to rules and the operation of norms, but also common definitions of the situation and strategies for action" (Scott, 2001, p. 39). This subtle move highlights the power that individual actors have to make and change meaning. Social researchers incorporate cognitive and cultural frameworks alongside normative systems as a way to account for more complex ways that meaning and institutional structures relate in society. Speaking to the shift in focus Scott (2001) notes,

> Sociologists have tended to give primacy to the effects of contextual factors, viewing individuals as more passive, prone to conform to demands of their social systems and roles. Identity theory has emerged as a corrective to this over socialized view by giving renewed attention to an active and reflexive self that creates, sustains, and changes social structures. (p. 38)

Individuals in Institutions and Organizations

A recurrent and critical thread lies in the experiences and actions of people. Individuals' roles within institutionalized structures are complex. People respond to pressures and rules, impose their beliefs and values, deal with emotions, perform expected duties, question and intellectualize their role, and exercise power, often all in

one day. All of the larger systems explored in this research have a predominant human element, even though at times they seem objective, removed, or predetermined. Of course, they are not. Institutions, organizations, and all of the mechanisms that constitute them have been built by people and continue to operate based on human conceptualization and action. It is this complexity that has largely spurred my inquiry. The educators' experiences, as revealed through interviews and site visits, brought me to this place and it is through these larger theoretical traces that I further an understanding of the individual educator's place within the established field of art museums. This human element is an important one to consider. I focus on the agency of individuals at greater length in chapter six, but nonetheless I want to underscore their role within the systems explored in this chapter.

Much of what is considered in this chapter focuses on the effects that institutional systems place on individuals, but it is not without recognizing the critical role individuals play in shaping their social environment as well. As noted by Jackson (2009), "while actors' identities and interests are shaped by the broader institutional environment, institutions are equally the outcome of particular constellations of actors and their interactions" (p. 3). In relation to organizations, individuals have specific roles and are classified through particular ideologies and systems but that is not without a certain level of flexibility. As noted by Zietsma and Lawrence (2010), individuals whose "thoughts and action are constrained by institutions are nevertheless able to work to affect those institutions" (p. 55). As described by Scott (2001), "individual actors carry out practices that are simultaneously constrained and empowered by existing social structures" (p. 75). Similarly, Seo and Creed (2002) explore how actors draw upon competing institutional

logics available to them to pursue their interests and are active and artful exploiters of

social contradictions (p. 231). Within the intricacies of daily work, and the varied

conflicts that exist amongst co-workers, individuals are able to advocate for the values

they bring into the conversation. Their daily work represents "a complex mélange of

forms of agency—successful and not, simultaneously radical and conservative, strategic

and emotional, full of compromises, and rife with unintended consequences" (Lawrence

et al., 2011, p. 53).

Fundamental Pillars and Processes of Institutions

Within institutional theory there are three main pillars that social theorists refer to

when analyzing social arrangements that help us understand and define institutions:

regulative mechanisms, normative mechanisms, and cultural-cognitive mechanisms

(DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). As might be expected, these cornerstones are not

mutually exclusive: they are related and have cross-sectional implications for those

working within any established system. And while it is sometimes hard to separate the

influences and connectedness of these cornerstones, there are distinct features between

the mechanisms that are delineated below. What is important to note is how these

differences influence the ways that institutions are formed, how they are maintained, and

how people work within them. A very basic separation of the effects of these different

branches is: the regulatory influences what we *have to do*, the normative what we *ought*

to do (based on socially prescribed expectations), and the cultural-cognitive what we

want to do (based on the values and beliefs of our practice).

As described by Scott (2001), " for some purposes we treat an institution as an

entity, as a cultural or social system, while on other occasions we are interested in

institutionalization as a process, as the growth over time of cultural-cognitive, normative, or regulative elements capable of providing meaning and stability to social behavior" (p. 92). Related to this, Selznick (1957) explains how institutionalization "is something that happens to an organization over time, reflecting the organization's own history, the people who have been in it, the groups it embodies and the vested interests they have created (p. 17). These processes of institutionalization function in different ways - offering not only abstract, symbolic value systems for actors, but also creating real life actions and logic to modes of working.

Closely related to the pillars of institutional theory are the various processes of institutionalization that often work through isomorphic mechanisms. Generally described, isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one unit in a contextual situation to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions (Hawley, 1968; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1981, 2001). The key work that many scholars turn to when discussing isomorphism, institutional theory, and organizational structure is DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) *The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields*. In this seminal writing, the authors explore the ways in which institutional context forces organizations to be *isomorphic* – similar to each other, in form and practice. They are interested "not in the variation that they saw amongst like organizations, but rather the startling homogeneity of organization forms and practices" (p. 148). In their search for understanding and explaining uniformity across particular social sectors, DiMaggio and Powell identified three key terms as isomorphic indicators: coercive isomorphism (related to the regulatory pillar), mimetic isomorphism (related to the cultural-cognitive pillar),

and normative isomorphism (related to the normative pillar).

The Regulative Pillar of Institutionalization and Coercive Isomorphism

According to Scott (2001), "In the broadest sense, all scholars underscore the regulative aspects of institutions," because they highlight the fact that "institutions constrain and regularize behavior" (p. 51). What is of particular focus amongst scholars that utilize regulatory analysis in institutional theory are the very functions of mandated regulation: establishing rules, inspecting conformity to set rules, and attempting to influence behavior through rewards and punishment (p. 52). They do so through processes that DiMaggio and Powell (1983) term coercive isomorphism, which result from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function" (p. 150).

The regulative pillar in the art museum context. When regulative pressures do affect museums, they tend to come from government regulation, funding agencies, law, and other regulatory forces. Instances such as de-funding or controlling pressure on museums arising from government disapproval, the ways in which copyright law influences museum work, the legal and ethical processes for de-accessioning work, or the protocols for how museums can accept gifts all point to the mechanisms of coercive isomorphism. Under coercive pressure, museums operate certain functions in line with standard protocol as a way to remain legitimate and recognized among their peers. And while the word coercive often has negative or over-powering connotations, the impetus for conformity is not always and necessarily a negative thing. The arguments by DiMaggio and Powell are not necessarily about passing judgment, but about recognizing

how organizations often standardize when given explicit codes of conduct as defined by powerful agencies (p. 151).

This is an incredibly powerful facet of institutionalization, yet it is not as common for art museums or museums in the United States to be subject to heavy-handed regulatory rules. As scholarship reveals, regulative barriers rarely exist within the non-profit sector - with more power lying in normative, cultural-cognitive mechanisms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008). That is not to say that it does not happen, it is just not as pervasive as with other fields such as banks, healthcare, or global trade processes. One example is the controversy surrounding Robert Mapplethorpe's 1989 canceled exhibition *The Perfect Moment*, and the subsequent threats from the US Congress to defund the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). This targeted pressure from the US government had strong regulatory effects, not just on the Corcoran Gallery in Washington DC, but on arts organizations as a whole. This is the extreme to which regulatory systems influence behavior of arts organizations, but it highlights ways in which coercive forces can influence the arts. Within the specific findings of this research, there were no obvious mentions of coercive or regulatory mechanisms that had significant impact on the interviewed educators.

The Normative Pillar of Institutionalization and Normative Isomorphism

As defined by Scott (2001), a normative system of institutionalization centers on prescribed norms and values, or what actors and organizations feel they ought to do within their defined sector. Norms "specify how things should be done and they define legitimate means to pursue valued ends"; and values "are conceptions of the preferred or desirable outcome" (p. 55). A normative system guides the behavior of actors within an

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institution, with the norms and formal rules of institutions shaping their actions significantly. According to March (1994) there is "logic of appropriateness," which means that actions are "matched to situations by means of rules organized into identities" (p. 57). Thus within the normative framework, the behavior of actors in a given situation is based on highly prescriptive ideas about who does what according to socially constructed values. These values also come with expected and normative modes of action, meaning how something is identified in a particular organization has direct impact not only on what is expected but how it is expected to be done. Unlike the regulatory system, much of the prescribed action and behavior comes from the internal legitimacy of a particular field. Instead of pressure coming from a forceful agency, the pressure comes from within a specific sector and is based on what is collectively deemed appropriate by the majority of players involved.

For instance, within the normative framework, professional organizations such as American Association of Museums (AAM), National Art Education Association (NAEA), The Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC), American Association of Museum Directors (AAMD), Association of Registrars and Collections Specialists (ARCS), Institute for Library and Museum Sciences (ILMS), and numerous other professional networks establish normative "best practice" standards, highlighting certain functions and setting expectations for museums. Organizations such as the NEA, Institute for Library and Museum Sciences ILMS, Americans for the Arts and other private and public agencies also influence the field through prioritizing certain ideas over others in their granting offers. The significance of these internal and external pressures results in a certain level of homogeneity within fields based on the resources that are available which

motivate priorities through financial support (Powell & DiMaggion, 1983; Scott, 2001, 2008; Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008). As professional organizations such as those listed above fund certain functions, those tasks become centralized, normalized, and often expected. Of course, it is important to emphasize that despite the power of such isomorphic processes, there is room for negotiation and individual agency within institutions. These concepts are explored later in this chapter.

The normative pillar in the art museum context. In order to delineate the norms and values that are at play within this study, I refer back to the themes identified in chapter four and determine which of those main concepts are things that are valued in the participating museum educators' practice. Not everything explored in that chapter is recognized as a value, which as defined above is indicated by clear, desired outcomes, objectives, and ways of working. Six of the ten major themes from chapter four are delineated as such; they are: *people at the center of our work*, *how people learn*, *what people learn*, *spaces to engage*, *aesthetic consideration*, and *collaboration*. With these values come normative behaviors, normative ways of operating, and normative ways of thinking about educational work (see Figure 3).

Of particular interest is the fact that there are two columns that have assigned conceptualizations, actions, and ways of working towards a specific value. One column, labeled "norm," indicates behaviors and actions that are traditionally assigned to a given value. The other column is labeled "intermittent - not yet legitimized" and speaks to ways of working that the educators in this research are indeed engaging with on a regular basis, but have yet to be legitimized within the larger museum structure. In this particular case, the normative modes of operating are those that are generally acknowledged and

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expected within the museums where the participating educators' work. It is safe to say that the majority of the museums' staff such as the director, curators, collection staff, docents, and other key figures may have an inclination to these norms because they are recognized, comfortable, and considered best practices in art museums.

VALUE	NORM (based on what is accepted by multiple actors and the organizational expectation)	TENSION / NEGOTIATION	INTERMITTENT - NOT YET LEGITIMIZED
People at the Center of Our work	Speak to people; appeal to people; think for people; tell people;(people seen as as passive; consumers, learners, art experts or art enthusiasts; content, similar)	IN BETWEEN cultural-cognitive logics ←→	Speak with people; work with people; advocate for people; think with people; ask people; consult people; (People as active participants; people as critical thinkers; people as diverse, people as collaborators; people as inspiring; people as contributors; people as experts)
How People Learn	Through programs; through lectures; through tours; by reading exhibition text (wall labels, intro panels, catalogues, gallery activities); through guided discussions; informative/didactic; through accepting; through acknowledging; singular points of access	IN BETWEEN cultural-cognitive logics ←→	Educators strive for tactile materials; inclusion of technology; experiences with art-making; text as guiding, questioning, prompting, instead of didactic; experiential moments; through making (material and content); through challenging; multiple points of access. **often still text heavy*
What People Learn	present art history; present expert knowledge;present singular perspectives;present tired and repeated narratives; present processes; present artist biography	IN BETWEEN cultural-cognitive logics ←→	present varied contexts; present multiple perspectives; present new and varied narratives; present local knowledge; present relevant information
Spaces to Engage	Remove from main structures of museum; create separate space; make space occasionally	IN BETWEEN cultural-cognitive logics ←→	Make equal to exhibition space; interweave within exhibition space; relate to exhibition space; put in close proximity to exhibition space
Aesthetic Consideration	un-inviting; child-like / for young audiences; modern (white-cube) aesthetic; limited in purpose; object oriented; selective; exculsive; 2-D considerations (book-like / reading de-fault)	IN BETWEEN cultural-cognitive logics ←→	Looks integrated with rest of museum; inviting; sophisticated; appeals to multiple generations; multi-faceted; object and audience oriented; comprehesive; inclusive; 3-D considerations
Collaboration	Periodic; limited perspectives / players; removed from exhibitions; building programs; working for people	IN BETWEEN cultural-cognitive logics ←→	More frequent; multiple perspectives/players; building exhibitions, more personal / intimate (see chapter 3 about conversational moments and sharing); working with people

Figure 3. Values and Norms - widely accepted norms vs. actions and behaviors that have yet to be institutionalized and widely accepted.

This normative element points to a key function of institutionalization, wherein what is valued in an institution leads directly to everyday practice, and these valued ideas and subsequent actions eventually become the standard and unquestioned way of operating. As Scott (1987) asserts, this type of institutionalization happens when individuals come to accept shared definitions of reality and their views and actions are taken for granted as the "way things are" (p. 496). In regards to the development of

reality and real life activities, Meyer and Rowan (1977) state that institutionalization "involves the processes by which social processes and obligations come to take on rule-like status in social thought and action" (p. 341). In this explanation, the customary or expected way of working is held by the majority of people associated with a place and thus is maintained through the continued support and understanding of such work. This notion that people operate based on the way things are supposed to be done is an important aspect of how the educators in this research experience particular functions in their daily practice, especially when it relates to their role in curatorial projects.

That is not to say that the other staff members in the researched museums do not support or value the less legitimized forms of action; in fact we see instances of support for these ways of working in some of the interviews. We hear about these moments in chapter four when Analis speaks to the western art curator's willingness to engage with audiences through collaborative and community-written labels (interview with Analis, August 2015), when Katalina reflects upon instances in which specific curators seek her out to brainstorm interactive learning in the galleries (interview with Katalina, March 2015), when Leana emphasizes her director's support for educational elements within exhibitions (interview with Leana, February 2015), and when I write about my director's encouragement for more engaging learning moments in *Call and Response* (research journal, February 2016). The point is these instances are less frequent, dependent on an individual's willingness to partake, and are not as accepted by everyone the way that a normative K-12 tour or written gallery guide would be.

Furthermore, there is a strong indication that some of the more traditional elements of education within gallery spaces are harder to shift away from, and tensions

that are created because of resistance are experienced similarly amongst every educator involved in this research. The normative elements that are met with the most opposition deal with aesthetics, space, and how people learn, while concepts around what people learn, collaboration, and placing people at the center of our practice are more commonly accepted and experience less confrontation. In telling our stories and sharing our spaces of practice, each of us highlights specific incidents that reveal moments of friction when something new is attempted in the realm of aesthetics, or through varied learning modalities, or by making education spatially visible in the layout of the museums. As we recall, Analis reflects upon the straight up denial, by the director, to include more tactile and experiential learning elements in a traditional gallery space based on a normative view that education does not belong in exhibitions, but rather in a separate, educational room. Katalina talks about oppositions she is up against when attempting to include multiple modalities in any given number of exhibitions. She underlines the fact that resistance comes from many directions, as she often has to convince not only the curators, but also the director and the exhibition designers that different ways of learning should be considered in exhibit layouts. Leana and Stella have similar stories that emphasize the marked struggles that come with spatial and aesthetic design in their museum spaces, specifically when others see the inclusion of engagement beyond text as disruptive and inappropriate for a traditional gallery space.

What is important to note is that while other museum workers may embrace particular values and prescribed expectations such as community engagement and inclusion, not all players have to align their actions with those larger systemic beliefs. This too accounts for some of the conflict that exists when a value is present, but the

pressure to realize that value is projected on particular workers and not others. As emphasized by Scott (2001), "some values and norms are applicable to all members of the collectivity; others apply only to selected types of actors or positions" (p. 55). What is more, he talks about the fact that while "normative expectations may be held by all salient actors in a situation, they are often experienced by the focal actor as external pressure" (p. 55). Within this research you can see evidence of this through my arguments in chapter one that place the educator as a key figure in the push for more community involvement, educational content, and audience participation in exhibitions. It is also reiterated in the educators' reflections on practice in chapter four, as each of us admit that we (and other educational staff) are seen as the core administrators for people-centered work. This accentuates the way that, while the museum industry as a whole is taking on more community-minded initiatives (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, 2005, 2007; Golding & Modest, 2013; Peers & Brown, 2003; Roberts, 2007; Watson, 2007), it often lands on the desk of educators to fulfill this goal.

Professionalization of museum workers and normative mechanisms. Directly related to this type of duty allocation is the act of professionalization. According to institutional theory, the ways in which distinct responsibilities are conceptualized in an organizational setting are connected to the how specific museum workers are trained. As noted by Scott (1998, 2001) institutions are embodied in individual experience by means of roles, wherein the realization of an action or idea depends on the performance of living individuals acting out their expected roles. In the normative framework, roles of individuals are mediated through socially constructed ideologies, and depending on which construct an individual subscribes to determines their role, what they value, and

how they work within their organization (p. 58). Lawrence and Shadnam (2008),

highlight how norms and values in a given field "result from the standards and cognitive

frameworks that are created and controlled by professions and other moral standards-

making bodies" (p. 2290). Related to this, Scott and Backman (1990) talk about the

importance of professionals and professionalization in organizational culture. They state,

> More than other groups the professionals rule by controlling belief systems.
> Their primary weapons are ideas. They exercise control by defining reality - by
> devising ontological frameworks, proposing distinctions, creating typifications,
> and fabricating principles or guidelines for action. (p. 290)

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explain this further as they note how "the third source of

isomorphic organizational change is normative and stems primarily from

professionalization," which is "the collective struggle of members of an occupation to

define the conditions and methods of their work" (p. 152). In extending our

understanding of the effects and mechanisms of professionalization, DiMaggio and

Powell explain (1991), "universities and professional training institutions are important

centers for the development of organizational norms among professional managers and

their staff. They are another vehicle for the definition and promulgation of normative

rules about organizational and professional behavior" (p. 152). Within this study the

argument is that educators are trained differently and thus have slightly different values

than curators, collections managers, designers, and other museum workers.

Looking to professional experiences as an indicator of how values and thus modes

of working are formed is a worthy idea. I certainly find significance in this notion, and

argue the relevancy of such a position. However, as will be explored in the cultural-

cognitive section, the influence of professionalization on one's practice is much more complicated and nuanced than the normative pillar implies. Considering the academic backgrounds for the art museum educators in this research, and looking towards their most advanced degree, one of them has an art history background, three of them (including me) an art education background, and one of them an early childhood background with an emphasis in art practice (interviews with Leana, February 2015; Katalina, March 2015; Stella, May 2015; and Analis, August 2015). Where our backgrounds align closely is through professional associations, as each of the educators interviewed mentioned organizing bodies while reflecting on their practice. AAM and NAEA were the most referenced organizations, while others such as the International Journal of Art and Design Education (iJADE) and International Society of Education through the Arts (InSEA) were cited although not consistently across each interview. Of course there is a wide variation in topics, foci, and presenters within and amongst these professional governing bodies so I am not arguing that these diverse professional affiliations influence people in identical ways. However, it is significant to note that each of us place ourselves in conversation with educational discourse and larger museum discourse. As theorized by institutional researchers this type of alignment impacts the way that people think and practice, and how they position themselves in the alliance with other workers in their field (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983; Scott, 2001, 2008; Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008; Kratz & Block, 2008; Thorton et. al, 2012).

Another interesting aspect of professionalization that is critical to consider in an institutionalized context is how professionals with differing values impact one another. As noted by Scott (2001), social and normative pressures are "associated with

differentiation of groups and the existence of heterogeneous divergent or discordant beliefs and practices" (p. 189). Within museum work it is common that hired professionals are trained in conflicting disciplines, which are not often focused in museums as an academic area, although this is changing. It is not until the 1960s and 1970s that museum work as a profession was proposed as an academic discipline, with the push for museum-specific curriculum in 1973 (Glaser, 1990). According to Welsh (2013), "with a few early exceptions, museum studies programs were not established in the USA until the 1970s and 1980s, when programs emerged from a growing recognition that museums were in serious need of an infusion of professionalism" (p. 437). More recently and in some cases, training for museum workers has started to shift away from content specialization into more professional programs. Again, turning to Welsh, the guiding principles of establishing museum-focused academic programs are to produce generalists rather than specialists, providing "students with a general, well-rounded understanding of museums, along with hands-on exposure to museum work" (p. 438). Instead of becoming experts in a particular discipline related to museum work, students study the overlapping and varied skilled mechanisms particular to the museum field.

That being said, even today art museums tend to seek and hire people with highly specialized backgrounds. Many museum professionals are educated in discipline areas such as art history, history, anthropology, biology, and education, with the museum focus being awarded through certificate programs or minor studies (American Community Survey, DATA USA, 2014). In the context of this research, each of the educators discusses the divergent ideologies that are influential to their daily work because of such specialized training. First and foremost, each of us confirms that by and large the

curators with whom we work have doctorate degrees in art history. Secondly, we

conceptualize the curators in our museums as primarily art historical researchers, object-

focused, and specialists whose training automatically places them in conflicting positions

to the generalist, educational, and people-centered motivations of our practices

(interviews with Leana, February 2015; Katalina, March 2015; Stella, May 2015; and

Analis, August 2015). While there are determined efforts and occasions for collaborative

intersections, we each see the work of curators and educators as fundamentally siloed

(see Figure 4). We also postulate that when the silos are crossed and professional

boundaries overlap, there is marked resistance and frustration, but also potential for

creative, new ways of working (see Figure 5).

Curator

Objects

Exhibition Space

Aesthetics

Research

What People Learn

Educator

People

Education Space

How People Learn

What People Learn
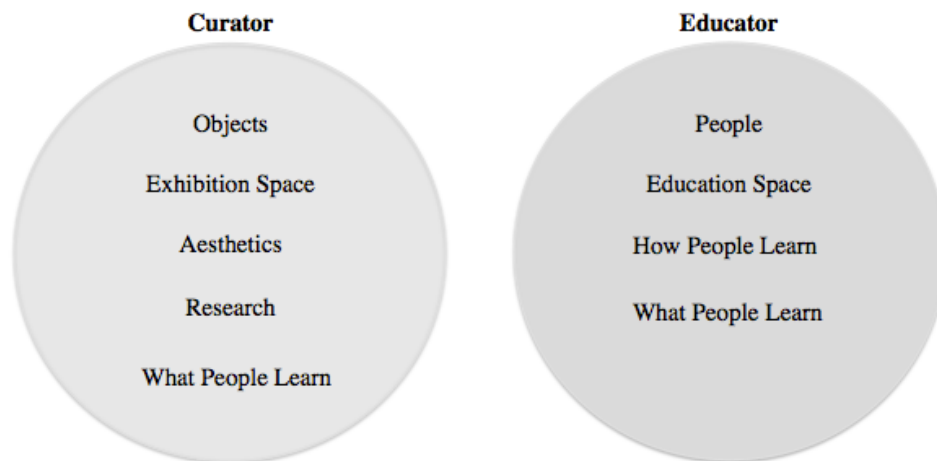
Figure 4. Traditionally defined roles and boundaries of curator and educator through specialized and siloed training. These separations perpetuate museum functions and ways of working.

Curator Educator

Objects
People
Exhibition Space
Education Space
Aesthetics
How People Learn
Research
What People Learn
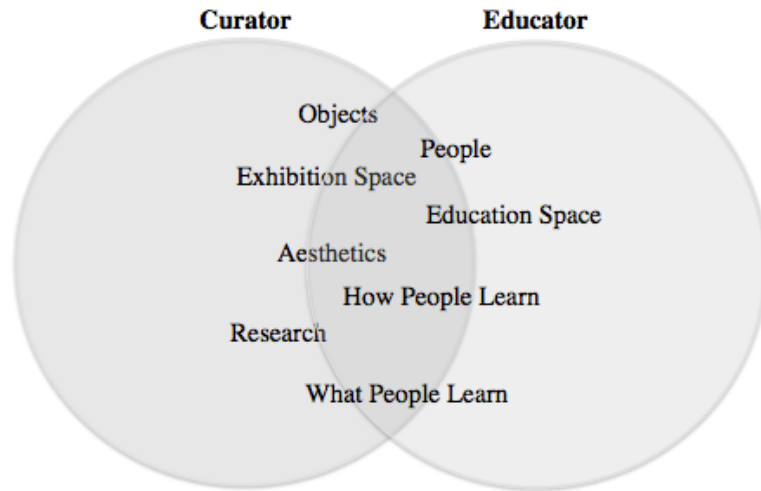
Figure 5. Shifting roles and boundaries of curator and educator that challenge specialized and siloed training. The overlapping areas are defined as contentious and productive areas of museum work.

Cultural-Cognitive Pillar of institutionalization and Mimetic Isomorphism

According to Scott (2001), the centrality of the cultural-cognitive pillar is "the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made" (p. 57). Introducing the cognitive function within institutional systems, D'Andrade (1984) explains, "what a creature does is, in large part, a function of the creature's internal representation of its environment" (p. 88). This explanation points to the means of comprehension and how actions of individuals are linked to their will and power to make sense of the systems of which they are a part. It places people in conversation with institutional systems rather than merely being directed by them. Alluding to individual action, Douglas (1982) proposes that we "treat cultural categories as the cognitive containers in which social interests are defined and classified, argued, negotiated, and fought out" (p. 12). Here is where personal interests, as defined by different cultural influences, come into play and guide the ways we navigate social definitions. Shifting from the determinist tendencies of the regulatory and normative

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pillars, the cultural-cognitive framework recognizes the active role people take in shaping meaning through reflection, awareness, and a keen sense of their situation. Scott (2001) also stresses the significance of the human element when he states, "rules, norms, and meanings arise in interaction, and they are preserved or modified by human behavior" (pg. 49). That is to say, that while the larger socio-cultural context certainly influences people's conceptualization of their role and place of work, they are active in maintaining and shifting those norms. Social reality is not a one directional force. It is an agreed upon, constructed way of understanding that is built and maintained by implicated parties. What is more, and will be explored at length in chapter six, is the fact that individuals have agency to work within and challenge the systems that impart values onto their conceptualization of an environment.

Mimetic isomorphism and meaning making. One of the central aspects of the cultural-cognitive pillar has to do with the dynamics of networking and learning from what is effective amongst like-minded organizations or people. As Hodgson (1994) argues, "cultural-cognitive frameworks position outcomes as relational to other entities and thus norms, rules, beliefs and resources are products of prior interactions" (p. 61). This is directly related to what DiMaggio and Powell describe as mimetic isomorphism, through which "organizations model themselves on other organizations" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 151). The same holds true for professionals as well. The idea behind mimetic isomorphism is one of seeking legitimacy through basing activities on what other, supposedly highly effective organizations are doing. As noted by DiMaggio and Powell, "organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful" (p. 152). As organizations

become institutionalized and align with other compatible establishments, they often take on analogous forms of operating and the actors within them situate their practice through likeness, familiarity, and what they deem suitable. That is not to say that simply modeling behavior or organizational structures yields similar results across the board. Sometimes the seemingly more successful or effective institutions are in different places (funding, location, workers, etc.) and are better able to meet specific goals. The important thing to remember is that the inclination to model stems from what is *perceived* as successful rather than what is actually applicable to a particular condition.

Cultural-Cognitive and isomorphic mechanisms in museum work. Within this research there are clear indications of this kind of institutional position for each educator. None of us are in overly pre-determined or heavily mandated situations where we are always and only following what is expected of us. However, we are certainly tied to particular expectations regarding the field of art museum education and our role within the defined profession. Leana, Katalina, Stella, Analis, and I reveal the complicated dynamics that exist when navigating what we *have to do* and *ought to do* with the things that *we want to do*. Obviously these things are not always in opposition to each other, but the nature of cultural cognitive processes helps us to define, understand, and negotiate with the larger ideological systems that inform our practice. Within our stories we explore our past experiences with art, art education, other museum situations, particularly interesting moments of engagement, less successful attempts at engagement, current trends in education and museum research, and a myriad of other influential forces - all in order to better comprehend and define our professional role.

In her interview Leana reflects on her 23 years as an educator with space to curate and she follows the trajectory of her experience through a kind of cultural-cognitive lens. She speaks to the various ways that she approaches curating through the lens of education; she talks about learning from her own mistakes; she highlights the changes she has made over time due to resources, space and support; she mentions conferences where she has presented her own experiences and learned from others; and in terms of mimetic isomorphism, she references other museums like the Walker Art Center, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and the TATE in London where she has seen particularly successful educational-curatorial work (interview with Leana, February 2015).

Similarly, Katalina speaks to how she tries to follow current trends in museum pedagogy, specifically inclusion and community-based approaches. She explores how her institution is intentional about inclusive language and how this influences her approach to gallery material; she highlights how she and other staff navigate these ideas together and separately. She references particular moments where her personal values have been validated and dismissed and talks about having to fall in line with a standard way of working. Furthermore, she reveals moments where her beliefs and persistence shift the larger rationale in her museum (interview with Katalina, March 2015).

My journal reflections are in line with my contemporaries' interviews. I put pressure on my curatorial project to appear a certain way and write about where this aesthetic ideal comes from, and I highlight moments of frustration due to differing ideologies about curation amongst staff. Like Leana I make a list of museum spaces where I think interesting edu-curation is occurring and I try to go there. I question my motives for why I want the object to be a part of my practice and where this desire stems

from. I take note of great moments of collaboration that help me to understand my role better and I reference particular presentations and papers that have had an impact on my understanding of the field.

These reflections point to our cultural-cognitive processes and emphasize how each of us is embedded in the complexities of art museum education, theory and practice. We are, as Scott (2001) describes, negotiating the cognitive dimensions of human existence, mediating between external pressures and our individual responses (p. 57). We are affected by overarching pressures, ideas, and resources, and remain cognizant of how the ideals we hold fit into the specificity of our situations. We are not mindlessly following the normative expectations put forth by our networks, our colleagues, or our museums. Rather we are in conversation with all of these things. Sometimes we move forward conservatively and other times we push the boundaries, but always immersed in conceptualizations of what it means to work in a museum, be a museum educator, be a community-oriented space, be an object-oriented space, and be engaging to those who choose to spend time in our galleries.

Pluralism and Difference Within and Among Institutions

Beyond the early seminal works that form the underlying principles of institutional theory, extensive research has been published more recently that complicates the ways that we understand the operations of institutions, organizations, and people therein. In her article "Institutional Pluralism, Organizations, and Actors: A Review," Kyoung-Hee Yu (2015) explores ideas about *institutional pluralism*, which recognizes fundamental tenets of early research, but accounts for difference and plurality between and amongst like organizations. Within her article she relies on the concept of

institutional logics, which extends institutional theory beyond the attention to similarity and homogeneity, emphasizing "the heterogeneous nature of institutional environments and the ability of organizations, groups, and individuals to respond to such an environment" (p. 464).

According to Yu, institutional logics "are principles of organization and action that provide criteria for appropriateness, cognitive frameworks, vocabularies of motive, and sense of self to members of an institutional field (p. 465). While this may be hard to differentiate from the cultural-cognitive pillar of institutionalization, there is a shift towards action (institutional and individual) and how it manifests differently in varied situations. This is directly related to notions of institutional pluralism, which is defined as "the presence of more than one logic in the environment, generating multiple institutionally given identities and mythologies that legitimate organizations, individuals, and groups" (Kraatz & Block, 2008, p. 244). According to Thornton et al. (2012), these key premises and the existence of multiple and potentially contrasting logics "enable actors and organizations to conceptualize and act on alternative views of rationality" (p. 7). That is to say that while larger normative and socially constructed ideas undoubtedly have an impact on institutions and individuals, there is autonomy within them and thus differentiation in logical action. There are also diverse investors, support networks, and audiences that expect and deserve distinctive attention. Thus within the framework of pluralism and logics different "organizational actors influence how multiple logics are put into practice within organizations" (Besharov & Smith, 2014, p. 366).

Directly related to institutional pluralism and logics are the localized and specific contexts wherein a museum exists. Difference can be accounted for in institutional

museum work through the recognition of and active efforts to meet local and regional needs. As noted by Marquis and Battilana (2009), an organization's "embeddedness in local communities has an enduring influence on organizational behavior" (p. 4). They go on to state, "because organizations are simultaneously embedded in local as well as more global environments, they almost always face a situation of institutional pluralism" (p. 33). That is to say, that despite the fact that the museum educators (or any museum workers for that matter) are responding to larger ideological demands or trends, they are also listening to and considering the needs of their local constituents. This position is where many of the educators in this research exist – a place of negotiation that straddles normative practice and localized pressures.

Pluralism and Difference in Museum Work

Despite the fact that the educators in this research are all navigating within the institutionalized concept of bridging curatorial and educational practice, there are variances in the institutional logics we utilize. There is a clear indication that each of us is working through larger social constructs regarding the educational and curatorial connection, and there are strikingly similar ways that we experience the convergence of these two historically siloed museum functions. There are also differences that are indicative of the distinct and localized environments where we work. The recent research on pluralism, logistics, and local influence helps us explain the diverse iterations of edu-curation within this research and how a larger ideology manifests within the specifics of a given location. Each of us internalizes our understanding of curatorial practice; we answer to wide-ranging constituents; we have different relationships with our museum spaces; we have varying levels and time of experience in the field; we all work with

colleagues who have their own values and forms of practice; and we all have specific relationships with our local communities that determine how we navigate our practice.

Leana, as an educator at SWMA for 23 years, has been curating for almost that long. She has a separate space that is her own in which to experiment. She has access to the permanent collections for use in this space although it has taken a substantial amount of time for her to be allowed to do so. She conceptualizes this gallery as a space for modeling visitor experiences and suggesting ways for people to engage with artwork in the rest of the museum. More often than not, her ideas center on what it means to be a museum visitor, making it museum-centric in some ways. When collaborating on educational and curatorial projects, the SWMA functions more collaboratively than some of the other museums in this research, with large teams brainstorming installation ideas. Her director supports her curatorial projects, and yet her collaboration with curators is inconsistent. She stresses her vision for future interpretive strategies and has strong opinions about the continued use of educative curation. She wants to focus her energy on such collaborations. She mentions community relationships less often than any of the other educators, and sees the community outreach and local efforts being implicated more in public programming rather than edu-curation projects.

In comparison, Katalina is committed to educationally driven curation, but unlike Leana she does not have dedicated space for her own explorations. In her sixteen-year tenure at MoAC, she has done a significant amount of work to advocate for more experiential modes of learning in galleries. Every curator brings a different level of commitment to working with her and the collaborations are intermittent. Over time her advocacy has paid off, with more and more museum staff coming to her requesting

educational inter-actives. She has utilized granting sources to her advantage by going after grant money that supports her vision. Her ideas often center on different ways of understanding artistic processes and materiality, and it is important to note that MoAC's focus on folk art lends itself well to this focus. Katalina does engage in local conversations and turns to audience feedback as much as she can in order to understand, rather than assume, the needs of her constituents and this falls closely in line with the museum's community-driven mission. While she sees value in educational material in exhibition spaces, she sees the future of collaborative curation moving towards artist and community-oriented partnerships.

Stella's situation at the MMA embodies the most formalized and institutionalized version of the educator's role in curation within this research. Her institution has responded differently than the others and has established a paid position, whose sole duty is to work directly with curators and their exhibition material. Much of her work deals with written interpretation and editing curatorial writing for accessibility, but as is explored in chapter four, she also leads collaborative efforts for more engaging material. The *Dust into Dust* exhibition that she helped conceptualize was highly connected to a local experience, and regional community members, government organizations, and environmental groups were consulted and made content for the exhibition. Despite her official role, she is still dependent on how individual curators perceive the idea of educator input, and she has been very understanding of their apprehension of an educator's edits to their material. She is also involved with curatorial projects because of grant support, and is working on digitization projects with art historians because of these funds.

Analis is in a situation that is yet another slight variation to the educational and curatorial intersection. She has similar experiences to everyone else in the sense that the individual curator is a major factor that determines the level of collaboration, but she has had opportunities to curate on her own and with community organizations. This kind of approach is a combination of what we have seen in the other examples, and demonstrates a multitude of ways that one institution logistically navigates the specific drive to wed curation with education in a localized context. Analis works strategically for opportunities to engage with curation on several levels. Her focus is slightly different than that of some of the other educators in this research in that she includes community wherever she can. Institutionally, support for the community-based curatorial projects are supported by grant money.

The point here is that the normative mechanisms and the cultural-cognitive processes manifest in a myriad of ways. Institutional logics, pluralism, and the effects of local specificity allow us to conceptualize why this is the case. The various ways in which these educators traverse the educational-curatorial divide indicates "that logics and organizational templates can be innovated on or altered by actors that interpret situational needs over time" (Yu 2013; Zietsma & Lawrence 2010). And while I focus on the ways in which the educator is implicated in these varied interpretations, I recognize it is not in isolation. The educators all speak to the influences of curators, donors, grant money, directors, collections staff, volunteers, and audiences. Across each museum these constituents differ and so do their effects. This highlights the fact that while there is a certain level of consistency in conceptualization and action in edu-curation, there are also significant differences.

Working Through Institutional Change

At the heart of this research are the experiences and mechanisms of institutional change as they relate to art museum educators. The complexities explored above point to transition and reconceptualization of what a museum does and how it realizes specific external and internal expectations. Museums are in a place of re-imagining. In-depth investigations into institutional change are relatively new within institutional scholarship. Researchers and theorists only recently started to examine the causes and effects of change within established organizational structures, with most notable literature being published since the early to mid 1990s (Scott, 2001; Ye, 2015; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Of course institutions change for a myriad of reasons and these changes are often situated in a complex web of political, normative, socio-cultural, and individual decisions. At the core of institutional change is reduced legitimacy, through which people identify an institutional structure as inadequate and thus alternative modes of working are sought (Scott, 2001, p. 182). In the case of this research, change is situated in what Scott describes as the diminishment of particular normative ideologies, the erosion of cultural beliefs, and an increased questioning of what has been taken for granted (p. 182). Because this shift is based in the socio-cultural realm of norms, values, and beliefs that are deeply rooted, change does not occur rapidly. According to the scholarship, "important changes often take place incrementally and through seemingly small adjustments that can cumulate into significant institutional transformation" (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, p. xi). This is a fundamental concept in my inquiry as it highlights the slow progression of ideas across time and space. What is also important to understand is that change, while often originating in a larger socio-cultural network, is

realized at the hands of organizational workers specifically in this case, as there are not regulatory pressures causing de-stabilization or mandated transformation. As Ye (2015) explains in her explorations of organizational structure, "institutional change is likely to be driven by people at all levels of organizations, including the frontlines, and often involves continual, effortful work" (p. 52). This places the act of change in the hands of those on the ground. It also implicates a high level of persistence in order to ensure that changes occur. It is not without effort and conflict that the shifting ideologies manifest in physical spaces of practice.

The change that we, as contemporary museum educators, are immersed in is reflective of a slow, long arc of wide-ranging discourses that have been building for decades. Explorations of museum purpose and relevancy (Alvarez & Holo, 2009; Dana, 1917; Cameron, 1971; Koster, 2006; Monroe & Echo-Hawk, 1991) calls for audience research and engagement (Hood, 1983; McClean, 2001; Neil & Kotler, 2000; Rand, 2000; Simon, 2009; Weil, 1999), theorization about art museum education (Adams & Koke, 2008; Duncan, 2005; Hein, 1995; Roberts, 1997, 2007; Villeneuve, 2007, 2016), appeals for community inclusion (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, 2005, 2007; Golding & Modest, 2013; Peers & Brown, 2003; Roberts, 2007; Watson, 2007), conceptualizations of people-centered curation (Belting, 2001; O'Neill & Wilson, 2010, 2014; Rogoff, 2008; Trant, 2008; Villeneuve, 2016), demands for diversification (Dewdney, et. al., 2012; Fyfe Y MacDonald, 1996; Mcityre & Ware, 2009; Nightingale & Mahal, 2012), and a myriad of other growing museum conversations that are central to the ways in which our field has been defined for a considerable amount of time. There have been incremental changes throughout this trajectory and museum workers have been at the helm of the

slow and determined progression. Of course the change is not isolated to the merging of education and curation. The act of wedding these two functions within the museum is an attempt to reach calls to action, and conceptualize diversity, inclusion, and community engagement through exhibition content. It is one facet among many in the larger culture shift in museums.

Also relevant is the fact that change in institutionalized environments does not come without conflict and some resistance. In discussing the effects of change on individuals Scott (2001) states, "if we recognize that virtually all social structures, particularly in the modern world, contain multiple institutional systems that intersect, overlap, compete for attention and adherents then we understand that it constrains some actors but enables others"(p. 184). Similarly, Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) explore social movement and organizational shifts through the concept of boundary work, which explains how "boundaries and practices have material effects on the distribution of power and privilege, which can fuel conflicts both within and across boundaries over time and through institutional re-structuring" (p. 193). We see the negotiation of boundaries within this research as educators and curators move into new territories. As evidenced in chapter four, each of us speaks to the existence of power dynamics and the privileging of some positions over others. The longer institutional history that has favored art history, the object, and academic language still holds true in many instances in the studied museums. None of them are completely free from, or de-institutionalized, in the hierarchical order that has long been a structural force in favor of expertise. This can be explained easily: a new ideation does not come through a complete disavowal of another. Instead, the bounded epistemologies reverberate, mix, and form complex understandings

of museum practice, curatorial practice, and educational practice.

Dynamics and Affects of Institutionalization on Museum Educators

Throughout this chapter I have drawn on multiple facets of institutional theory in order to explore the questions a) what are the institutional structures and dynamics at play within these art museum educators' experiences? and b) how do these institutional dynamics and structures influence the educator's conceptualization and practice of art museum work? What is revealed speaks to the complex nature of art museum education and museum work in general. The educators in my research all deal with and come up against larger ideologies that impact their work in similar ways, and yet there are striking differences in how each educator navigates the specificities of their institutionalized structures. While the museum educators in this research are by no means working in identical spaces, they are responding to analogous expectations and some of the effects are strikingly similar. As mentioned earlier in this chapter the larger concepts that each of these educators negotiates by bridging the education curatorial divide are: *people at the center of our work*, *how people learn*, *what people learn*, *spaces to engage*, *aesthetic consideration*, and *collaboration*. These are normative ideas that are valued across each of the educator's stories and yet on an individual and professional level these values are conceptualized with variation due to the cultural-cognitive and pluralistic factors. For instance if we compare Leana to Analis, they are both equally passionate about all of the above-mentioned values, and yet the way these ideals play out through their respective spaces of practice is distinct. Leana has her own space to curate and explore whereas Analis has intermittent opportunities to curate on her own, working mostly through curatorial collaborations. Leana conceptualizes the role of edu-curation as a way to guide

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people through the museum experience, modeling ways of looking. At the heart of Analis's curatorial practice is the desire to represent more perspectives through community input and interjections. Leana views collaboration as internal to the museum and Analis bridges the curatorial through community partnerships. They both negotiate issues of aesthetics and yet that is more consistently a concern for Leana as she deals with these issues more often in her dedicated space. Resources, personal beliefs, relationships with colleagues, connections to community, support from leadership, and a myriad of other everyday factors mark their experiences with distinction.

This chapter has focused on systems and ideological frameworks that define the intersections of art museums, curatorial practice, and art education. It highlights the ways in which art educators are positioned within these systems and how they traverse changing conceptualizations of how museums present content and work with people. In chapter six I shift focus to concentrate on individual agency. While the role of the individual is not ignored in this chapter, it was certainly framed within institutionalization, which has constraining and limiting effects. In chapter six I will reveal moments where these educators are leading the way in efforts to un-discipline and ultimately de-institutionalize dated ways of thinking about exhibitions, education, their design, and their function.

CHAPTER SIX:

PROCESSES OF CHANGE: THE EDUCATOR'S ROLE IN UN-DISCIPLINGING

MUSEUM PRACTICE

Moving into new territories of institutionalized systems and how they impact education work in the art museum, I now turn to the agency of individuals and the complex processes with which they engage in order to enact change. As introduced in chapter five, the idea of process is not unknown to institutional theory. However, within the canon of institutional scholarship, researchers historically focus on process as an indicator of how people operate within an organization to maintain normative behavior and stability. In this chapter, I frame process in a slightly different manner, arguing that it is inherently transformative and indicative of impending shifts, newness, and creative variance. I focus on the reflexive practices of educators, the translations between museum participants (workers, visitors, volunteers), and acts of becoming as a way to demonstrate the un-disciplining function of process. Putting these operating modes into conversation with institutional theories of change, I situate these processes as critical components of the museum educator's active involvement in shifting museum practice. By assuming these concepts and notions of museum as process, I explore my final research question:

How are art museum educators changing normative, standard, and

institutionalized museum practice?

Within this chapter I hone in on the situations and positionalities that I briefly mention in chapter five — the spaces wherein educators navigate the terrain between traditional and shifting ideations of museum work (see Figures 6 and 7). Moving outside

of the specifics of institutional theory, I locate my analysis of the educators' roles in these

moments and places *in-between*, where I find fruitful potential for newness and agency.

I argue it is within these liminal areas where educators in this research negotiate,

challenge, and make meaning. These interstitial spaces "provide the terrain for

elaborating strategies of selfhood — singular or communal — that initiate new signs of

identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the

idea of society itself" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). Bourriaud (2002) explores art and

engagement through the notion of *interstice*, which in the context of his defined term

relational aesthetics reflects, "a space in human relations which fits more or less

harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities

than those in effect within this system" (p. 16). That is to say, that within the structure of

the museum system, these bordered areas are where we educators are re-imagining what

it means to be art museum educators, how museums function in society, and who has

agency in museums. The interstice is where new possibilities exist. In these spaces, we

traverse the value-laden logics of institutionalized museum work by existing in new

capacities, which muddle what we know and open possibilities for difference in how we

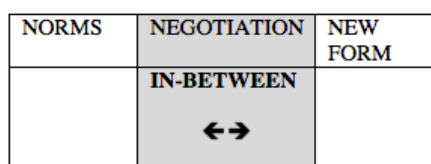conceptualize our practice.

NORMS	NEGOTIATION	NEW FORM
	IN-BETWEEN	
	←→	

Figure 6. Negotiating in-between norm and newness.

COMMUNITY

CURATOR

EDUCATOR

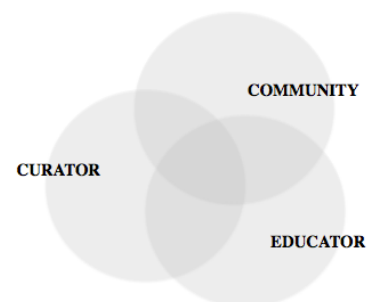*Figure 7. Overlapping modalities of curator / educator / community.*

Museum as Process: Meaning and Transition in Our Work

Central to all of these positions—the in-betweenness, creativeness, messiness—are the processes of museum work. While the stability of museums often focuses our attention to the physical state or outcomes, I argue that there is agency and potential in viewing the museum as an unending process. This idea "draws attention to the potential of museum spaces in which diverse, intellectual, professional and cultural communities meet and engage in work that yields new ways of thinking and living" (Silverman, 2015, p. 2). This conceptualization of museums is centered on collaborative relationships, working outside of delineated duties, and the movement of meaning between the individuals who are connected to the experiences created in museums. As a process, the museum and its associated knowledge become places for "a more dialogue-based sense of asking" (Karp & Kratz, 2015, p. 281). Rather than stating something as universally true, museum knowledge is situated as "essentially contested, debatable, and respecting the agency and knowledge ability of audiences" (p. 281). This ideation of museum content highlights a marked and significant shift, which challenges the singular expertise and authority of the museum. In speaking to this shift and process, Karp and Kratz describe the "interrogative museum," and how "challenging established practice and categories that have been taken as universal or natural requires radical openness to deal with the uncertainties and unexpected twists and outcomes" (p. 285). Part of museum as process is allowing for difference and maintaining a flexible and accepting position. What is more, as practitioners, it is about creating or opening space for new ideas to take shape outside of what is traditionally expected.

Processes of Deinstitutionalization: People in Action

In chapter five, I introduced the notion of institutional change and focused largely on the normative, cultural-cognitive, and logistics of such change. I did not elaborate on deinstitutionalization. This is not an oversight on my part, as, according to Scott's (2001) research on change, de-institutionalization is relatively rare. Scholarship on institutional change tends to focus on larger ideologies and how they generate likeness across organizational sectors. This type of change is directly related to the formation of norms, values, and modes of working due to some level of institutional pressure. While I am interested in these constructions (see chapter five), they are not the basis of this chapter. Within these pages I focus on *how* new formations are conceptualized. I am thinking about what constitutes de-institutionalization, which "refers to the processes by which institutions weaken or disappear" (Scott, 2001, p. 181). Based on this research, I am in no position to claim that any of the normative ideas or modes of working are being completely erased. I am not interested in, nor do I argue, that one form of museology is completely displacing another. Instead, I situate this analysis in what Tolbert and Sine (1999) describe as an intermediate stage of de-institutionalization based on changing practices. The perceptions of curation, education, and community are not disappearing, but are becoming something else altogether. These stages of *becoming* and the messiness that exists during de-institutionalization are explored here, with a focus on the educator's experience and role.

I find value in exploring individual action and the spaces where new ideations come to fruition through how people position themselves —both ideologically and in their daily practice. Most research into de-institutionalization does not focus on

individuals and the power they have to work change larger systems. As Scott notes, "much of the attention to change tends to privilege two moments; the formation of new elements and their diffusion across host forms" (p. 181). Several institutional theorists argue that there is a systemic tendency to deemphasize human agency (Powell & DiMaggio, 1988; Oliver, 1997). Ye (2015) demonstrates that it is only within the last ten years that agency is being acknowledged within institutional theory and even then many people postulate that individual actions are characterized by bounded intentionality, social identity, value-laden goals, and cognitive limitations (p. 469). While these factors do come into play, I think there is something more complex happening within the educators' stories. If we look at their experiences differently, through a different lens, then we expose great moments of becoming something else and new.

Un-disciplining the Museum: Moving Within and Beyond Boundaries

Directly related to the processes of de-institutionalization is the notion of un-disciplining. By placing disciplines (epistemologies, methods, spaces, actions) in direct correlation to institutionalized systems, we see that the movement within, between, and outside of disciplined boundaries is fundamental to larger shifts in museums, which recognizes an embedded presence of disciplined thinking in traditional museum practice. As defined by higher education researcher Allison Lee (2005), "disciplinarity can be understood as a socially constructed, authorized and organized attitude to knowledge. Its logic is conceptually a closed logic in terms of its boundary work, constructing grids of specification and exclusion" (p. 11). Correlating to the professionalization of museum workers and the normative mechanism of institutionalization, disciplines are an expressed outcome of academic specialization. As noted by Davies (2003), "specialization

reinforces the knowledge already known by enforcing — e.g. through conventional methodologies — normative forms of behavior. Specialization is the essence of disciplinarity" (p. 11). What is more, disciplinarity is a function of the museum itself as a producer of knowledge. In his exploration of museums and disciplines Whitehead (2009) states, the museum "embodies theories concerning the relative value of objects and the proper ways of apprehending, studying, appreciating or even revering them — of *knowing* them" (p. 25). He goes on to explain how this manifests spatially as well, explaining

> The clinical, white, uncluttered spaces of display unencumbered by all but the most minimal of texts, the isolation in space of art objects inviting our silent contemplation…all of these elements might be seen to efface and neutralize the gallery and to maximize the intensity of focus on what ostensibly matters: the work of art. But inevitably the physical organization of the gallery itself constructs knowledge and its interpretive, mapping art away from everyday spaces and concerns – away from time and place - as if an alternative dimension of pure aestheticism and pure visuality. (Whitehad, 2012, p. 33)

It is within these boundaries of knowledge production that museum educators and other implicated museum constituents begin to challenge disciplines. In order to understand how this works, I turn to scholarship from diverse fields, where conceptualized notions of un-disciplining take varied forms and speak to distinctive ways of moving beyond overly specialized ways of working. I highlight researchers that take interest in acts of un-disciplining and explore several formulations of un-disciplinary work. The root word has been paired with several prefixes in-, inter-, trans-, sub-, cross-, multi-, as an indication of

the varied ways in which people attempt to traverse bounded experiences. Robinson

(2018) suggests, "research or teaching that is not disciplinary is typically described in

terms of how it differs from, adds to, or even works against, disciplinary work" (p. 71)[8].

He goes on to declare that those "who are drawn to this work engage in creative,

challenging and risky work that occurs at the margins of a larger disciplinary enterprise"

(p. 71). As explained by Darbellay (2015),

> the organization of knowledge along interdisciplinary lines is based on the
>
> interaction between several points of view, with the issues and problems treated
>
> falling "between" (inter) existing disciplines, being recalcitrant to treatment by a
>
> single discipline. The inter- and transdisciplinary approach draws its entire
>
> meaning in the "inbetween" of the disciplines – ''inter,'' which is between, at the
>
> interface, ''trans'' which traverses and transgresses – between disciplinary order.
>
> (p. 165)

He goes on to highlight ideas of collaboration and integration and how cross-, inter-, and

trans- competencies can happen at different levels of an un-disciplining interaction. He

explains, "it can be a matter of transferring or borrowing concepts or methods from

another field, of hybridization or crossing mechanisms between disciplines, or even of

creating new fields of research by combining two or more disciplines" (p. 166). What is

important to note is that these transgressions and mixings are often still largely concerned

with disciplinarity to some degree. Robinson notes,

> while whole new ideas, methods, approaches and theories may be developed in
>
> such work, these new approaches and ideas are themselves proto-disciplinary in

---

8 In addition to teaching and research, I insert practice here as well.

the sense that if they prove to be fruitful, they begin to map out the borders of a

new discipline, or at least a sub-discipline, with all the paraphernalia (journals,

canons, theoretical foundations, language, etc.) of disciplinary knowledge. (p. 71)

According to Purpura in an interview with DeSouza (2013), undisciplined knowledge

conveys a few things all at once: a) that knowledge is not bound to a single academic

discipline, that it moves between the histories that lead to the segregation and

professionalization of knowledge; b) refers to a refusal to comply or conform to the rules

of category; and c) implies a level of being untrained and raw (p. 168). Taking it further,

Rogoff, as cited by Nasar (2011), postulates the notion of complete disciplinary dis-

identification, which "'uses irrationality, confusion, and disorientation, and so on, in

order to produce another logic, not the hegemonic one'" (p. 108). Within her exploration

of un-disciplining, Rogoff stresses,

> I think only in terms of *undisciplined* work, not transdisciplinarity,
>
> interdisciplinary or super- disciplinary, just undisciplined work, because that is
>
> where a zone of dis-identification takes place. You don't spend your life saying,
>
> "In sociology we do this, but in anthropology we do that; in literary criticism this,
>
> but in art history that." You get on with it. And you produce an undisciplined field
>
> and that is a zone of dis-identification and immensely productive. (p. 108)

 In a way, this idea represents the extreme to which one situates themselves outside of

any bounded conceptualization of self and a specific knowledge base. That is not to say

that our past experiences and ways of knowing are abandoned altogether, but the impetus

to revert to what we know or how things *ought to be* done is limited within this kind of

undisciplined approach. As will be explored below, the educators' experiences fall in

varied positions along a spectrum of the above-mentioned un-disciplining practice. Some

instances are more disruptive to normative ways of working than others and some

experiences represent more innovation. The explanations display a wide range of how

and when people interrupt tradition. Just as is the case with processes of

institutionalization, processes of un-disciplining are contingent upon numerous factors

such as individual values, flexible institutional structures, access to resources, and

engaged collaborators, among many other influences.

Un-disciplining also comes through the mediation of physical museum spaces and

objects. While the ideas above are written in relation to research, teaching, and individual

measure, they translate into the materiality of museum work as well. Un-disciplining the

exhibition space takes many forms. It is connected to blurring the knowledge boundaries

as they relate to objects, which by and large are still framed within the art historical

canon and an authoritative, specialist framework. As a form of un-disciplining we are

embedded in practice that attempts to "challenge, not overthrow, but challenge —the

claims to authority that museums make (Karp & Kratz, 2015, p. 294). It is a recognition

that objects of knowledge "often posses multiple layers of meaning, an epistemological

patina that may or may not be accessible and apprehended by those who encounter and

engage them" (Silverman, 2015, p. 3). As an un-disciplining method I recognize the

exhibit as an open discourse and invite more room for interjections, re-writing, and

building new meanings. In related her discussion of the Belghazi museum and its

approach to exhibitions and objects, Katarzyna Pieprzak (2000) says, "undisciplined

stories and the disorganization of talk open the possibility of stepping outside of the

supposedly logical and rational narratives of culture" (p. 79). Within this the ideation of

the objects themselves begins to exist outside of disciplinary order. They are imagined

through varied markers of existence and through numerous points of access.

Un-disciplining Exhibition Content, Bringing in More

The most evident and commonly mentioned effort for un-disciplining come

through the educators' challenges to the predominance of the art historical canon in

museum spaces. Each of the museum educators in this study brings up not only

frustrations with this predominance, but ways in which we are working to complicate

what information is presented and who is involved with the formulation of knowledge.

Through partnerships and layering multiple meanings into the exhibition space, the

educators are un-disciplining the tendency to rely on one author - the sole curatorial

voice. These acts of un-disciplining challenge the specialization of the art historian as

curator, bringing other ideas into conversation with the objects on view. In the

collaborative strategies used in the exhibition *Dust into Dust,* Stella and other MMA staff

partnered with historical societies, government agencies, water agencies, and the general

public, among others, to contextualize environmental issues related to drought and water

rights in the region. Moving beyond the singular lens of art history, multiple partners

were brought into the exhibition plan as a way to open up the material through varied

perspectives. The placement of each voice into the exhibition brings out notions of what

Robinson (2018) labels "issue driven inter-disciplinarity," which focuses on "partnerships

with the external world, partnerships which go beyond treating partners primarily as

audiences, and instead involve these partners as co-producers of new hybrid forms of

knowledge" (p. 72). Analis speaks to similar efforts of un-disciplining through various

partnerships and exhibition strategies. The "Community Voices" labels written for the

exhibition *Western Iconography* highlight specific instances of marked efforts to confront some of the standard, historical, and popular conceptions of Western art. Through the inclusion of community voices in the exhibition, the focus on the "heroic," white cowboy is challenged and the problematic representations of people of color are front and center, with the collaborators bringing a discourse of discrimination and racialized violence to the fore. The community-written information would certainly not have been presented without the educator's involvement in the project, as she mentions in her interview that the brainstorming for the collaboration began when she asked the curator how she was going to deal with the fact that the exhibition featured exclusively white male artists with threads of racism embedded in the imagery. Analis questioned the curator,

> how are you going to deal with an exhibition that is white…in a non-white community? There are only a few women artists and no ethnic or racial diversity other than having a native person here and there. You literally have white men painting non-white people. How are you going to deal with that? (interview with Analis, August 2015)

In one of the other big curatorial projects, Analis took the un-disciplining processes even further, through engaging the long-term involvement of community partners and participants in exhibition development. Challenging the authoritative and singular museum voice throughout the entire undertaking, Analis made a point to involve participants in every step of exhibit conceptualization, development, and implementation.

> Some participants were more comfortable with what was going on and felt empowered enough to say, "I am bringing stuff from home and you're going to put it on view." There was a goal and mentality for multi-vocal exhibition and

curatorial narrative because we included people from the very beginning. We never, EVER privileged one voice. The museum was equal to our partners…equal. (interview with Analis, August 2015)

Katalina and the curators of the exhibition *A Color, A World* at the MOaC also made it a point to include many voices and perspectives. They worked with numerous specialists including multiple art historians, historians, botanists, entomologists, textile artists, educators, and designers, among others, in order to layer meaning and complicate the art historical object. The exhibition included pieces of diverse use and cultural significance, ranging from traditional 16th century oil paintings to hand-woven rugs to contemporary product packaging, all of which demonstrated the creation and use of pigment across the globe throughout history. The expertise comes not just from the museum, but also from a wide-range of participants' voices. The singularity that often defines the way exhibitions are created and conceptualized shifts significantly within these collaborative efforts, marking a shift in museum practice away from a hyper-disciplined and specialized process to an open, negotiable dialogue.

Un-disciplining Education, Re-thinking How We Learn in Museums

As mentioned in previous chapters, one of the most pressing issues for the educators in this research deals with the nature of education and how it is implemented and changing. Learning in museums has become overly disciplined and in many instances the educational standard is dependent on explanatory and didactic text, top-down knowledge exchange, and structures that restrict how people engage with ideas. In chapter five, each of these issues is presented as an institutionalized function of the museum's learning environment, being the normative and expected way that museums

relay information from the museum to the viewer. Each of the educators in this research

speaks to their frustration with these standard ways of working and through various

projects and collaborations have begun to challenge how learning can occur in the gallery

space. These educators are working through varied theories of knowledge and theories of

learning, pushing towards more tactile, creative, and learner-focused engagement. In my

project *Call and Response*, I was intentional in my conceptualization of the educational

components that informed the curator's vision for *A Painter's Hand: The Monotypes of

Adolf Gottlieb*. Instead of relying on the authoritative voice of the museum to interpret

the last body of work by Gottlieb, I invited a local painter to work creatively in

conjunction with the exhibition. Together, we planned and organized the program

through which she made her own monotypes as an exploration of process. We filmed her

studio time and also interviewed her about what she was thinking throughout the project.

This video was presented alongside her work. Her experience and artistic translations

broke from the art historical record that was the heart of Gottlieb's exhibition, focusing

more on the physical nature of making the monotypes and the emotional impact of

creating one's last body of work – which is what Gottlieb was doing. Her interpretation

was intimate, physical, and marked with ideas of making. Community members were

also invited to create monotypes as Gottlieb would have, using a similar press and

process, allowing for a physical connection to the working artist. And while these

educational components are not necessarily un-disciplining art and the focus on the artist,

the learning moments move beyond the authoritative voice of the museum and the limited

use of explanatory text as the only educational form.

Leana's curatorial practice also points to a form of un-disciplining. In the educational gallery that she curates, the traditional purpose of the museum exhibition is challenged and in essence flipped. Through her conceptualizations and collaborations, the artwork from the collection is used to support the educational project rather than the other way around. In conventional museum planning, education is utilized to support and elucidate the traditional curatorial vision. Through Leana's use of the collection she highlights different ways that museum visitors can engage with material and the artwork brings to light a particular learning process or idea. Through her projects she emphasizes the multifaceted use of art objects, and she asks visitors to not only engage with the ideas, but to leave their interpretations and reflections behind for others to see as well. The exhibitions are multi-vocal and multi-dimensional. Storytelling, political issues, observation, empathy, problem solving, and social issues, among many other ideas, are explored and she pulls work from the collection to demonstrate these varied ways of understanding the purpose and contexts of art. She states, "I ask myself, how can these objects serve a different function? How might we use the collection with learning and the learner at the forefront of our planning" (interview with Leana, February 2015). While some people might argue that museums already operate in this way, what Leana is doing in her space is unique and the way she thinks about the exhibition challenges the normative ways of working through museum content. Katalina is also active in what I define as un-disciplined practice. In challenging the standard educational model of text-heavy labels, Katalina often creates opportunities for learning through different modalities. The exhibitions she spoke of and had me look at included technological interactives, work stations for art-making, and tactile samples for viewers to feel and

study. There were also spaces that included viewer reactions, thoughts, creative designs and reflections. Like the other educators in this research, Katalina is making a clear attempt to open up different ways of learning, moving beyond the traditions of education in exhibitions.

Un-disciplining the Space, Moving Beyond the White Cube

It is perplexing that today, long after the formulation, standardization and criticisms of the white cube aesthetic in art museums, that museum personnel are still relying on the standard white wall, minimal text model for exhibition design. As mentioned in chapters four and five, the aesthetics and design elements of exhibitions are easily the most institutionalized marker of the experiences of educators in this study, and thus the most difficult to challenge or un-discipline. The resistance comes from the expectations of colleagues and co-workers but also from the educators themselves who each stressed their concerns about exhibitions looking "legitimate" and acceptable. However, as related to the ideas of un-disciplining art history and education, the layout and design of the art exhibit has begun to shift, moving beyond the contemplative, object focused, fact-based models of design. Incorporating interactive learning moments, community voice, contextual information, and technology all shift the aesthetic towards something unexpected and less neutralized. All of the examples mentioned above move the pristine and clean design into new territories of complexity, layering, and disruption.

Beyond the aesthetic alterations that are an affect of the processes of un-disciplining art history and education as explored above, the educators explore other ways that the traditional layout and design of exhibitions are being re-conceptualized. In chapter four, Leana reflected on specific meetings where the collaborators of the

permanent gallery installation were discussing exhibition spaces and the architecture in relation to exhibit planning. An entire week's worth of meetings was spent talking about the 3-dimensiality of the museum visit and the potential for new modes of operating based on considerations of space and the learning environment. Challenging standard development strategies and the tendency to conceptualize exhibitions through book projects or written work, these conversations speak to an un-disciplining practice. In a similar act of un-disciplining, Analis explored a situation in which she moved completely away from using historical objects when she was put in charge of re-installing a historical property that belongs to the museum and is part of its exhibition space. The focus that museums place on the object is often – almost always – paramount. In her interview she expressed her frustration with the old installation's use of objects, which reinforced problematic and racist visions of domestic spaces and inhabitants of the southwest. Instead, Analis collaborated with designers, curators, local historians, and artists to focus on more complex stories about historic spaces and the city's development. The re-installed exhibition highlights personal stories, contested histories, urban renewal, and ideas of gentrification – bringing complexity and varied narratives to the space.

Related to this, one of the most impactful processes for challenging the traditional aesthetics and content of the museum comes through inviting the outside in. While this seems like a simple idea, it is not something that happens with frequency in museum spaces. Each of the collaborative moments mentioned throughout this research highlights the ways in which diverse perspectives and ideas for engagement shift the visual and conceptual representation of the museum. Allowing space for new ideas to be presented is key to breaking from the clean, un-interrupted art experience. This is not to say that

such an experience is invalid or no longer relevant, however the spatial organization and presentation of such an exhibition limits who and what is being considered. Moving beyond this idea of a purely contemplative space marks one of the most challenging yet critical processes of un-disciplining the museum.

Un-disciplining Through Processes of Reflectivity and Reconception

Part of the un-disciplining process manifests through the simple, yet key acts of reflection and re-conceptualizing the means, outcomes, and purposes of knowledge production. As defined by Ben-Ari and Enosh (2010),

> reflectivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs and political commitments shape our identities. It also involves the need to be aware of one's social context and the influence of societal and ideological constraints on previously taken-for-granted practices. (p. 154)

As opposed to a specialized and disciplined form of research, teaching, and practice, which many see as inherently re-productive rather than productive, reflection "is the basis of questioning social and intellectual practice" (Davies, 2003, p. 11). Reflective practice as suggested by Davies is oriented towards

> the need to break the disciplines from their conventional hold on knowledge that ensures intellectual conformity; an antidote to the way social and psychological space is monopolized by historicizing methods and representations that ensure the continual reproduction of the "same old thing." (p. 26)

Similarly, Holland (1999) notes, "an important function of reflexive analysis is to expose the underlying assumptions on which arguments and stances are built. We are socialized

into assumptions as we internalize worldviews, world hypotheses, cultures, cosmologies, thought styles, or paradigms" (p. 466). These ideas speak to the act of questioning and challenging moments, habits, and procedures that are institutionalized or disciplined. It brings critical reflection upon the notions of what it means to be an educator in an art museum — or what is more, what the function of a museum is.

Connected to the reflective acts mentioned above is the important process of reconception, which is at the heart these educators' stories. In the editorial dialogue of their book *Breaking Disciplines: Reconceptions in Knowledge, Art, and Culture*, Davies and Meskimmon (2003) explain the power of reconception, noting,

> stressing the materiality of knowledge and the creative activity of thought, re-conception rejects the existence of universal truths which precede articulation, arguing instead that it is in articulation itself, whether that be through words, text, objects, or images, that subjects negotiate a meaningful place in the world. (p. 2)

They continue, "reconceptions are open to contingency and change; they are processual modes of thinking, which permit exchanges between and across conventional intellectual, political and cultural borders" (p. 2). This is particularly important to the individual and the collaborative roles of re-imagining what an art museum, art exhibitions, and learning look like in relation to museum communities. It also shifts the way we work to make new forms of our practice. "Reconception does not just re-interpret the world, but makes different realities, engenders different patterns of behavior" (Davies, 2003, p. 30). This is marked throughout the educators' practices described in this research.

Un-disciplining Through Processes of Translation and Positionality

Beyond reflectivity and reconceptualization lie the acts of translation and how one positions themself in relation to their collaborators, colleagues, and the creation of knowledge. In the recent publication *Museum as Process: Translating Local and Global Knowledge*, translation is presented as a key component in our understanding of the museum as a dynamic and living social structure that evolves over time. It is a marker of activity and mobility in the act of meaning making. Silverman (2015) explains, "translation is a social process that brings knowledges into a common signifying space in which meanings are negotiated and articulated, in which objects of knowledge are defined and redefined and given new meaning" (p. 4). Recognizing the complexity of translation as a processual thing, Phillips and Glass (2010) discuss four main conceptualizations of translation and how it can function, explaining,

> One might consider translation as interpretation, a process of explaining or "making sense of" one thing in the language of another; translation as transformation, acknowledging that the process involves the revision, alteration, adaptation, appropriation, repurposing of that which is being translated; translation as displacement, a process of "de- and re-contextualization ;" and translation as agency, acknowledging the power and presence of the object of translation itself.'

These definitions take into consideration the many ways that translation occurs when meaning is being negotiated between the various and diverse positions within spaces or moments of re-imagining. These translations are not seamless or without disorder, but that is sometimes the point and a welcomed state. As noted by James Clifford (2013),

translation is not just about transmission, "something is brought across but in altered forms, with local differences, with a loss or misunderstanding along the way and something is gained, mixed into the message" (p. 48). These movements, intersections, and exchanges of power are fundamental to translating something outside of the norm. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) reiterates this idea when he states, "the 'time' of translation consists in the *movement* of meaning, the principle and practice of a communication that puts the original in motion to decanonise it" (p. 326).

Connected to the idea of translation is how we position ourselves in terms of our collaborative and individual work. Bhabha (1994) puts positionality at the center of his exploration of translation. He notes, "translation is the performative nature of cultural communication. It is language *in actu* (enunciation, positionality) rather than language *in situ* (enonce, or propositionality)" (p. 326). This iteration favors the act of translation, the relational moments that place meaning in motion as a key factor in how movement and new meaning occur. Through this lens I understand translation within the museum as the act of speaking, emphasizing process and multiplicity rather than product and truth. Irit Rogoff also explores the notion of positionality in her interview with Nasar (2011) when she says, "something else that interests me is the notion of trans-identification: the possibility of identifying with something that is not your identity or your experience or your knowledge of the world or your positionality, and taking it into another context" (Nasar, p 103). In her book *Tierra Infirma* (2000), Rogoff highlights two issues of positionality. First she states,

the conviction that politically informed work is founded on certain

disenchantments and frustrations with existing ways of knowing and with the very

possibilities for visibility and representation which they allow, and that it is the

mobilization of this discontent that is the driving force behind the need to arrive at

new articulations. (p. 4)

Second she recognizes the importance of self-situatedness and "the animating conditions

for critique in a particular individual set of beliefs, a set of intellectual histories and a set

of experiences" (p. 4). This active movement outside of one's own worldview and set of

beliefs is loaded with potential for newness and re-imagining.

Educators in this research position themselves in spaces of reflection,

reconception, and translation as they shift in-between notions of education, community,

and curation. Looking at Leana's acts of re-conceptualizing and reflecting on the standard

use of museum objects she challenges and forces other museum colleagues to consider to

whom the collection belongs. Her position is somewhat inward facing, in which she

thinks about the internal workings of her institution, but her persistence in reiterating that

museum collections do not belong to *just* the curators is key to how meaning is shifting in

her space of practice. Working through the dynamics of curatorial, educational, and

community partnerships, she argues that the collection should be understood as belonging

to everyone affiliated with the museum, including community partnerships and one time

visitors that have valuable contributions and perspectives. In challenging the traditional

notion that curators have sole intellectual ownership over museum objects, which is

common and limiting, Leana set in motion processes for new modes of practice. She also

questions the very nature of education as a priority of the museum. In her reflective

moments she brings up her critiques of overly determined educational missions and asks

others to consider different functions of museum engagement. She notes how she often

mentions new ideas to staff as a way to re-conceptualize, together, the mission of the museum. She says,

> I try to get people to re-think our actions and planning for people, but it is met with hesitation. If you're at a meeting and you bring up the entertainment factor of museums, I mean who cringes when you say entertainment? We can identify that need, but people around the room say "we're better than that." Entertainment shouldn't be that dirty word, but it is. (interview with Leana, February 2015)

She challenges her colleagues in other ways, too.

> This is another thing I've been thinking about, it's redundant and boring perhaps, but we pull so much imagination out of the museum in the service of education. To understand artworks you have to engage your imagination. I try to remind my staff that we work with creative objects and that our work is inherently creative. We need to force ourselves into this framework sometimes. We get so wrapped up in our routines and we forget why we are here. (interview with Leana, February 2015)

In moments like this, she is pushing the boundaries of not only the education discipline, but also the disciplines of museum work. She shares her reflections and reconceptualizations in order to push the boundaries with her colleagues rather than intellectualizing practice in isolation. In a similar way, Katalina reflects upon her practice as an educator and positions herself in a different space when she thinks about why people come to museums. She extends her conceptualization of her role when, as explored in chapter four, she emphasizes how people are looking to museums for community engagements, social service needs, political needs, and support. In her

reflective moment, she shifts her focus away from the education discipline, and speaks to the nature of how re-imagining un-disciplining happens. She makes an affirmative statement about the power of our positionality when she says, "how we situate ourselves matters as we try to reconcile how to act as stewards of our institution and advocate for our communities and partners at the same time; it really matters" (interview with Katalina, March 2015).

Analis also positions herself in ways that re-conceptualize the function and form of art museums. In her daily work environment she makes consistent efforts to challenge herself and those that work with her. As mentioned in chapter four, she keeps a list of questions that serve to remind her and her colleagues of their intentionality. Her deliberate act of interrogating curatorial plans and the apparent lack of diversity in their exhibitions speaks to processes of translation, reflectivity, and un-disciplining the normative museum narrative. This is reflected in her interview when she says, "

> So as an educator who is interested in working with the community that we are serving, I very directly in curatorial situations ask about the diversity or lack of diversity. And unfortunately, often our curators are not thinking about that so I make it a point to bring it up. We should be thinking about that. Why aren't we thinking about that? (interview with Analis, August 2015)

In these moments she is not only reflecting and re-conceptualizing the way museums operate, but also positioning herself with the local community. Similar ideations are found in my personal journal when I take note of my frustration with problematic exhibitions and my intentions moving forward. As explored in chapter four, beyond merely writing about my frustrations I make a list of reflective questions and statements

for intentional practice. I question my role, but also re-imagine my position moving forward. I empathize with my audience and make a commitment to advocate for more thoughtful material and consideration for who walks through our doors. Through these actions, I begin to delineate processes to break away from standard behavior and normative outcomes in the museum.

The Act of Change: Processes and Meaning-Making in Our Work

Each of these acts and processes of un-disciplining exist in the moments where educators, curators, community partners, and at times other key players in museums are engaged with the spaces in-between old and new ways of operating and thinking about one's practice. The acts of reflection, translation, reconceptualization, and assessment of one's postitionality help to break from the reproductive tendencies of our own disciplined biases and, what is more, bring us into active dialogue with the disciplinarity of museums. Looking at the museum as a process – full of meaning, movement and potential – we are able to shift beyond the normative patterns that have come to define museum work. By engaging with ideas, locations, and spaces that are not familiar to us, or are not within our disciplined framework, we carve the way to newness and change. The educators in this research each negotiate the standard expectations of their practice with innovative strategies that are sometimes obvious and striking, while other times subtle and under the radar. They are leading to change, nonetheless. While it is impossible for the educators to function in these spaces of transition all of the time, the moments explored throughout this chapter point to their marked efforts to initiate transformation. Important to note is that these movements are tied to the individuals in this research. While they are all responding to larger ideological pressures – to be more

inclusive and community centric – the ways in which they are responding speak to their individual values and agency. In most of these instances, the attempts to bridge community, education and the demands of curatorial work would not be a focus for museum work if not for the educators. In fact, other than Stella who was hired specifically for curatorial collaboration, each of the other educators recognizes that the way they practice would likely not be happening if they were not leading the efforts. Their intentionality and concentrated determinations to push the museum in new directions is key to the presence of the specific kind of change explored in this research. This is not to say that other museum workers are not on board or supportive of these efforts, but it is the educator who often pressures the institution to think differently and beyond the standard modes of operating.

In bringing the institutional systems of museums in conversation with processes of un-disciplining, I argue that museum educators (and all practitioners for that matter) should consider the processes of meaning-making beyond our specialization. At the same time, we should forget nor disregard our training and the values that come from those spaces. The beliefs we bring with us to our practice are fundamental to an important function of the museum – that of community, learning, engagement, and the human factors of museum work. However, it is important to consider these values as one point among many, source material if you will, from which we may envision our roles and the roles of those with whom we collaborate. The tenets are by no means an end point; instead we should view them as dynamic positions through which we can move and mingle with other ideas. Questioning ourselves, positioning ourselves with others, and reflecting on our modes of work can lead to museum practice that embraces diversity of

ideas and representation. While it is easy to get wrapped up in daily routines and

traditional ways of thinking about our work, we should make a commitment to focus on

the processes and movements of meaning in order to shift our practice in the directions

that the educators in this study lead.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

UNDERSTANDING OUR PRACTICE IN MUSEUMS

By putting the art educators' stories and experiences into conversation with the two disparate frameworks of institutional theory and un-disciplining in this study, I highlight the complexity of change within highly normative systems. The stability that comes with institutionalized museum work also comes with a slow moving and difficult path towards transformation. In this research, I demonstrate how educators are navigating the terrain that exists somewhere between the highly standardized ways of thinking about education, community, and curation, and formative ways of aligning these components more closely in museum practice. In this chapter, I briefly re-visit my research questions and summarize the implications for each question. In so doing, I make direct connections between what I explore in the previous chapters and the field of art museum education. While I specifically focus on educators in this research and thus some of the implications speak to their position within museums, there are inferences that also apply to the varied actors (community, curators, directors, and volunteers) who are involved in museums. I also explore areas for future research in response to some of the findings.

Revisiting Questions: Experiences and Perspectives of Art Museum Educators

What are the experiences and perspectives of art museum educators who are involved in contemporary museum practice that aligns education with curation (either collaboratively or individually)?

The educators in this research share many experiences and perspectives and, as is to be expected, have different experiences and perspectives as well. While it would be easy to argue that the similarities can be explained through the mere fact that I sought out

educators who were involved in curatorial projects, it is not guaranteed that just because they are working on such projects that they perceive or experience their work in a similar fashion. At the heart of their shared beliefs, the educators understand their role in curatorial projects as being an advocate for the community and audience. They all speak powerfully to this notion and see it as key to their role in bridging the curatorial voice with visitors' experiences. The difference occurs in how each of them approaches this conviction, due to either their individual beliefs or the varied spaces where they work. Each of the educators in this research deals with variation in institutional size, the willingness of their co-workers to engage with education and community, the resources (money, space, and collections) that are available to them in imagining new forms of practice, and the amount of time they can dedicate to curatorial and collaborative projects.

Each of them also experiences restrictive and empowering moments. Overall, they speak to the continued occurrence in which curators and directors yield power over their decisions and ability to work in particular ways. They also speak to moments where their positions as educators are empowering and relied upon to meet new pressures within their places of practice. Given the continued focus on education and community-driven initiatives, the educators in this research are often in a place of freedom and experimentation. At times they must insert their position and make a strong case for why the curatorial vision must be disrupted, and other times their colleagues turn to them for advice and consultation. There is a clear indication that some of the traditional power structures are shifting to incorporate educators' and community members' perspectives. What is more, educators and community are seen by museum constituents as important

contributors to content and the knowledge they put forth by the museum. Rather than being simply responsive to ideas, they are active participants in producing and displaying ideas.

Oftentimes the educators perceive certain positions and functions of the museum as problematic. There are numerous conversations within this research that point towards the educators' criticisms of how museums operate. Major criticisms point towards the siloed nature of internal operations and the continued separation of museums and their communities, especially when it comes to the content of exhibitions. As explored in chapter four, aligning curatorial visions with education and community has a real impact on museum work and how museum employees conceptualize the role of the museum. The educators in this research identify the need to incorporate more perspectives and voices into the museum experience, and also see opportunities to offer new ways for engaging with material. None of them see the traditional and relied-upon focus on art history as wrong, but they do see the exclusive nature of most art exhibits as limiting and narrow in scope. Being that they often feel the pressure and are identified as the dedicated staff member for addressing issues of audience engagement, the educators in this research are steadfast in their commitment to diversifying exhibition content. Of course they address issues of engagement and inclusivity in other areas of their work, but when it comes to exhibition development, by and large, the educators interviewed for this research are the voice of inclusiveness. At a minimum they support efforts to extend the concepts and voices represented in museums and they often lead the way in the efforts that bring curatorial, educational, and community perspectives into conversation.

The experiences and perspectives of these educators are complex. Working during a time where the museum world is experiencing a significant paradigm shift, these educators have unique insights into how the field is changing. As will be explored in the sections below, the educators hold varying ideas for how to navigate curatorial, educational, and community needs. There are long-held ways of working and conceptualizing museum work that continue to influence how educators and others involved with museums understand the educational role. There are also moments where the educators are challenging those traditional modes of working in order to present new ways of working for and with museum constituents.

Revisiting Questions: Institutional Dynamics and the Educator's Experience

What are the institutional structures and dynamics at play within these art museum educators' experiences? And how do these institutional dynamics and structures influence the educators' conceptualization and practice of art museum work?

The structures and dynamics of institutions have a significant impact on how the educators in this research operate. The ways in which museums have been conceptualized, taught, and practiced throughout history continues to have an effect on people working in the field today. By placing the findings into conversation with institutional theory we understand how tradition and stability impact the drive for change. In summarizing the ways in which institutional structures influence museum work we see a complex social structure that helps us explain and understand:

- why these museum educators experience and perceive some aspects of their work similarly, across time and place;
- the prescribed value for the various roles and workers of museums;

- the normative behavior and expectations for curators, educators, community members, and other museum constituents;

- why behavior is constrained and enabled, depending on how people value those behaviors and actions;

- why certain behaviors become standardized and expected;

- the influence of training, through education or professional networking, on museum workers' conceptualization of their role in the museum and how museums should serve visitors and the community, and

- how the strong presence of stability impacts the actions for change.

In utilizing institutional theory to explore the shared experiences of these art museum educators, I argue that there is value in these consistencies. That was not always the case. My initial turn to institutional theory was based in frustration and annoyance that there was not more change present in my research findings. The stability did not always seem necessarily a good thing, but in hindsight I see that stability points to a strong network of thinkers, museums, educators, and colleagues that value the turn to education and community involvement in museums. They highlight the fact that what we present in our professional practice and how we network our ideas can and does have an impact on the field. They also emphasize the important things that we value. While sometimes our individual values are pitted against the larger institutional values, we are educated in an area that advocates for people, complexity, and inclusiveness. That is not to say that other workers in the museum world do not also believe these ideas to be important, but through analyzing the educators' stories in this research, it is clear that it is key to our practice.

Of course institutional theory also explains the frustration that these educators experience when working in spaces where multiple perspectives bring complex and differing values to the table. While this research places the analysis in the specific movement towards bridging curatorial and educational work, the implications span all areas of the museum. There are always multiple beliefs, values, ideas, and pre-conceptions that determine how and why museums operate they do. What is playing out currently is a negotiation between historic understandings of museum work and newer ideations of what museums *could be*. The institutional values are changing and educators are directly indicated in these changes. Where the frustration lies is that the actualization of such values are slow to manifest. There is also disagreement as to how they can manifest. I found that even though these frustrations and disagreements frequently impact the educators in this study on a frequent basis, at least the conversation is happening which means that there is potential to influence decisions. I argue that educators must continue to position themselves in this discourse and bring their values, beliefs, and perspectives to the table, while coming to the table with an openness to hear the perspectives of others and a commitment to bridging the varied values that mingle when multiple people are in the mix. This is true for their institutional level and at the larger, networking level. Important to keep in mind is the fact that because over-arching and sometimes restrictive institutional values of museums are learned, they can be un-learned or at the very least challenged and re-conceptualized.

Revisiting Questions: Un-Disciplining our Practice, Un-Disciplining the Museum

How are art museum educators changing normative, standard, and institutionalized museum practice?

Within this research, educators and curators are working in tandem and alongside community partners in various capacities to enact change. In these collaborative and in-between spaces, transformation is understood through processes that challenge the disciplinary nature of museum work. Throughout this research it became clear to me that one of the most restrictive aspects within museums, which hinders change and new modes for work, is centered on the disciplined and siloed nature of how museums operate. Thus the idea of un-disciplining became key to my analysis of the ways in which transformation is occurring in the instances of blended curatorial and educational practice. Change is happening at all levels of the museum field, with individuals at the center, challenging and re-imagining what museums can offer and how they can serve the various constituencies that make up their community. Through the framework of un-disciplining we understand:

- the necessity of stepping outside of our discipline (beliefs, values, habits) to invite new ways of understanding our practice;
- the importance of process, which emphasizes something in motion, unfinished, and able to shift;
- the need to reflect upon how our experiences, beliefs, and interests in order to challenge the taken-for-granted habits and modes of work;
- the productive, rather than re-productive, nature of reflection and reconception; and

- the importance of moments of translation and in-between, which foster the inter-, trans-, multi-, and un-disciplining of ideas

By focusing on the un-disciplined nature of particular moments, we understand how and when transformation happens. Of course, at times, the call for change comes from the top – from governing bodies, boards, and funding agencies (this is the basis for institutionalization). Within this research most of the change is initiated by individuals at lower levels in the museum's structure and is constant, subtle, and drawn out over time. The shifting ideologies and modes of working stem from the ways in which educators, communities, and curators position themselves in relation to, rather than in isolation from, one another. The co-mingling of ideas and conceptions needs to occur more frequently. While it is hard to do collaborative work all the time, I see the acts of reflection and reconception being inter-related and necessary for movements beyond normative ways of working. How we position ourselves is also key to driving change in our practice. Positioning ourselves outside of our world view, either as part of a collaboration or independently, is an important action. Empathizing or understanding the world through a different lens animates the knowledge we subscribe to and sets up a place for creative work.

Educators, and all museum workers for that matter, should actively reflect upon, question, and re-position their values. It is easy to get stuck in the habits of working and to assume the perspective that certain behaviors are simply "the way things are." However, to passively perpetuate these modes of working is not responsive to the shifting demands and needs that communities seek in cultural institutions. Best practices must change and thus museum workers must be active in defining what those changes look

like, in accordance to the varied and unique populations that they serve. Certain ideas are engrained in our practice for a reason, but even the most fundamental structures of a given field are flexible, as they should be. The educational marker of museum work has been central to the field for decades, but how it manifests in daily work and our conceptualization of what education can be continues to shift. Art museum educators need to place themselves in the messiness of this work.

Areas for Future Research

As is often the case, this project has limitations and is narrow in focus. There is room to dig deeper, look at museum education differently, and revisit what is to be gained from such an inquiry. In looking at the key findings from this research I see potential to investigate several ideas that were touched upon, but not investigated further. This project focused solely on the art museum educators' perspectives, and while this was intentional on my part, curators, directors, and community members also have voices to contribute to inquiry on museum education. This kind of approach would diversify the responses, and in all honesty reflect the kind of work I argue we should be doing more of – that which steps beyond our disciplined way of thinking. Given the focus on disciplines and un-disciplined work, I also see potential in investigating how edu-curators are trained and how they continue learning. Investigating the specificities of how particular values and norms are instilled through our educational experience would bring interesting insights to the discourse presented here. In the framework of institutional theory, it would be valuable to do more in-depth research into museums as a way to understand how and where institutional pressures exist. Additionally, research could be done on how people outside of the traditional museum space respond to educationally driven curatorial

projects. A major assumption I make in this research is that exhibitions are problematic in many cases. More research can be done that explores how communities and audiences experience exhibition content, whether it is traditional or more collaborative in nature. Understanding their needs and perspectives of our practice is key to conceptualizing exhibitions and programs for the future.

Reflecting: Institutions, Un-disciplining, and the Educator's Role

What is clear from this research is that the evolution of museums is slow and constant. The historical ideologies and values, some having been around since museums were conceptualized as a social institution, continue to impact contemporary museum workers. While there have been consistent and impassioned calls to shift our values towards education, community, and inclusive practice, the educators in this research reveal there is more work to be done. Although we may not often think about specific historical values and practices that define museums, the lasting influence of these beliefs is real and palpable. Museum educators live them everyday, negotiating between tradition and a call for something else altogether. We are in the center of the discourse and the acts that make the calls for more people-centered work a realization. We are navigating the boundaries of theory and practice, collections and community, curation and education, history and present, and so many other territories.

Un-disciplining our actions complicates, yet activates the meaning that is created when we bridge seemingly disparate spaces of our work. Educators, and all museum actors for that matter, should be open to the messiness and productive movements that come with collaborative efforts and stepping outside of our comfort zones. What is more, we must make an effort to listen to, learn from, and share un-disciplining actions. When

we challenge the museum space, when we question who the collection belongs to, when we invite communities to engage and create with us, we must open up the dialogue for others to hear. The calls for change come from every direction and educators, communities, and curators must position themselves in a way that guides (rather than responds to) those directions. The shifts are small but leave their mark for others to take hold and move the museum field a bit closer to the promises it has made for decades. The traditional modes of working in museums are becoming less viable and our practice must shift to meet the demands of a diverse, critical, and dynamic group of constituents.

APPENDIX A

Reruitment Materials for Research Participants

Dear [Museum Educator],

I am very interested in the structure and context of educational programs that your museum has developed and implemented. I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Arizona studying Art History and Education. My dissertation is focused on the recent shift in some museums' practices wherein museum educators are either curating or collaboratively involved in curatorial endeavors in order to make closer ties with exhibition content and educational programs. My research project will involve interviewing education staff members, reviewing any documents made available to me about the development of educational programs / exhibitions, and possibly observing any meetings or planning stages first hand. In conducting such research I hope to better inform my questions about how educators are collaboratively or individually making an effort to more closely consider the development of exhibition content in conjunction with educational programs.

Your participation in this project would involve obtaining documentation about program development, a one-on-one interview that would last between 2 - 5 hours, and, if possible, observations of your programming. You may terminate your involvement at any time and you many request that your participation remain anonymous to protect your privacy.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The University of Arizona reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Please let me know if you have further questions regarding my thesis project prior to making a commitment. I look forward to working with you and learning more about the ways in which you and your institution are co-facilitating the development of education and exhibition content.

Sincerely,

Traci Quinn

IRB Approved Consent Form

The University of Arizona Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Museum Practice and the Changing Role of Educators

Principal Investigator: **Traci Quinn**

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

1. **Why is this study being done?**

   This study aims to explore the role and perspective of museum educators who have experience working in environments that allow them to either curate exhibitions or collaborate on curatorial endeavors. Research will explore the relatively new shift in museum practice wherein educators are becoming more involved in the curatorial processes and exhibition design. Specifically, this research will focus on 1) how the museum educator perceives his or her role(s) once they are given new/different opportunities to work with museum content; 2) how museum educators are collaborating with other museum workers in order to bridge the divide between art creation, curation, and education in museums; and 3) how exhibitions and education might function in the museum space when these new inter-departmental and collaborative approaches are in use.

2. **How many people will take part in this study?**

   1 - 5 museum educators

3. **What will happen if I take part in this study?**

   First, you will also be asked to participate in an interview, which in total should take roughly 2-5 hours. This time allotment includes follow-up questions and / or having you check the data transcription for accuracy. If possible, I will observe and document the ways in which your educational programs are presented and structured. With permission I will audio record our interview, take photographs of the exhibitions (not people), take notes about the structure and set up of educational components in the gallery, and do sketches of the layout as well. Also with permission, I will then review any written records you may have that pertain to the development of educational programs in conjunction with the curatorial process. If possible and if permission is

granted, I would also like to observe meetings / planning processes that involve the development of exhibitions and education.

4. How long will I be in the study?

The duration of this study is approximately 6 - 9 months. Your participation will be kept to a minimum as I understand and do not want to interfere with your professional duties. The interview process, which will last between 2 -5 hours, and your collecting of written documentation for review are the only instances in which you will be asked to participate. Also, I would also like to observe and take notes on your exhibitions / educational programs. If you want to do so, you can read through our interview transcriptions and any initial analysis I have in order to confirm your opinion and how it is represented in this study.

5. Can I stop being in the study?

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part in the study, you may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any of your usual benefits. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The University of Arizona. If you are a student or employee at the University of Arizona, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

6. What risks, side effects or discomforts can I expect from being in the study?

There are no anticipated risks involved with participation in this research. There is a chance that upon reading your interview transcriptions, you may realize you revealed something that you did not mean to reveal or that you said something in a way that is not necessarily what you intended. While it may make you uneasy or uncomfortable, please know that you can always retract this information or change it. It does not have to be used in the final findings if it makes you uncomfortable.

7. What benefits can I expect from being in the study?

You will not receive any direct benefits from taking part in this study, although the knowledge gained from this study could potentially benefit you as a museum educator. This study will potentially add to general knowledge in the field of museum education, which is the subject of your occupation.

8. Will my study-related information be kept confidential?

Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law.

Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies
- The University of Arizona Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices

9. What are the costs of taking part in this study?

There are no monetary costs associated with taking part in this study. There is however the cost of your time which will include 2 - 5 hours of interview time.

10. Will I be paid for taking part in this study?

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

11. What happens if I am injured because I took part in this study?

Although an injury arising from this study is highly unlikely, if you suffer an injury from participating in this study, you should seek treatment. Neither the University of Arizona nor the researcher has funds set aside for the payment of treatment expenses for this study.

12. What are my rights if I take part in this study?

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

You will be provided with any new information that develops during the course of the research that may affect your decision whether or not to continue participation in the study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The University of Arizona reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable,

according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

14. Who can answer my questions about the study?

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Traci Quinn at **quinn2@email.arizona.edu** or 973-337-9982.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at 520-626-6721 or online at http://orcr.arizona.edu/hspp.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Traci Quinn at quinn2@email.arizona.edu or 973.337.9982.

Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

_____   _____
Printed name of subject   **Signature of subject**

                                 _____ **AM/PM**
                                 Date and time

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or the participant's representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or to the participant's representative.

_____   _____
Printed name of person obtaining consent   **Signature of person obtaining consent**

                                 _____ **AM/PM**
                                 Date and time

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions / Prompts for Discussion

1.   How would you describe your role / duties here at the museum?

2.   What professional or personal factors guide your decisions as a department or individual educator?

3.   Can you describe your role / contribution to curatorial projects?

4.   How did you become involved in curatorial practices in your museum?

5.   As somebody that is working within the curatorial process, what are your thoughts / opinions on the relationship between education and curation?

6.   As an educator who is curating - what are your general priorities and goals for exhibitions as a whole (thinking about curatorial decisions and educational decisions)?

7.   How do you think the implementation of educational programs / activities / tools is related to the curation of the art objects?   What is your role in those processes?

8.   How do you think education would function (either similarly or differently) if you were not involved in the curatorial process?

9.   What does your involvement as an educator who is engaged in curatorial processes bring to exhibitions? (In other words, what is the point of having an educator be more involved with curation?)

10.   How do you think taking on curatorial duties (either in isolation or collaboratively) has affected / influenced your practice as an educator?

11.   Using specific situations in your experience as examples: What are some of the benefits and disadvantages to creating educational programs / activities while also being involved in curatorial processes?

12.   Tell me about a program / exhibition (in which you were involved) where you felt the bridging of curatorial goals and educational goals was particularly successful and why you think it was successful.

13.   Tell me about a program / exhibition where you felt the bridging of curatorial goals and educational goals was not as successful and why.

14.   Can you describe some of the tensions you have experienced in the process of making educational material that are embedded in the exhibition?

15. What would you like to see in the future as far as the topics we have discussed are concerned?

16. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experiences as they pertain to the ideas we have discussed today?

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