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**Defining a Process: Planning an Art Museum Field Trip for
Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

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Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

by

Emma Catherine Grimes

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2018

Dedication

For Stephen. I feel your light shining on me every day.

And for my students at William's Community School. You constantly remind me to look at the world from different perspectives, and I am a better person because of it.

Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge all of the incredible educators that I've had the blessing of working with in the last year and a half. This thesis study would not have been possible without the time, expertise, and support given to me by Emily Cayton and Anna Monas. I am so grateful for both of you.

My sincerest gratitude goes to my thesis chair, Dr. Christina Bain, who guided me and kept me on track through the whole thesis-writing process. Your endless patience and kindness helped me stay grounded this year. I also extend my gratitude to Dr. Paul Bolin. Thank you for always having an open door and for all of the stories you shared with me. You both made my graduate school experience so special. Thanks for always believing in me.

Finally, shout out to my mom. I am strong and capable because you showed me how to be. 143.

Abstract

Defining a Process: Planning an Art Museum Field Trip for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2018

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The purpose of this thesis was to examine the considerations made by educators when bringing students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) into an art museum setting. This action research study investigated why special education teachers are not taking their students to art museums, and carried out the process of planning and going on a field trip to a contemporary art museum with a class of children with ASD. In this study, I collaborated with a special education teacher from a school in Austin, Texas to prepare her class of 7-9 year olds for a trip to The Contemporary Austin. I also explored the role of museum educators, examining the methods that docents use to engage special needs audiences and the benefits of a museum field trip for visitors with ASD from the perspective of an educator at The Contemporary Austin.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the considerations educators make when bringing students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) into an art museum setting. This study examined the process that one group, consisting of a special educator, museum educator, and art educator, went through in order to organize a field trip to a contemporary art museum for a class of children with ASD. In particular, this study inspected the preparation efforts that museum docents need in order to work with special needs audiences and the specific ways that educators prepared their students for the field trip. Finally, it addressed the perceived benefits of a museum field trip for visitors with ASD.

As the art educator and researcher in this study, I worked closely with a special education teacher at William's Community School to arrange a visit to The Contemporary Austin's Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria for a class of children between the ages of 7 and 9 years old. William's Community School is a private school in Austin, Texas that provides individualized education to students with a range of developmental disabilities. It is important to clarify that I am an assistant teacher at William's Community School in a classroom of five children, four of whom have Autism Spectrum Disorder. At the time of this study, I had been teaching at the school for eight months. Children in this classroom often meet the lead teacher's art lessons with challenging behaviors and indifference to rigid project prompts. Due to my expertise and

love of both art and museums, I sought to provide this group of students with a unique encounter with art, outside of the classroom. Through collaboration with the lead teacher in this class, we identified learning goals for a visit to Laguna Gloria and arranged classroom activities to prepare students for the field trip. I also worked closely with the Associate Director of Education at The Contemporary Austin to understand how the field trip would be structured and to gain a more complete sense of how this museum approaches accessibility, including sharing their art collection with all audiences, particularly children with ASD. My goals for this study were to dive into an area of the field of art education that is not well-researched, in order to provide firsthand insight into the steps leading up to a museum visit for students with ASD and to encourage future studies of this kind.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

Through this research, I sought to examine: What considerations are made by educators when bringing students with Autism Spectrum Disorder into an art museum setting?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Special educators do not typically receive formal training in how to provide meaningful art lessons to students with disabilities as part of their university coursework. Furthermore, many special educators do not see the benefit of sharing art in a museum with their students, or see the risks of such a visit outweighing any positive outcomes. Likewise, art educators typically have limited training and experience working with

special populations. For these reasons, a need for specific resources that support educators in these endeavors could benefit children with special needs as well as special educators and art educators.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): The American Psychiatric Association (2013) defines Autism Spectrum Disorder as a “neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by impairments in social communication and social interaction, and restricted repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities” (p. 50).

Accessibility: For the purpose of this study, accessibility refers to the ability of any given individual to participate in museum education programming.

Accommodations: In the context of this study, accommodations are any measures taken by an institution or group in order to ensure that a facility or program is fully accessible to all audiences.

ADA: The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is a major piece of Civil Rights legislation that bans discrimination of a person based on disabilities, and aims to ensure equal opportunities and quality of life for disabled persons as their nondisabled counterparts. In making discrimination against disabled persons illegal, transportation services, businesses, and institutions alike are expected to have full accommodations for persons with any range of disabilities, both physical and mental.

Disability: The World Health Organization (2011) defines disability as a term covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. “An impairment

is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations” (p. 7). While this research design could be applicable to students with a range of physical and/or intellectual disabilities, this study focused on a group of children with ASD.

Docent: Docents serve as educational guides for institutions, often on a volunteer basis. In art museums, docents often have art history or art education backgrounds. Many docents are retired teachers. At The Contemporary Austin, Emily Cayton stated: “Docents are expected to keep the art safe, keep museum visitors safe, and provide a fun, informational experience for the group they are touring.”¹

FAPE: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates that children with disabilities are provided Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This includes access to necessary resources and accommodations for students.

IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), first authorized in 1990, guarantees Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with disabilities and ensures that students with disabilities have the same educational opportunities as nondisabled students. The legislation mandates Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that are best suited for each child’s unique needs, and mandates a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for these students.

¹ All quotes from Emily Cayton, Associate Director of Education at The Contemporary Austin, are from an interview conducted on January 17, 2018, unless otherwise indicated.

IEP: Part of the IDEA legislation, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are personalized education plans that provide guidelines for reaching learning targets for students with disabilities.

Inclusion: Inclusion is the process of integrating students with special needs into general education classrooms (Schiller, 1999). In the context of this study, inclusion refers to assuring that children with ASD have the same learning opportunities at an art museum as their nondisabled peers.

LRE: The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) ensures that students with disabilities are educated in the same setting as their nondisabled classmates, to the maximum extent that it is appropriate. LRE is inclusion in practice: allowing students with disabilities to learn in general education classrooms. However, some court cases have noted that a more restrictive environment may be the LRE for some students (Keifer-Boyd & Kraft, 2003).

Museum Educator: Museum educators are integral staff at a museum, tasked with creating programming around the content in the museum in order to provide visitors with a guided opportunity to engage with and learn from the content. Museum educators generate guidelines for docents to work from and craft supplemental information for museum visitors who seek a deeper understanding of objects or installations on display. These educators typically have a graduate degree in art history or art education.

Museum Education Program: In the context of this study, a museum education program is a docent-led tour and artmaking activity that centers around content on display at The Contemporary Austin.

Special Educator: Special educators are certified teachers with schooling in pedagogy, curriculum, special education law, and a knowledge of a range of disabilities.²

Typically developing: A term frequently used in autism research and writing to refer to individuals who do not have a developmental disability.

MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Personal Motivations

My interest in connecting autism with art (museums specifically) stemmed from a summer job that I took in 2017 in order to pay the bills. Last June, I began working at William's Community School as an Assistant Teacher in a classroom of five children, aged 7-9 years old, most of whom were on the autism spectrum. Before taking this position, I had little knowledge of the nuances of autism, and was not particularly enthralled with the idea of spending my whole summer with children. However, to say that this job changed my life would not be an exaggeration. My time at William's has changed so many things for me: it made me completely change my thesis topic, it has challenged me to connect with others in a more meaningful way, and it has instilled a sense of joy in me that I was desperately needing in my life after the recent passing away of my older brother.

The mission of William's Community School is to provide unique education to students with developmental disabilities through highly individualized academic

² Many educators at William's Community School, including the educator with whom I worked with for this thesis study, received their Masters of Education with a focus in Autism and Developmental Disabilities from The University of Texas at Austin. This specialized program focuses on assessment and treatment practices for students with ASD and other developmental disabilities.

curriculum. This school has a low student-to-teacher ratio, approximately 1:3. During summer programming at William's, academic goals took a backseat, but social and emotional learning remained a top priority in instruction. Through social outings, like weekly trips to public swimming pools and constant participation in activities with other classes of older, younger, and higher or lower functioning children, students were encouraged to flourish in a setting that was safe and nurturing. As such, artmaking activities were central to summer programming. Unlike during the school year, when our class has Art once a week, summer students had art lessons every afternoon. Something that surprised me was how often students displayed negative behaviors during art activities. This contrasted sharply with my own philosophies, believing that artmaking is a therapeutic and enriching experience. As I observed, I noticed that the art lessons delivered by the special education teacher were usually product-based, "cookie-cutter" type crafts. The classroom was often chaotic and many students had difficulty staying engaged longer than 10 minutes out of the hour-long art block. I had no experience creating art curriculum for children with ASD, but I could clearly see a missed opportunity for what I thought could be wonderful learning experiences for these children.

This experience was so transformational that I remain as an assistant teacher in a classroom of 7-9 year olds at William's Community School nearly a year after my initial employment. While the focus of my students' learning transitioned back to reading comprehension and mathematics during the academic year, I remained fixated on figuring out a more effective way to share my love of art with my class. To do so, I spent a good

bit of time in the fall trying out different lesson structures (open-ended prompts, incorporating a variety of materials, encouraging active participation, and beginning lessons with collaborative brainstorming). I became less invested in getting my students to make “school art” (products that look exactly like the teacher’s example) and more interested in learning how to get them engaged in meaningful art-based experiences. Literature on adaptive artmaking techniques are abundant (Alter-Muri, 2017; Guay, 2006; Reynolds, 2012; Rodriguez, 1984), but the research on meaning making and creative experiences for individuals with developmental disabilities is lacking. As I began planning this study, I thought about the importance of the summer outings into public spaces, and how valuable it is for children with ASD to experience new things and unfamiliar places. I began to discuss with Anna Monas, the lead teacher of our class, the possibility of taking our class to an art museum. “It would be amazing,” I told her. “They [our students] could experience art in a way that they’ve likely never had the chance to.”

Professional Motivations

The Kennedy Center, a frontrunner in disability research and advocacy, established a formal plan of action for a merging of the fields of art education and special education (Malley & Silverstein, 2014). Their most recent publication, titled *The Arts and Special Education: A Map for Research* (2016), draws attention to the need for more thorough research in access and equity, instructional design and innovation, and effectiveness. In this publication, the following question is posed: “What physical, cognitive, or cultural barriers may exist to access and meaningful[ly] participate in arts

learning opportunities?” (Burnaford, Gabriel, & Glass, 2016, p. 9). And so, this thesis study considered that question in relation to the experiences of educators working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The specific arts learning opportunity examined was an art museum field trip.

A key takeaway from this study was found in recognizing the value and significance of collaboration between educators working in different settings and with different audiences. Burnhard (2006) supports this finding, stating: “We need...changes in the ways adults (and adults and children) collaborate, cooperate, complement, and connect as arts communities working together to extend professional discourse with shared agendas” (p. 11). Through this thesis study, I gained a more thorough understanding of the complexities that define the fields of special education and museum education in order to best inform the work that I do as an art educator working with special populations.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study took a qualitative approach and utilized practitioner action research methodology to carry out the collection and analysis of data. Reflective practice initiates a pattern of behavior that activates movement in a purposeful, forward direction. It is a process that encourages awareness, reflection, inquiry, understanding, and proposes further action from an informed viewpoint. Several stages of reflection, including two interviews with educators, comprised the bulk of this study’s data. Hennessy (2006) asserts, “Where different artforms and practitioners are brought together, much can be

gained through the quality of collaborative thought and action which acknowledges such distinctions in practice and seeks to complement and find new ways of working” (p. 186). Understanding the perspectives of other educators was essential to this study.

For this research, I conducted a one hour-long interview with a special educator and a second hour-long interview with a museum educator. I also collaboratively planned and implemented two classroom activities for a class of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder to prepare them for their first field trip to an art museum; the activities included an artmaking lesson and a social skills lesson. In addition, I kept a personal journal where I recorded my own reflections throughout the duration of the study. Analysis of these reflections revealed further areas of investigation and suggestions for other educators based on the experience of taking one group of children with ASD to an art museum.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This thesis study had tight limitations, for numerous reasons. Autism Spectrum Disorder encompasses a vast range of characteristics. Because of the fundamentally unique personalities of all five of my students, the process of planning an art museum field trip for my class unfolded with the needs of each of my students in the forefront of my planning. The very small number of children in our class was a factor of convenience in planning the field trip; in terms of logistics, we did not need to charter a bus or put out a call for parent volunteers, and there was not a financial burden of museum admission for a larger group of students. Laguna Gloria was an incredible environment for our students because the outdoor sculpture park did not have the same element of caution that

an indoor museum may carry. There was fresh air and plenty of room for our students to navigate through, without fear of precious objects being the victim of clumsy maneuvering or an episode of challenging behavior. Lastly, we had an exceptional docent for our tour. Emily Cayton's approach to guided tours is flexible and responsive, and I knew from our interview that she felt fully comfortable working with our group of students. I can only hope that every museum has an educator that is equally as excited to share art with any and every person who walks through the door.

While results are not generalizable, I aim to thoroughly represent the perceptions of those interviewed for this study and to acknowledge my own bias as well as the limitations of this study. Though results are not generalizable, the results of the data analysis serve as informational resources and specialized preparation ideas that can benefit educators of all kinds.

BENEFITS TO THE FIELD

Research in the field of art education points to the value of one-time museum visits for children (Terrassa, Hubbard, Holtrop, & Higgins-Linder, 2016) but resources are lacking when it comes to preparing special educators to feel comfortable in bringing their students to an art museum. Passage of the ADA in 1990 has removed massive barriers that prevented individuals with disabilities from engaging with museums in the same way that nondisabled persons do. However, most of these changes pertain to those with physical disabilities, including those in wheelchairs or with vision or hearing impairment. There is little research about the ways to integrate persons with intellectual disabilities

into the art museum (Stringer, 2014). The Center for Disease Control (2016) estimates that 1 in 68 children are identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Research in the field of art education needs to recognize the prevalence of autism and plan rich, appropriate curriculum for engaging this population. This thesis study is just one attempt to address a growing need in our field.

This introductory chapter has explained the central research question and described the problem at hand: resources for educators working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder seeking a museum experience for their students are scarce. It also covered the design of the study, motivations, and potential benefits to the field of art education. Chapter 2 reviews the pertinent literature on children with ASD in a classroom setting, theories related to creative learning, and the current state of accessibility in museums.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This review of literature critically analyzes pertinent key writings on Autism Spectrum Disorder, construction of knowledge, and museums. In particular, this overview looks at the challenges that students with ASD face in the classroom, learning through experience, benefits of a single-visit museum trip, and the status of accessibility in museums today. The sources explored in this chapter are presented in support of the central research question of this thesis study.

Autism and Art

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) manifests itself in unique ways in each individual who is diagnosed. This developmental disability significantly affects communication and social skills (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Repetitive or restricted behaviors and perseverative interests are recognizable traits of autism. As the name implies, individuals with ASD fall within a large spectrum of characteristics, with varying degrees of severity. Some individuals with autism are verbal while others are nonverbal. Many struggle with language comprehension or abstract ideas. Common behavioral challenges include self-injury, aggression towards others, and stimulating behaviors such as hand flapping or rocking back and forth. Individuals with ASD often express resistance to schedule or routine changes, new environments, and overstimulating sensory experiences like bright lights, loud sounds, and large groups of people. Another hallmark trait of autism is difficulty with social interactions. This could include trouble

picking up on nonverbal cues from body language, making eye contact, or empathizing with others.

Children with ASD often face problems in classroom settings due to their behavioral and communication barriers. To combat these challenges, Dawson and Osterling (1997) make note of several elements that promote success in school for children with ASD, mainly that students benefit from supportive teaching environments and strategies that present information in a variety of ways. Predictability and routine are also valuable to students with autism. For example, having a clear idea of how the day unfolds allows students to know what to expect. In addition, teachers would benefit from understanding the nuances of transitions and how important it is to take care in bringing new environments and people into a student's routine. Finally, active family engagement plays an important role in the life of an individual with autism.

There are many educational approaches to supporting children with ASD in the classroom, but the most frequently used is applied behavioral analysis, more commonly known as ABA therapy. ABA therapy is “the process of systematically applying interventions based upon the principles of learning theory to improve socially significant behaviors to a meaningful degree, and to demonstrate that the interventions employed are responsible for the improved behavior” (Ashcroft, Argiro, & Keohane, 2010, p. 37). In this approach, it is theorized that all behavior is affected by what happens right before the behavior (the antecedent) and what happens right after the behavior (the consequence). ABA therapy is an intervention strategy that examines a behavior and then implements a plan that modifies antecedents and/or consequences in order to shape the old behavior

into less challenging or more acceptable behavior. For example, if a student is prone to tantrums during transitions between tasks, providing them with a visual schedule of the day or setting a timer or clock in sight of the student in order to prepare them for transitions would constitute an antecedent intervention. ABA is also used to teach new skills and to reinforce productive behavior. Because behavioral challenges are central to ASD, ABA therapy is vital in helping students with ASD interact appropriately with their surroundings and with others.

There is a consensus in art education literature that artmaking is beneficial for students with special needs, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Alter-Muri, 2017; Guay, 2006; Kellman & Levett-Gerber, 2010; Reynolds, 2012). However, students with ASD face similar challenges in the art classroom as they do with any other subject. Alter-Muri (2017) states that students with autism may have difficulty representing ideas using symbols, may be resistant to directions, and might have difficulty starting, stopping, or switching from one activity to another. Students with autism may oppose art lessons that offer abstract prompts or are less structured for the purpose of encouraging creativity. Stokes (2004) contends that students with ASD generally respond positively to structure and predictability of activities as well as a non-changing physical environment. One way to offer stability and structure to these students in the context of an art lesson is to scaffold instruction by presenting visual aids explaining expectations and breaking skills down into a step-by-step process (Alter-Muri, 2017). Scaffolding also allows educators to formatively assess for understanding and assist with problem solving along

the way, as students with intellectual disabilities may not readily communicate what they know and what they do not understand (Billingsley, Brownell, Israel, & Kamman, 2013).

As awareness of the prevalence of autism grows, more investigations specific to individuals with autism and the value of art for these individuals are being carried out. Mishawn K. Reynolds (2012) writes in great detail about common learning and social-emotional targets for students with ASD and how artmaking can be used to meet goals. She describes art as impactful for those with autism in the following domains: deficits in imagination and abstract thinking, sensory regulation and integration, self-expression (especially emotions), developmental growth (including fine motor skills and interpersonal skills), leisure skills, and visual-spatial awareness (Reynolds, 2012). In addition, artmaking is proven to promote self-determination in students (Wehmeyer & Schalock, 2001). The ability to make intentional choices is a frequent goal for students with autism, and creative activities facilitate the process of decision making. Children with ASD have been found to show visual thinking skills superior to those of their typically developing peers (O’Riordan, 2004). And so, it is important for art educators to demonstrate best practices for promoting these visual thinking skills. Kulik and Fletcher (2016) point to one more power of art for individuals with ASD: Autism is a disorder that is characterized by lapses in communication skills, and artmaking is a way to communicate ideas in non-verbal ways (Kulik & Fletcher, 2016). Fostering patience and flexibility in the art room is essential in order to allow these benefits of art (abstract thinking, sensory and emotional regulation, self-expression, and improvement of fine motor skills) to flourish, not just for those with ASD, but for all students.

Literature on teaching art to students with disabilities is largely focused on adaptive techniques and strategies (Guay, 2006; Rodriguez, 1984). These techniques often include lesson plan modifications and ways to assist students with physical disabilities in skills like holding a paint brush or using scissors. However, veteran art educator Doris Guay (2006) asserts that harnessing the powers of art means more than classroom management and implementing adaptive strategies. She expresses:

Teaching students with disabilities in art classrooms begins, not so much with full knowledge and understanding of disabilities, management techniques, and strategies, but with caring and a belief in the values of art education. As educators, we know the values of art, of understanding the messages and stories that art tells us. We know the place of art in helping students understand the world of yesterday and today. (Guay, 2006, p. 8)

Art educators are invested in sharing the benefits of art with each and every student they encounter. As such, providing thoughtfully designed lessons and arranging the learning environment to maximize creative learning opportunities is a goal art teachers share. In the context of this study, it is imperative to unpack creativity and its connection to learning theories.

Ways of Knowing: Creative Learning

The words “creativity” and “art” are intrinsically linked. To truly comprehend the importance of art for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, the meaning of creativity and the circumstances in which it occurs must also be understood. Renowned art educator Viktor Lowenfeld, who spent much of his career investigating child art and child development, defines creativity as an approach to making that is both independent and imaginative (Lowenfeld, 1975). Thompson and Sefton-Green (2011) add that “when

educators talk about creative learning, they generally mean teaching that allows students to use their imaginations, have ideas, generate multiple possible solutions to problems, communicate in a variety of media and in general ‘think outside the box’” (p. 2).

Encouraging creative learning in students with ASD is especially important because it promotes self-regulation of affect and the ability to see multiple perspectives (Butchner & Niec, 2005). All these elements of creative learning are important objectives that appear over and over for individuals with autism, not only in art lessons, but in domains of social skills and academic subjects as well (Dawson & Osterling, 1997; Reynolds, 2012).

Creativity has been theorized by many individuals as a way to connect with our world. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1999) asserts that an accurate understanding of creativity consists of a process that occurs outside an individual, instead of a cryptic process that happens somewhere inside us. American philosopher, psychologist, and educator John Dewey (1980) theorized that learning is a process of experience and interaction with the world. Dewey also believed that it is vital for children to interact with their communities. Batja Mesquita (2010) agrees, asserting that cognitive development happens through engaging with our environment and our social world. The notion that creative learning is not an internal process but an external experience is central to this thesis study. Creativity is an imaginative process of learning. Learning is a process that happens effectively through understanding lived experiences. Therefore, the next section explores the foundations of constructivist theory.

American psychologist Jerome Bruner (1960) identifies constructivist learning as an active process in which one creates new ideas or concepts based on current and past

knowledge. New knowledge is built on existing knowledge in order to reach new understanding. This process of creating new knowledge is not just a one-time deal; we are constantly reflecting on our life experiences and using what has happened to us to make sense of what we already know and vice-versa (Black, 2005). Many scholars in education, including Friedrich Froebel, have advocated for the need for children to have space to play and explore on their own in order to make sense of their world. Froebel's legacy acknowledges that children have unique needs and talents, influencing how they grow through experience with shapes, colors, and manipulation of forms (Efland, 1990). Furthermore, George Hein (1995) insists that "in order to learn, students need to have experience; they need to do and see rather than to be told" (p. 22). An obvious way to facilitate a creative learning experience is through the implementation of a hands-on artmaking lesson. However, there are also many benefits of experiencing art without actually making a product.

Dewey (1980) and Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) are just a few of many scholars who have written about the experience of interacting with art. Dewey (1980) refers to this interaction with art as an aesthetic experience. After engaging with a work of art, the aesthetic experience "happens temporally inside a person, as a result of that person's construction of meaning from *an* experience, rather than happening to a person by a piece of art" (Churchley, 2011, p. 19). And so, the creation of meaning from an aesthetic experience *is* constructivist learning because we understand a work of art through the lens of all our prior knowledge. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) describe art encounters as ways for individuals to reflect on their identity and how they

are positioned within the world where they live. The aesthetic experience is just as valuable as any other experience and may act as a building block for creating new knowledge. Perhaps the most common place for one to have an aesthetic experience with a work of art is at an art museum. The section that follows considers the distinctive characteristics of art museums, the learning that occurs at art museums, and ways art museums are (and are not) accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Art Experience: The Museum

Graham Black (2005) lists the following attributes as essential pillars of the twenty-first century museum: they are accessible to all (intellectually, physically, socially, culturally, and economically) and are proactive in bringing in new audiences. They celebrate cultural diversity, promote social inclusion, and function as a community gathering place.³ For these reasons, museums are a unique educational resource and are invaluable to each of their learning communities (Black, 2005). Professor of Museum Studies Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1994) identifies three main functions of a museum: “to preserve, to study, and to communicate” (p. 140). In addition to these scholarly goals, a museum is a place where learning can be disguised as a fun field trip experience for students. Tishman, McKinney, and Straughn (2007) expand on the concept of museums as environments for learning. They write:

[Museums] seem to be venues that naturally encourage people to do the kinds of things that are hallmarks of constructivist learning theory—to explore and discover their own interests, to actively engage with rich stimuli, and to use their

³ Emily Cayton and Anna Monas, two educators who participated in this study, both note the importance of children participating in the cultural institutions (like museums) in their hometowns.

own backgrounds and prior knowledge as explicit frames of reference for constructing knowledge. (Tishman, McKinney, & Straughn, 2007, p. 3)

Museums, therefore, encourage creative learning in that audiences may find understanding in what is being seen by comparing it to what they already know. For individuals with ASD, the learning objectives of museums may be aligned with targeted IEP goals for students with autism. The outcomes of creative learning include using imagination and abstract thinking, advancing leisure skills (differentiating between “work” and “play”), supporting sensory regulation and integration, and promoting self-expression and emotion (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Reynolds, 2012).

Children may encounter museums through various ways. They may experience a museum for the first time through a visit with their family. Another common way that individuals are exposed to museums is on a school field trip. Beyond the novelty of leaving school to explore somewhere new, there are numerous benefits of a single-time visit to a museum. Even if students spend a few hours at a museum on a field trip and never return, they still reap an abundance of positive effects. DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) surveyed studies on museum field trips and found common affective outcomes, including increased curiosity and empathy through awareness of differing perspectives. Field trips encourage exploration and provide experiences that simply cannot happen in the same way inside the classroom. Museum exhibits, which often involve multiple senses, can activate several neural systems simultaneously and can result in deeper, more powerful memories (Ward, 2014). In many cases, these experiences are held onto by students in their memories long after the field trip occurred (DeWitt & Storksdieck,

2008).

Bolin and Mayer (1998) highlight over a dozen benefits to be gained from a visit to not just any museum, but specifically an art museum. They discuss the tactile learning that can happen outside of making art, and how a visitor's understanding of art can greatly expand through exposure to new objects. Seeing the "real thing" as opposed to seeing a work of art in a book is a special moment that can happen in a museum. Often, seeing works as part of a large body of objects opens up new pathways for understanding things contextually. When engaging with works of art in a museum, new vantage points allow visitors to experience art from multiple perspectives. These particular ways of interacting with art expand our understanding of what a learning experience can be (Bolin & Mayer, 1998). McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, and Brooks (2004) contend that the art museum visit fosters empathy through exposing individuals to the experiences of "people vastly different from themselves," allowing observers to make connections with unfamiliar attitudes, people, and cultures (McCarthy et al., 2004, p. xvi). Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) note this empathy gained through engaging with art initiates an internal inquiry that questions our own relationships with the world and with others.

The art museum field trip is significant for students, and especially students with special needs, because it is a protected space where they can practice and utilize skills that are integral for navigating the real world. Often, art museum field trips include a docent-led tour that facilitates discussion and meaning-making through discovery and exploration of exhibits. Of these group tours, Hooper-Greenhill (1994) writes, "the

building of confidence through speaking out in a group, the opportunity to test an idea in a sympathetic environment, the ability to become a useful member of a group with a common task, all these activities go towards forming a self-view” (p. 151). Many others (Adams, Foutz, Luke, & Stein, 2007; Bowen, Greene, & Kisida, 2014; Tishman, 2003) have identified additional skills which may be gained by students through engaging in group dialogues. These discussions are important learning experiences because students are asked to observe, describe, interpret, hypothesize, compare, and associate what they see by using prior knowledge or experience. This leads to extended focus, making sense of what they do and do not know, drawing conclusions, and being open to multiple perspectives and possibilities. This list of skills is impressive, but for individuals with autism, it is especially challenging to practice some of these skills in an unfamiliar art museum setting. For example, participating in a group discussion is not a productive way of having a meaningful experience for nonverbal individuals. In addition, interpreting, hypothesizing, and drawing conclusions about an object viewed out of context is an abstract thinking task that is difficult for many students with ASD. The following section takes these challenges into consideration and examines how museums approach accessibility for those individuals with disabilities.

Accessibility in Museums

Today, all museums in America are required by law to provide appropriate accommodations for visitors with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ensures that equal opportunities for participation are offered to individuals with

disabilities. The Metropolitan Museum of Art spearheaded the campaign for access in museums when, in 1913, they began including touchable objects and braille for guests with visual impairments. Just three years later, the Children's Museum of Boston began offering classes specifically designed for participants with hearing and visual impairments. Several decades later, new legislation made accessibility more of a pressing concern for museums. Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibited discrimination based on disability. Because many museums and other cultural institutions receive federal funding, they are required to make their spaces accessible to all audiences (Andrus, 1999). Stringer (2014) points out how the bulk of these changes were in response to guests with physical disabilities. For example, wheelchair ramps were installed, handrails went up, and audio headsets or similar devices were offered to guests. For visitors with intellectual disabilities, accommodations may be less visible as they are nuanced based on each individual's capabilities.

Lucy Andrus (1999) defines accessibility as "supporting inclusion, promoting independence and dignity, and operating from a standpoint of mutual respect" (p. 68). Museums strive to be environments that are open to audiences from all walks of life, but truly understanding how to include visitors with disabilities comes down to knowing what these visitors want and need from museums. Black (2005) notes the growing demands from "previously excluded or marginalized audiences for the right to representation and to a say in how a site or museum is managed and presented" (p. 2). He continues, "Museum[s]. . . must go out and engage directly with their communities, seeing people as equal partners on a cultural journey" (Black, 2005, p. 56). Black and

Andrus both agree that accessibility is not a one-sided task. To be effective, museums must view individuals with disabilities in the same way that they view any other audience and respond directly to their needs, working as partners and not as superiors. However, even though museums aim to be inclusive, “many individuals with special needs do not perceive an art museum as a place where they can feel comfortable. . . . Like many in the general public, those with special needs have stereotypical notions that art and museum experiences are for a different segment of the population” (Andrus, 1999, p. 67).

Furthermore, lack of representation of disabled people in art museums is seen as isolating for this population (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). For guests who already view themselves as outsiders, a visit to an art museum and enjoyment of all the positive benefits of such a visit may not feel like a possible option.

For visitors with Autism Spectrum Disorder, some of the barriers they may face have to do with the museum staff. Black (2005) describes how staff often lack knowledge, understanding, and training for working with certain audiences, including those with disabilities that are not necessarily visible. In their 2016 study of a program for children with autism at the Dallas Museum of Art, Kulik and Fletcher reported similar findings: “Museum staff and volunteers expressed the need. . . to have more training on ASD. They requested training in topics such as the signs and characteristics of ASD, how to identify a person with ASD, effective communication styles, enabling engagement in the museum, and behavioral-management techniques” (p. 30). Lack of opportunities for specialized training and uneasy attitudes from museum staff can be interpreted as annoyance or hostility for visitors with disabilities. Emily Cayton, Associate Director of

Education, trains the docent corps at The Contemporary Austin and tells her docents that “it’s naive and wrong to think that you know those groups better than their [parent, teacher, chaperone, or aide].” With that being said, she instills in docents how these adult supervisors are great allies in leading a successful art museum visit for visitors with special needs. For teachers, parents, and friends of individuals with autism that do not see the art museum visit as a welcoming or worthwhile trip, Cayton responds, “Why would you keep anyone from having an experience? Who are you to say what they would love. . . without trying it out?” As this thesis study uncovered, planning an art museum field trip for this specific audience requires advanced planning and numerous considerations, but it can be done, and the experience may be one that these individuals remember for a long time to come. Andrus (1999) insists, “Everyone stands to gain from increased interaction [at a museum], and what better way to promote it than through the universal appeal of the arts?” (p. 69).

This chapter provided an overview of the current literature in the field pertaining to Autism Spectrum Disorder, creative learning, and museum visits. This information is essential for understanding the foundation of this thesis study, which focused on crafting a creative learning experience for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder by taking them into an art museum setting. It is imperative to make note of another vital element of this study: the role of the educator and levels of collaboration between educators working in different fields. Practitioner Action Research, the methodology utilized in this study to highlight my own role as art educator working with a special educator and a museum

educator to gather data, is outlined in Chapter 4. But first, Chapter 3 details the key places and participants involved in this study.

Chapter 3: Environment: Places and Participants

This chapter provides some context for this thesis study by describing the locations and participants in detail. Two locations, a school and an art museum, served as the sites for this investigation. Three educators were the key participants: two educators from William's Community School and the Associate Director of Education at The Contemporary Austin. The goal of the educators was to plan a field trip to an art museum for a class of five children, four of whom have Autism Spectrum Disorder. None of the students had ever been to an art museum. The educators at William's Community School had previously taken this class on field trips, but never to an art museum. The Contemporary Austin's Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria was the eventual site of the ninety-minute field trip, complete with an artmaking activity and a docent-led tour by an educator from the museum.

PLACES

This section describes the locations of this study: William's Community School and The Contemporary Austin's Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria. Two educators from William's Community School collaborated in a classroom setting at the school, and a museum educator from The Contemporary Austin served as the docent when the class visited the museum's outdoor sculpture park.

William's Community School

William's Community School (WCS) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that provides a unique educational model for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder living

in the Austin, Texas area. The school was founded in 2011 as a tiny operation run by 2 mothers who were dissatisfied with the educational opportunities that their children were receiving from public schools. William's Community School, once run inside the home of one of the founders, flourished and now occupies a large space with six different classes and 35 students, most of whom have developmental disabilities or learning challenges. The staff has grown to 16, including teachers, teacher aides, behavioral analysts, and occupational therapists. Students at WCS are grouped according to academic abilities instead of age, and the small staff-to-student ratio allows their needs to be addressed with individualized attention. Academics are tailored to the specific learning levels of each student.

William's Community School was selected based on convenience sampling, as is typical for action research studies (Kemmis, 1993). It was an ideal setting for this thesis research for a few reasons: WCS is not a part of an Independent School District, which made the process for research approval less bureaucratic than a public school district. Also, I had been an assistant teacher at the school for over 6 months by the time this study began to take shape; because of this, I had developed a relationship with the staff and I had the full support of the school administration to carry out this research project. During this time, I had also gotten to know the nuances of my students' personalities, which greatly informed my preparation efforts for this study.

The Contemporary Austin

The Contemporary Austin is an art museum which has existed in different forms and under a variety of names since 1911. According to their website, its current mission statement asserts that the museum “reflects the spectrum of contemporary art through exhibitions, commissions, education, and the collection” (The Contemporary, 2018). What makes The Contemporary such a special institution is its dual locations for exhibiting art. The Jones Center is an indoor museum space located in downtown Austin, just blocks from the state capitol. When one thinks of “museum,” the Jones Center is the white-walled space that comes to mind. The curatorial team scouts fresh talent and well-known names in the art world for rotating exhibitions that take place in this vibrant downtown location. The Contemporary’s other location is The Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria. This site is a 14-acre peninsula a few miles west of downtown, tucked away from the bustle of the city. Paved and gravel paths wind through palm plants and lush greenery alongside the Colorado River, showcasing over a dozen site-specific sculpture installations by contemporary artists along the way. Laguna Gloria was gifted to the Texas Fine Arts Association by Clara Driscoll in 1943. Driscoll was the owner of the property and one of Texas’s most prominent supporters of the arts at the time. It was Driscoll’s wish that the location be transformed to “bring the pleasure of art to the people of Texas” (The Contemporary, 2018).

One of William's special education teachers and I chose to take our class to The Contemporary's Laguna Gloria location for a field trip. Laguna Gloria was a special place for our students to experience art in a museum setting for the first time. The outdoor location removed some of the barriers that could have made a museum field trip challenging: instead of being confined inside a room with fragile objects, at Laguna Gloria there was plenty of space to move around and roam outside. Also, we were not forced to be in the same room as other groups of people at the same time, allowing both the teachers and students to feel comfortable during our field trip. Possible sensory issues like particular lighting or noises (components that contemporary artists often manipulate in their installations) were also nonexistent during our outdoor tour.

PARTICIPANTS

This section describes all participants involved in this study. Three educators were represented in this study: The first was a museum educator, the second was a school special education teacher, and the other educator was myself. All three educators chose to be identified by their real names. In addition to the educators, students in a class at William's Community School participated in this research by going on a field trip to an art museum. The five students in this study were minors (aged 7-9 years old), so pseudonyms were used in place of their real names.

Educators

Emily Cayton, Associate Director of Education, The Contemporary Austin

Emily is the Associate Director of Education at The Contemporary Austin. She has been employed by the museum since 2013 and plays an integral role in the programming of the Education Department. Before she became Associate Director of Education, Emily was the Educator for Teachers and Docents, which entailed training the museum's volunteer docent corps and doing community outreach and school visits all across the county in order to encourage teachers to bring their students to The Contemporary for a visit. Emily has both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Art Education and is passionate about teaching in the museum's galleries. This led her to teaching others how to lead gallery tours. Emily has a vibrant personality and a true gift of warmly connecting with anyone. She relayed to me that she is comfortable and excited to lead art experiences for all ages, "from the womb to the tomb."

For this study, I interviewed Emily to learn how the museum where she is employed approaches working with disabled audiences. She shared with me her own personal philosophies about what can be gained from a museum visit. This interview occurred prior to our class's field trip to The Contemporary so that I could gain clarity on expectations the museum had for tour groups. Emily was the docent for our field trip visit and led us on a 45-minute tour of the grounds of Laguna Gloria.

Anna Monas, Lead Teacher, William's Community School

Anna is the lead teacher of a class of five children, ages 8 to 9 years old, at William's Community School. She came to the Austin area to pursue a Master's of Education degree in Autism and Developmental Disabilities from The University of Texas at Austin. She is in her third year of teaching at WCS and also has several years of experience working in Montessori schools. While visual arts were "never a strength"⁴ for her, Anna shared with me her love for theater and singing, and her special relationship with museums. She even worked at the Living History Museum at Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts during and after her undergraduate studies. She was immediately supportive of the idea of taking our class to a museum, a cultural institution that holds significance for both of us.

I interviewed Anna to hear what role art has played in her life and how she learned how to conduct art lessons for children with autism. She had little experience with visual art and never formally learned how to teach art lessons to this population, so she relied on an art curriculum that was available online and was product focused. This interview was conducted before we took our class to the museum. After she shared her artmaking background, we discussed planning efforts for the field trip, including ways to prepare our students for their very first art museum experience.

⁴ All quotes from Anna Monas, unless otherwise indicated, are from an interview conducted on January 20, 2018.

Emma Grimes/myself, Graduate Student in Art Education at The University of Texas at Austin, Assistant Teacher at William's Community School

Artmaking has been a central part of my life for as long as I can remember. At a young age, I took to illustrating anything and everything. My parents were supportive of my creative interests and enrolled me in Saturday art classes at the local community college in town. As a child, I frequently visited museums in Washington, DC and took annual trips to see Broadway shows in New York City. Art was always my favorite class in school; something about making felt like the most natural extension of my identity. I received my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Craft & Material Studies from Virginia Commonwealth University, where my studio practice focused on technical proficiency in using glass as a medium. I worked as an assistant in an artist's studio as well as a production artist in a local glassworking studio, but have put my object-making practice on hold as I work on my graduate studies.

I have worked in Anna's classroom as her assistant since June of 2017 and have seen the struggles of teaching art to this population firsthand. We have discussed the importance of allowing children with ASD to have art lessons, while acknowledging the challenges of creating lessons without having a pedagogical background in artmaking or teaching art (from her perspective), or tailoring art lessons to be better suited for this particular group without having a special education background (from my perspective). For this study, Anna and I worked together to generate classroom activities for our students in order to get an idea of what they could expect and what would be expected of them when going on our field trip to Laguna Gloria.

My background has certainly influenced my values and beliefs surrounding art education, but it was my teaching experience at WCS that has shaped my approach to this research study. Working as an assistant teacher has been a first for me. It was my first time working with children in an educational setting, it was my first time working with people who have Autism, and it was the first time that reflection has become a vital part of my job. It quickly became evident to me how passionate I was about working with this population, which led me to start searching for knowledge about teaching children with ASD. For example, how do they engage with art? What kinds of art lessons are most successful with my class? What kinds of lessons just do not work with them? Why haven't they been to a museum before? What would it be like to take them to an art museum? My lifelong love of art and my excitement from working so closely with this group of children led me back to the same questions, and it became apparent that I would have to experiment with some ideas and processes in order to find the answers I sought.

It is important that I acknowledge my tripartite role in this research study. I am a student myself; understanding pedagogy and theory in art education has been fundamental to my studies. Part of what I am doing in this study is searching for a greater understanding of the potential role of art in the lives of my students. I am also an educator; when I am in the classroom, it is my job to hold a position of authority, to conduct lessons, and to share knowledge and information. While I am in this role, I actively assess what is or is not working for my students, allowing me to adjust how I work with them to better suit their needs. Lastly, I am the researcher; while I have collaborated with other educators and reflected on the experiences of my students, this

study is ultimately guided by what I want to know about taking my students to an art museum and what I am finding out about this experience.

Students

To provide some contextual information about the five students in our class who we took on a field trip to Laguna Gloria, this section offers a brief summary of the characteristics and interests of each student.

Oliver, 8 years old

Oliver is very verbose and academically above the rest of our group. He came to William's Community School from public school, where his aggressive and sometimes destructive behaviors frustrated his teachers. He is always an active participant during art lessons on Fridays. He frequently participates in open ended prompts during art lessons and has an active imagination. He takes pride in his art and likes to draw cartoon-style narratives during free time at school.

Ian, 9 years old

Ian loves fairy tale stories and is an avid maker of movies on his iPad at home. He particularly enjoys taking existing books, stories, and characters and creating remixed plotlines for them. He loves to write and illustrate books during free time, but it is extremely hard to keep him engaged during a structured art lesson. He is quick to become discouraged and disinterested in the task at hand if it presents cognitive or physical challenges to him.

Elizabeth, 8 years old

Elizabeth is the only typically developing student in our class (she does not have ASD). She serves as a peer model for the class and shows amazing empathy towards others. Elizabeth is obsessed with unicorns, ponies, and most other animals. She loves to make things and is exceptionally imaginative in mixed media approaches to her creations. She is always attentive during our art lessons and, like Oliver, takes great pride in her work. She has an insatiable sense of curiosity and questions everything.

Adam, 8 years old

Adam is quiet and well-mannered. He does not have any aggressive behaviors but he does have challenges in academics and social communication. Adam has exceptional fine motor skills and is very inclined to copy examples with precision during art lessons. It has been difficult to find effective ways to encourage creative choicemaking in art. He follows directions effectively, which makes abstract questions and prompts confusing and frustrating for him. He enjoys creating pictures with markers (often images of his favorite characters from the TV show *Peppa Pig*) but is overall more drawn to reading books.

Joseph, 8 years old

Joseph, who has perhaps the most active imagination of all the students in this class, also has the most challenging behavior in the group. He is prone to frequent erratic behavior or tantrums and also has difficulty with social communication. Joseph has no interest in structured art lessons and is usually done with art activities after only 5-10 minutes. However, he is an avid book maker; we have a growing collection of his stories

in our classroom library. His books contain unique plotlines and are often accompanied by colored illustrations.

This chapter has laid out key locations and participants involved in this research study. The two locations in this study were The Contemporary Austin and William's Community school. Associate Director of Education Emily Cayton of The Contemporary Austin, special educator Anna Monas of William's Community School, and myself were the three educators involved. Anna and my class of students, whom we took on an art museum field trip for this study, have also been identified in this chapter. Because I played a multifaceted role in this study, it is important that the roles of others involved have also been established and understood before moving forward. The next chapter presents the methodology utilized in this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology: Practitioner Action Research

This chapter defines qualitative research and practitioner action research, as both are central to this study. It also explains the research design and methods used to collect and analyze data for this study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and personal reflections recorded in a journal. Data were analyzed using Schön's theories of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action to gain a more focused understanding of the practices of educators working with individuals with autism and educators working in art museums. This thesis grew out of the acknowledgement that educators working in different disciplines have varying understandings of each other and also have vastly different needs, expectations, and access to resources. A key factor in this study was my use of reflective thinking during data analysis. This term was coined by John Dewey in 1933 to describe the continual process of evaluation of beliefs, assumptions, and hypotheses, used to understand my personal position in this process of researching and advocating for further collaborations between special educators, art educators, and museum educators.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is a way of planning, collecting, and analyzing data that is systematic, credible, verifiable, justifiable, useful, valuable, and ethical (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). It does not seek to determine the causes and effects of things, but rather to uncover meaning. Merriam (2009) states that this is often done by understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning

they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Qualitative research assumes that people create their own meanings through interaction with the world around them. Through this interpretation, the researcher inevitably asserts a level of subjectivity into the study, though Lapan (2012) does not see this as problematic so long as the researcher acknowledges implicit biases. The purpose of this type of research is to put a spotlight on and develop a greater understanding of a particular case or situation.

This study used qualitative research to answer the research question because it investigated a clearly defined phenomenon and looked at a specific audience in a specific setting. It relied heavily on examining firsthand experiences and knowledge to inform the data analysis approach. In order to better understand educators working with children with ASD or working in a museum setting, it was essential to get the perspectives of educators directly from the source. This study carried out an action research cycle, which began with trying to understand best practices for bringing children with autism to an art museum. It included interviews with different educators, planning a field trip for students with ASD, preparing students for the field trip, taking students on the field trip, and reflecting on the process when it was over.

PRACTITIONER ACTION RESEARCH

In the early twentieth century, German-American psychologist Kurt Lewin created what is now known as action research as a way for individuals within a community to solve problems. Action research is significant because it “provided legitimacy to collectively solving problems as a form of real research” (Lapan, 2012, p.

294). Commonly used in the fields of education and healthcare, this method of research aims to improve one's practice through gaining an understanding of the practice and the environment or situation where the practice takes place, reflecting on practice, and then implementing changes to improve them (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). This study used Lewin's (1948) action research model. The process is as follows: fact-finding and conceptualization, action planning, implementation, evaluation, problem analysis, and conceptualization developing a new research plan. In practical terms, this looks like selecting a topic or issue to study, creating a research plan, implementing the plan through practice, interpreting the data, determining necessary changes, and then creating a new plan of action (see Figure 1). Donald Schön (1983) noted how the reflective research process spirals through different stages: "The unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it, and changed through the attempt to understand it" (p. 132).

Action research studies real-life situations and makes sense of them through a process of interpretation and reflection. This methodology is often utilized when seeking to make changes or improvements to everyday practice. Lapan (2012) points out how the reflection aspect of action research can be done by just an individual or through a shared experience with others. Oftentimes, educators or other professionals working in the same setting will collaborate to establish areas where improvement is needed, and then collaborate to find possible solutions to these problems by developing new courses of

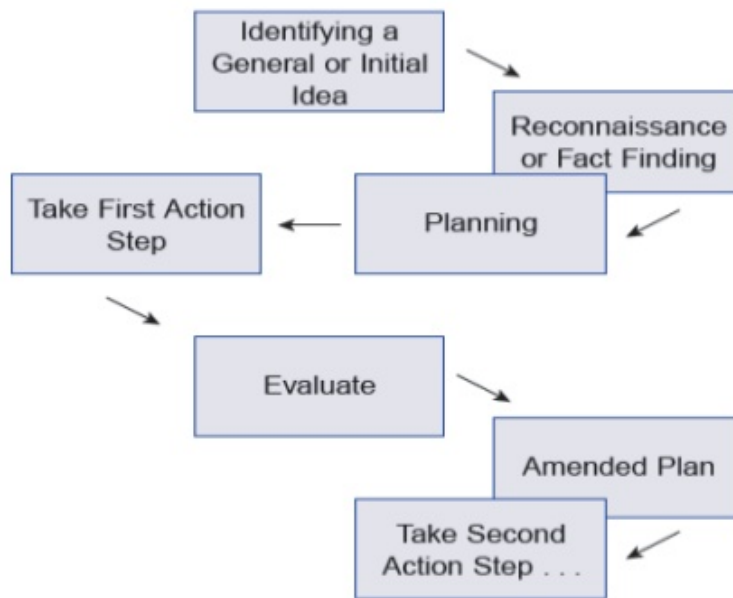


Figure 1. Kurt Lewin’s action research model (Kumar, 2014)

action. In this study, I used the expertise of fellow educators working in different fields to assist me in carrying out one cycle of action research. In the context of creative learning, “the purposes of action research... is to try and make explicit what’s implicit in their practice so that it can be shared more widely” (Cochrane & McGuigan, 2011, p. 51). A key point of this study was to thoroughly understand the challenges and unique perspectives that make up the teaching practices of special educators and museum educators so that I could understand how to improve museum visits for children on the autism spectrum.

This study examined the reflections of three educators as part of data analysis. Stephen Kemmis (1993) notes how reflection ties in to the action research process. An action research cycle examines issues associated with one’s own work by emphasizing self-reflection and improvement of one’s practice. The following section outlines how reflective practice was utilized in this study.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Schön (1983) proposed a 2-part model for reflection: Reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action is the thinking we do on our feet; the reflecting we do while simultaneously carrying out our practice, drawing on previous knowledge and experience to understand and respond to what is happening right before us. This carries into reflection-on-action, which is the type of reflection that happens after an event. It is a process of reviewing the experience, making sense of it, and learning from it. By using Schön's two models of reflection, "we are able to facilitate the integration of theory and practice—that is, to make sure practice is informed by theory and theory is informed (and tested) by practice" (Thompson & Thompson, 2008, p. 16).

Thompson & Thompson (2008) coined an additional term that complements Schön's reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-for-action is a thoughtful practice that goes through planning, anticipation of what might happen or what might be encountered, and what should be done to negotiate our way through these things. They point out how reflection-on-action "not only refers back to the earlier reflection-*in*-action, but also looks forward in terms of reflection-*for*-action" (Thompson & Thompson, 2008, p. 16). In reference to Kurt Lewin's model of action research, outlined above, reflection-for-action happens at the tail end of the action research cycle: it is both the planning stage before the initial event and then the informed planning stage after reflections on the event have been gathered.

Reflections were fundamental to this study at many different stages. The reflections of two educators were woven together with my own reflections through one cycle of action research. Hennessy (2006) highlighted the importance of working together with other practitioners. She states, “Where different artforms and practitioners are brought together, much can be gained through the quality of collaborative thought and action which acknowledges such distinctions in practice and seeks to complement and find new ways of working” (Hennessy, 2006, p. 186). This study aimed to examine a holistic view of the process of coordinating an art museum visit for children with autism by taking into account the differences in practices and perspectives of the three educators who were involved.

METHODS

Data Collection

Two methods were used to collect data for this study: semi-structured interviews and a personal journal I kept throughout the duration of the study. I interviewed Emily Cayton and Anna Monas, separately, for an hour of conversation surrounding themes of this thesis study. Although I had specific questions planned for each of them, I allowed the flow of our talks to remain open so that each educator could speak authentically about their experiences as teachers working in unique educational settings without adhering to the rigidity of a structured interview. I also kept a journal for the duration of this study. In this journal, I recorded observations in the classroom and conversations with Anna. I also worked out aspects of organizing the field trip for our class. Most importantly, the journal

was a designated place where I recorded my reflections for the duration of the study, from beginning to end. These reflections were a key component of this action research study, as they helped me sort through thoughts and also informed the planning I did along the way.

Data Analysis

The method of inductive content analysis was used to investigate the data collected for this study. Interview transcripts were coded by picking out keywords and phrases and then collapsing them into themes. Journal entries were coded in the same way. By carefully combing through the data, recurring ideas emerged that could then be sorted and analyzed. The journal entries contained planning efforts including lesson plans that were created specifically for preparing students for the field trip. These lesson plans are artifacts (see Appendix A) that served to triangulate findings from the interviews and journal reflections by supporting themes and conclusions that were developed through the coding process.

Researcher Positionality: Participant Observer

In this study, I was not only researching the field trip planning process for a class of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, but I was also the assistant teacher inside that classroom. Because of this, my position in this study was that of a participant observer. I was not on the outside looking in. I was actively involved in activities leading up to the field trip, and also went on the field trip as both assistant teacher and researcher observing as much as possible. Although I was not able to see the whole field trip unfold

from a distance, two factors enabled me to attentively observe all our students: our class of five students was a small enough group that I could keep my eyes on all of them at the same time. Also, there were three adults involved in the field trip (myself, Anna, and our docent), so I had adequate support in keeping the group safe and observing their reactions to the art. The reality of action research is that the researcher often finds themselves wearing multiple hats, as I had to do in this study.

VALIDITY

Validity speaks to the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings in a research study. For this study, I took steps to ensure internal validity as far as possible. I utilized an external source throughout the writing process. This checker critically read through my findings in order to confirm that results made sense and answered the research question. I also member checked with my interviewees by providing them with transcripts of our interviews so they could verify that their thoughts were represented accurately. They did not respond that there were any errors. Above all, I sought to give a voice to the people that I studied and to portray the findings as honestly as possible.

GENERALIZABILITY & TRANSFERABILITY

This study is not generalizable to other classes, groups of children, museums, or age groups. Although the findings of this study are specific to a particular group at a particular stage in their education at a particular school, it does not make the research any less valuable to myself as an educator, to the school where I work, and to the field of art education. “[This] research may prove to be illuminative to a wider range or practitioners,

because it may help shed light on issues in their own institutions and provide them with a point of comparison” (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p.26). I hope that readers can see how the results of this study may be transferrable and useful in other settings. What can be gleaned are commonalities, not a hope for exact replication of results. All children are unique and every class, teacher, museum, and docent are different, but the findings from data analysis speak to broader themes of collaboration and planning for museum visits that are relevant beyond the parameters of this study. These findings are discussed in the following chapter.

This chapter described qualitative research, explained why practitioner action research was the appropriate methodology to use, and examined how reflective practice can be an essential component of an educator’s teaching practice. Interviews and a personal journal were the data collected, and inductive content analysis was used to produce the findings of this one cycle of action research. The findings are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Data and Analysis

In this study, I examined the perspectives of three educators to answer the research question: What considerations are made by educators when bringing students with Autism Spectrum Disorder into an art museum setting? Educators working in different roles have distinctive considerations relating to working with this specific audience, and it was important for me to represent those priorities in this chapter. In this study, I was also interested in carefully studying my experience as an art educator working with children with autism. Action research enabled me to do just that, because “action research is, essentially, a story about you and the positive changes you have made. . . . It is your study and the story is about your practice, your concerns, your values, your changes, your observations, your reflections, your evaluation, your learning” (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 143). Chapters 1 through 4 have laid out foundational knowledge for understanding this thesis study and were written with academic language. This chapter shifts the academic tone to a narrative style of writing as I share the viewpoints of a museum educator and a special educator as well as my own personal reflections.

In my own practice as an artist and an educator, the process of creation is the most essential piece of my work. Whether I am making objects, designing art lessons, or working with a specific audience to discover meaning through engaging with or creating art, I find that the experience of working towards the final product is where the most valuable and exciting learning takes place. This chapter is my story of the process of

taking a class of children with autism to an art museum and the considerations that three educators made in order for it to happen.

Process: Anna Monas, Lead Teacher, William's Community School

Nearly everything that I know and understand about Autism Spectrum Disorder has been shaped by my experiences working directly with children with autism. These experiences have been guided by the knowledge and leadership of my colleague Anna Monas, whose classroom I have been working in since June 2017. Before I began working as an assistant teacher with Anna at William's Community School, I admittedly knew very little about the characteristics of autism; what I did know was that for a summer, I could work with anyone, and that was enough. However, my experiences that summer ended up teaching me so much. Anna led our class through weeks of social skills, outdoor P.E. lessons, daily art and science activities, and weekly outings to the local public pool. I observed how she conducted herself as a teacher and I modeled her behavior during my own interactions with our students. I picked up on subtle ways of encouraging specific behaviors and learned how to appropriately handle challenging behaviors. I even began to develop my own "teacher voice," a particular way of wording things when speaking to our class. Before I started working, I received two days of training in ABA therapy, but the way I actualized this training was through direct exposure, application, and by watching Anna.

As we transitioned from summer activities into the school year, my summer job turned into a continuing position at WCS. I was also getting back in the swing of things

in my graduate program and quickly began to investigate ways that I could connect my art education studies with my excitement of working with children with ASD. Anna allowed me to take over teaching our art lessons on Fridays. This was my first experience teaching art in a classroom. As I had done all summer, I looked to Anna for guidance in how to approach art with our class, but she began to look to me as one with answers, since I was the art educator. Although I was studying art education, I had not envisioned myself as a classroom educator, as I was more intent on teaching in other settings like in community programs or in museums. This opportunity to teach art to our class was certainly valuable to me, but I was interested in exploring ways of offering our students creative experiences outside an art lesson. For this study, I sat down with Anna to talk “experiences,” a word that came up over and over again in our interview. What follows is the product of two educators with different backgrounds coming together and sharing what we know, what we don’t know, and the possibilities of making a creative learning experience happen for our students outside the classroom.

Art and Teaching

Anna has never considered herself to be good at art. “No one ever said this to me, but I was one of those kids who always felt like I couldn't really draw, that visual arts were really not a strength for me,” she told me. She explained how she loved to sing and gravitated towards theater for her art electives in middle school and high school, and left visual arts behind after completing her last required visual arts course in the seventh grade. At William’s Community School, where Anna has been teaching for the last five

years, students receive one hour of art instruction a week. After she was hired at WCS, Anna expressed a feeling of bewilderment when she realized that any art that she offered her class would be generated by her own knowledge and expertise. WCS did not have any art resources for her to utilize. When it came to art, she said, “I just didn't have a lot of experience with learning it. So, when I became a teacher, I didn't know how to teach it.” She invested in books on teaching art to children. She purchased a membership to an online database of art curriculum called Deep Space Sparkle. She gradually built a personal collection of paints, markers, oil pastels, and specialty papers for her lessons. “I've always thought art was important and knew that I should be exposing them to that,” she insisted, “but I had no training and no idea really where to start.” For Anna, leading art lessons was overwhelming and felt unfruitful. I witnessed this strain last summer during our daily art activities. The combination of having 12 children and five adults in a room, the range of ability levels, and cookie-cutter product-based lessons often ended in chaos.

I asked Anna to explain to me her reasoning behind choosing the types of lesson plans that she used. Before she began leading her own class at William's, Anna co-taught in a Montessori preschool for several years alongside two educators who had very different approaches to art. She felt inspired by one teacher who developed intricate units of instruction based around relating skills-based lessons to art historical references. She also worked with a teacher who taught “crafty, Pinterest-type” projects, which she found to be a great waste of time for everyone involved. “What does a child get out of gluing cotton balls to paper to make something resembling a sheep?” she wondered. However,

when she was placed in a position of teaching art on her own at WCS, she fell back on these crafty projects because they were easy to plan. She followed, “the crafting stuff does work pretty well because a step-by-step instruction is, you know, the easiest to teach, the easiest to set up and also the easiest for them to process. The idea of kind of coming up with something where they could be creative independently, it was just beyond my abilities.” We swapped thoughts and ideas on ways to structure lessons for our class that would ensure engagement and initiate creative independence. Anna felt at odds due to her lack of art pedagogy, and every Friday I was testing out my own theories on artmaking but was still relatively new to working with children with autism so everything felt like trial and error. Based on what I knew about our group of students, I thought that choice-based art had potential to be successful. Instilling a sense of agency in students as “artist” and allowing them to pick from a selection of materials and open-ended prompts seemed to hit some productive goals for children with autism: self-determination and creative expression. It also provided a balance of structure and flexibility, which is helpful for students with ASD who like predictability, but is also nice for students who want room to explore outside the parameters of a cookie-cutter lesson.

Ultimately, Anna defended the structured, follow-along, step-by-step art lesson. I had been critical of this type of lesson, but Anna offered an explanation that gave me pause:

I do like the idea that when we do the projects where we're all kind of working on the same thing, the kids who don't do art beyond, you know, drawing a stick figure of themselves, they get an experience with materials and hopefully that will lead them into being able to be comfortable doing other art projects. . . .It's like a lot of the beginning steps of many skills. When you teach a kid to read using

readers [introductory books that focus on phonics and making sense of sounds and words], that has so little to do with literature, but this feeling of ‘they need to start reading somewhere’ is kind of how I felt about the art. Yeah, I don't think that . . .when we all paint a picture of a princess or something that they're having a really meaningful art experience with that. But it does feel like there's got to be kind of a bridge between just picking up a crayon and drawing the same thing over and over into, you know, making art more independently.

This was a perspective that I hadn't considered. Anna's objective was to give students a set of skills so that one day they could use them to make whatever they wanted, and the step-by-step lesson was helpful in getting them there. Skills were important, I agreed. I offered her my own desires for our students during art lessons. “I feel morally opposed to having kids make things just for the sake of making them and then [have them] take these things home and throw them away,” I admitted. “That's so wasteful. It's a waste of everyone's time and it's not worthwhile.” I wanted to connect meaning making and making objects in a way that didn't feel prescriptive, but I told Anna that with children with autism, I wasn't sure how to do it. “I'm trying to translate making meaning in this abstract way with this group of kids that sometimes has a hard time thinking in abstract ways,” I continued. I wanted our class to be able “to do something creative without really caring what they make because I don't, I don't really care what they make. I just want them to be excited about exploring something.” We concluded that our objectives could coexist. Art could teach skills without being crafty or wasteful, but we both needed more time, experience, and each other's knowledge in order to gain a better sense of what that could look like for our class.

Field Trips and Museums

There were two words that were recurring in my research inquiries and the notes that I kept in my journal: experience and exploration. How can these things happen outside of an art lesson? I had been thinking about field trips for our class ever since the summer when we went on weekly trips to the pool. The logistics of those days were complex, but by mid-summer we had the process of suiting up, suncreening, and loading a group of kids and all their lunches and towels into the school van down to a science. I wondered what outings looked like at WCS during the school year. Anna recounted how Fridays used to be designated for daytrips. Teachers and their students would go to the grocery store, to the zoo, to the park, and even to the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum. These weekly trips had stopped, Anna told me, because some parents were not pleased with their children leaving school once a week. They wanted their child at school, receiving ABA therapy, doing work. She got the impression that they thought the field trips were a waste of time. So the weekly field trips stopped, but teachers could still schedule trips occasionally if they wanted to. Teachers at WCS were relieved; the pressure of planning the trips and the additional stress of actually taking students out every week had been lifted. Anna and I took our class to a pumpkin patch in the fall, but we hadn't been on any other trips that school year. I asked Anna to share what was keeping her from going on field trips more often: "Money is one. [It's also a] little tricky to think about what kind of field trips can I do, who's going to come with us, how can we do this? Just nervousness about how are these kids going to be. . . . But you know, it's more just kind of logistics of planning and that has kind of stood in the way." I had

wondered if Anna felt hesitant at any point about students having behavioral troubles while on a field trip, which she confirmed. With barriers like financial costs, rounding up parent volunteers, and concerns about whether students would interact with a new public space in an appropriate manner, I understood why teachers at WCS were not enthusiastically planning frequent field trips for their classes. However, I was particularly interested in giving our class the chance to go to new places and have special experiences. I wanted to plan a trip to an art museum for our class, and Anna was on board from the start.

Anna's readiness to figure out how to take our class to an art museum stemmed from her personal history with museums. "I'm a former museum employee and an intern and volunteer," she told me, sharing stories of her days working at Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts and how much she enjoyed them. We both grew up visiting museums with our families and continued to seek them out as adults. For these reasons, an art museum field trip for our students did not seem daunting for us, since we both felt comfortable in those spaces. Anna added, "for me it's not. . . a personal 'Why would you go to [a] museum?' because I go to museums on my days off, that's something I love to do and whenever I'm traveling that's kind of my first thing that I want to do, see whatever important cultural institutions of the place that I go to." I realized that for teachers who don't go to museums on their own, an art museum field trip would seem cumbersome not only because of logistical barriers and worries of how their students would behave, but because of the lack of familiarity on their end. If they don't go to museums on their own time, then why would they go out of their way to take their students to one?

I directed our conversation toward art museums and children with ASD. Are art museums accessible for these individuals? Is it a good idea to take them there? Anna and I shared the thought that our class would respond well to a field trip to an art museum, mostly because they are higher functioning and are able to express themselves verbally. “It's really more about . . . making it a good experience for them,” she said, “making sure that they don't impact anyone else's experience of the museum, you know, and making sure everyone's going to be safe, kind of those things.” We decided that through thoughtful planning and preparation, we could do our best to make our field trip a positive experience for our class. I knew that with Anna’s enthusiasm, our planning efforts, and the nature of our class, the process would be relatively straightforward. However, I brought up my interest in figuring out ways to create resources for teachers who would not necessarily think that a field trip to an art museum is something that they could do, keeping in mind some of the other classes at WCS. Anna nodded and told me she wondered what the benefits of bringing some of the nonverbal children with more severe ASD to an art museum could be. She candidly wondered:

I think honestly the other thing that might be in the way of people choosing to take groups of kids like this on trips is also wondering, well, what are they going to get out of it? And . . . okay, if I can bring them to a museum and we can walk around it, are they going to connect at all to what they're seeing? Are they even really going to notice it? Like is this going to be a meaningful experience for them or is it just what I think they should be doing? [Am I] taking them here because that's what you do, you take kids on field trips to museums?

Anna related these sentiments back to her time working at Plimoth Plantation where she would see groups of children on field trips come through daily. She remembered how many of these groups would come in with a list of questions to answer, presumably

assigned by their teachers as a way to make sure students were learning on the field trip. She said these students would ask her the questions, write down the answers, and leave without looking around. “[I] always felt like why are you spending the amount of money and bringing these kids here if you're not [going to] prepare them to actually experience this museum? They could have found all the information they needed in a book or online,” she sighed. We talked about the difference between looking at a picture of art and seeing a work of art in real life. Anna felt confident that our students could draw meaning from seeing art in a museum because they were capable of interacting with and noticing things in a picture of art, but was not sure how lower functioning students could get to that same point. “I guess the challenge for you in your field,” she asked me, “is how to make, is it possible to make a museum experience meaningful for these other kids?” I let her know how often I considered that exact question.

My discussion with Anna revealed the complex considerations that teachers working with children on the autism spectrum make when planning (or deciding not to plan any) field trips for their class. Teachers at WCS were not bringing their students with ASD to art museums and I wanted to figure out how to advocate for the art museum field trip as a beneficial and worthwhile endeavor for them and their students. In order to do so, I needed firsthand experience for a frame of reference. Thus, Anna and I proceeded with planning our field trip to The Contemporary Austin’s outdoor sculpture park, Laguna Gloria. On our end, we took several measures to prepare ourselves and our students for a fun and well-organized field trip. At The Contemporary, museum workers also make efforts to best prepare themselves to provide meaningful experiences for

school groups and other guests who visit the museum. After getting an idea from Anna about what our process would look like for getting this field trip to happen, I met with Emily Cayton, Associate Director of Education at The Contemporary Austin, to discuss art museums, accessibility, and the process of training docents to lead tours of the museum. The following section presents the highlights of our talk.

Process: Emily Cayton, Associate Director of Education, The Contemporary Austin

The Contemporary Austin is challenging the way that the term “art museum” is defined. The museum’s downtown Austin location is what one might expect when walking into a museum: white-walled rooms full of objects and installations and security guards roaming the exhibitions, which showcase art made by artists who are currently alive and making work. The museum’s other location, the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria, also features works by contemporary artists, but that is where the similarities between the two locations end. The 14-acre sculpture park is located on a lush peninsula full of palm trees and walking trails sprinkled with giant works of art. Laguna Gloria provides opportunity for visitors to experience contemporary art in a leisurely manner. Emily laughed, “I am still tickled by how many people are like ‘oh yeah, our walk was cool, but like when are we going *in* the museum?’ And [I say to them] ‘aww, no, we are like, in it, right now!’” A museum without walls feels less intimidating than an indoor museum where fragile objects are contained in a confined space. I knew that this would be the ideal place for our class to have their first art museum experience because of the openness and flexibility the space could afford. Emily

mentioned what a joy it is for her to lead tours at Laguna Gloria, where people think they'll be walking up a staircase with marble columns to see the art. "Nope, it's all outside!" she tells them with a smile. I wanted to get a better sense of how the museum guided visitors' experiences at Laguna Gloria. As Associate Director of the Education Department at The Contemporary, Emily had the expertise that I was looking for and graciously shared it with me.



Figure 2. A sculpture by artist Carol Bove on display at Laguna Gloria.

Teaching/ Learning in the Museum

Out of all the things that Emily does at the museum, she feels most strongly about

teaching. “I like being able to put the theoretical into practice,” she beamed. Teaching at The Contemporary Austin, for Emily, means two things: she leads gallery tours for visitors and she is in charge of training docents how to lead their own gallery tours by teaching from objects. In addition, she leads teacher workshops for educators in the public-school system to help them integrate contemporary art into their curriculum. She expressed to me how important it is for her to teach so that she can truly know what teachers and docents want and need. “I like testing that out and troubleshooting [ideas] and the only way that I know how to do that is by doing it myself,” she explained. Working with teachers enables her to understand what they need from the museum, and she takes these requests and hands them right to the docents. This back-and-forth that Emily mediates between different educators interacting with the museum is, she told me, a special way for the museum to provide visitors with a well-rounded experience.

The docent corps at The Contemporary is a team of about 30 volunteers, some who have been part of the corps for over 30 years. I asked Emily to share, in her own words, why the docents are an integral part of the museum. Without missing a beat, she began to paint a picture of the embodiment of the museum’s mission. To start, “[the docents] are people out in the community, spreading the word about The Contemporary.” This is valuable to The Contemporary because the docents share news and information about the museum with people they know. It is also essential for the museum to hear the voices of the docents because “the way that they ask questions may be similar to how maybe our neighbors, or someone who is not swimming in the deep end of contemporary art institution jargon [would ask questions].” In this way, the docents bridge the divide

between the art museum institution and the everyday visitor. Docents are often in the position of guiding an art museum experience for people who have never been to one before, as would be the case when Anna and I brought our students to Laguna Gloria. “I feel strongly about docents being a friendly face, in what might be an intimidating situation, especially if you’ve never been to a museum,” Emily insisted. “Just having someone who’s like ‘I have all of our artwork picked out, we can stop by anything we pass on the way, but you know, I’m your person for the next 45 minutes to an hour, and I can’t wait to hear what you have to say about the artwork’” is a powerful way that docents support visitors at the museum.

I asked Emily to walk me through her expectations for docents. I thought that knowing their expectations could give Anna and I a better idea of how to prepare our students for participating in a docent-led tour on our field trip. “I have 3 things in mind,” she explained:

[I want them] to keep the group safe, number one, keep the artwork safe, and the last one is, just have fun, be flexible, because you might have a whole thing planned out but you know, you might see a snake on your walk, and then you start talking about line and rhythm and pattern more, and you start chasing the snake through the woods and you know, you suddenly encounter a really awesome sculpture that’s out there. So I like them to have a plan, but also know that that plan should be able to wiggle a little bit.

This explanation reminded me of how essential it is to be flexible when working in the classroom. It also made me consider how autism is a particular aspect of who my students are, but all children, even those without a disability, benefit from patience and understanding. “People are not wanting to look at this thing?” she continued, “[we] don’t force anything and sometimes it’s just ‘let’s walk through together and pick out what

we're going to do.'” Hearing about the adaptability and fluidity of tours at The Contemporary was inspiring. Emily explained it as a non-prescriptive approach to having a meaningful experience with a place that happened to offer interactions with contemporary art, which is exactly what I wanted for my class.

Some teachers at WCS had expressed that museums did not feel like welcoming spaces for their students. I relayed their concerns to Emily and wanted her opinion. Are docents trained to work with special needs audiences? Do they feel comfortable leading tours for them? How do they approach these tours? Emily would remind her docents that the adults bringing these groups to the museum are the surest form of support in leading a successful tour. She encouraged docents to foster a connection with these teachers, chaperones, or aides so that if something went awry, they could assist in realigning things. To this, she added that they should “really think of the teacher or the chaperone as a team member because [the docent is] the person that knows all about the artwork, but they're the people that know all about the students that are with them.” This brought my own role as assistant teacher into perspective. Anna and I would be *with* our students for the field trip. They wouldn't be familiar with the location, the art, or the docent, but they were comfortable with us and we would be able to play a part in keeping them engaged on the tour. This was an important point. Even though teachers who were not museum-goers might feel uneasy about bringing their students, they could focus on the relationship with their students and think about how to support them in a new environment.

Children and the Art Museum Field Trip

Before digging into ways of advocating for the art museum field trip to reluctant teachers, Emily pointed out just how special an art museum visit is for children, especially with regard to contemporary art. “They’re coming to terms with the fact that art is not old, always,” she pointed out. Emily continued, “if a kid has been to a museum before, they’re like ‘[we saw] mummies, we saw dinosaurs,’ stuff that’s definitely associated with being old.” One of her favorite things to do is to tell students that the artists who made the work at Laguna Gloria are still alive, and how some of the artwork is younger than them (see Figure 3). Making this distinction helps children to understand



Figure 3. Laguna Gloria sits right alongside the Colorado River.

that museums are not always buildings full of historic objects. In preparing my class for our field trip, one of my students, who loves the movie *Night at the Museum*, was convinced that we were going to see pirates and bears on our field trip. I shared this with Emily, and she noted how Laguna Gloria challenges a visitor's preconceived notions of what a museum is "supposed" to be. Getting to experience art and experience learning outside, walking through trees along the river is a first for most children who visit the museum, she added. In addition to breaking down the identity of the art museum itself, The Contemporary is also redefining the art museum field trip. Emily proudly described the museum's multimodal tour experience for visitors. The Contemporary offers a 90-minute guided visit, complete with a 45-minute docent-led tour and a 45-minute artmaking component. This set-up is effective, she insisted, because some kids love talking during the tour and don't really care for making art, and some children are hesitant to participate in the tour but are so excited to work on a project in the museum's studio. She added that the artmaking component also exposes children to materials that they may not have used before, and gives teachers opportunities to see skills in their students that they might not have known that they have.

Emily asserted that there are "so, so many" benefits of a one-time visit to an art museum, and my findings in Chapter 2 of this study support this claim. "My first inclination," she began, "is like, well why not go on a field trip? Why not go see something new? I think about. . . the bus ride, if they saw something really big out at Laguna, I mean they just never forget that." I agreed, thinking back to some field trips I

took in elementary school that still remained in my memories to this day. “I just think that kids having more experiences outside of the classroom, outside of the school context is extremely beneficial for just diversifying their experience,” she added. “You meet more and more kids that like don't leave their neighborhood, you know? So just getting out. They might not know how close they are to certain things.” Anna and Emily had both made parallels to the importance of children participating in their communities, a claim that was central to the work of John Dewey. I was eager to show our class a place that existed in the city where they live, a place that they could return to and experience time and time again. Emily made sure to point out that for various reasons, not every trip is equal. Sometimes the bus is late or the teacher is out sick and students come with a substitute who does not know them. Another factor that makes a noticeable difference in students’ experiences at the museum is the distinction between teachers who just roll up to the museum without any expectations for students or for the trip as a whole, and teachers who have been actively priming their students and themselves by sharing art in the classroom before the visit and by participating in the teacher trainings that Emily offers at the museum. That being said, Emily maintained that all trips, regardless of circumstances, are beneficial for children because they “invite students to remember that you can learn anywhere and that learning can be fun.”

I asked Emily how she would respond to the attitude that some teachers at WCS had expressed that they did not see what their students would get out of a field trip to an art museum. Emily understood the need for “advocating for having an experience.” She argued that it was up to us, educators in the field of art education, to steer people away

from the assumption that certain cultural institutions are for certain types of people. She told me how even after helping teachers get past the hurdles of skeptical principals and funding, some of them were still reluctant to plan museum visits. “Oh, my students, they couldn't handle it” is a response she had often heard from teachers. She refuted, “Well, when are they going to be able to try, you know, sooner the better. Right?” I felt the same way. It was hardly fair to assume that someone wouldn't get anything out of an experience without ever taking measures to provide them with the opportunity.

Furthermore, The Contemporary's tours could be personalized to any audience. It is the job of a docent to be *your* guide and to respond directly to you, what you want to see, and what you want to know. Docents have strategies of working with challenges in groups. If children really want to touch one particular work, they move on to a new one to avoid damaging the artwork. If the group really is not interested in something, then they can continue on to something else. “I do feel confident that, any sort of challenge, that there is a way to get around it. . . I think [getting teachers to bring their class to the museum] maybe stems with advocating for why it's important, and why would you keep anyone from having an experience?” The answer seemed so simple and yet so powerful. Emily welcomes all types of groups to experience the museum at either or both locations. With audiences that need any type of accommodations, tours can be much more free form because “one of the main things, again, [is to] make everybody feel safe,” she restated. “Safety can be on a spectrum, on a continuum of ‘I feel safe because I have someone making sure I don't lean into something’ or ‘I feel safe because I have plenty of room around me to express my emotions physically or however.’” Emily again acknowledged

how The Contemporary was willing and able to work with teachers in order to help get them to the museum, whether that be through special considerations, arrangements, or assistance with admission costs. She finished, “I see a lot of opportunities for all types of people to experience our work and how would you know without ever doing it.”

After my conversation with Emily, I felt confident that Anna, myself, and our students would be taken care of during our field trip to Laguna Gloria. I got the genuine impression that The Contemporary placed a significant emphasis on making sure the museum was a welcoming place for all, and also that the docents who guided the experiences of visitors shared that same desire. Working with a group of individuals with intellectual disabilities can be difficult for those who do not know the group personally and therefore may be unaware of the disabilities and any accommodations that such a group could need (Stringer, 2014). A way for teachers of students with ASD to ensure that their class has a productive and meaningful experience on an art museum field trip is to prepare their students for the trip before showing up to the museum. These preparation efforts by Anna and myself, which were tailored to the unique characteristics and needs of our own class, are outlined in the following section.

Process: Preparing Our Class

Anna and I had several concerns, goals, and considerations for our students and our field trip to The Contemporary. We wanted our class to understand what the trip would be like ahead of time so there would be no surprises come the day of the event. In addition, we wanted to guarantee that our students understood museum manners and

expected behaviors and, in turn, that the art would remain safe. We also cared deeply about the safety of our students and decided that providing them with as much information ahead of time as possible could give them a sense of familiarity with the idea of an art museum. Anna and I planned for our trip in the following ways: we communicated with museum staff, sharing with them the nature of our group and seeing what, if any, special arrangements needed to be made in order to ensure a productive and positive field trip experience. We also conducted classroom activities to prime our class for the trip. I created a special art lesson (see Appendix A) that modeled the format of our field trip, which would start with looking at and discussing works of art and would end with a studio making component. Right before our trip, Anna led a social skills lesson that emphasized the kind of museum we were going to and allowed our students to generate their *own* list of best practices and expected behaviors for our trip. Lastly, Anna and I were in continuous conversation in the weeks leading up to our trip. If something were to go wrong, how would we handle it? What did we need to make sure that we remember to do before leaving the school for Laguna Gloria? Throughout the planning process, we remained positive and shared our excitement about the trip with our class, which gave our students a sense of just how special this field trip would be.

Classroom Activities

Art Lesson

One week before our scheduled field trip, I taught a lesson with our class that mirrored the structure of the multimodal visit that we would be experiencing at Laguna

Gloria. My intentions were to see how each of our students responded to this format, and to give them a general sense of what the field trip would be like. I had concerns that some of the students might not prefer to stay actively engaged in conversation with a docent if they did not truly understand what the docent was asking of them. I also wondered if the students in our class who disliked our normal art lessons on Fridays would want to participate in 45 minutes of studio-time after our tour.

I split our hour-long art block into a 30-minute discussion, followed by 30 minutes of creating in response to our discussion. I had two objectives for our discussion: establish what a museum is, and work on responding to questions and articulating ideas. I gathered our class onto the carpet in our classroom and sat in front of them with a small whiteboard where I could write down key phrases for them. Students associated sitting at the table in the classroom with doing academic work and I did not want them to feel like talking about art was similar in any way, for example, to a cumbersome math task. We sat in a circle and I asked them if they had ever been to a museum. Most said no (Adam was the only one who had been to a children's museum in town). I prompted them to explain to me what they thought existed inside museums. I got answers ranging from "dinosaurs" to "space ships" to "maybe a movie theater." I was met with silence when I reminded them that we were going to an art museum which unfortunately meant no bones or aircrafts. However, when I explained to them that the museum we were going to was all outside, their eyes lit up and Elizabeth even asked me if I was kidding. After the group came to consensus that a museum is "a place to go to look at things" (which indeed was correct), I wrote down the following on the whiteboard: 1. LOOK 2. TALK 3. MAKE. I

told them how first we would be spending some time looking at art. We would have a guest from the museum walking around with us as we looked, and this person would ask us questions about what we were looking at. “I don’t really like to talk about what I see,” responded Elizabeth. I told her and the rest of our group that they did not have to answer questions if they did not want to do so, but explained that they might be excited about what they saw and could share that excitement with our docent if they so desired. After we walked around and talked about the art we saw, we would be going into an art studio where another museum worker would guide us through an art lesson, just like I did with them on Fridays. Once I established the flow of things with our class, we jumped into the lesson I had planned.

I modeled the looking and talking portion of the field trip by printing out three images of self-portraits for us to analyze. One by one, I showed them Frida Kahlo’s *Self-Portrait with Bonito*, Vincent Van Gogh’s *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*, and Pablo Picasso’s *Self-Portrait Facing Death*. I held each picture up in front of them and first asked them to tell me what they saw. Elizabeth and Oliver were quick to point out many things they noticed in each picture. I had to verbally prompt Ian, Adam, and Joseph to share with me, but when I directed them with specific questions, they were able to come up with a response. “What do you think is happening behind her?” “What is this thing on his ear?” and “What materials did the artist use to make this picture?” were a few of the questions I used to give our students an idea of how the docent would be interacting with them. I mentioned to Anna later that day how helpful it was to have her sitting on the carpet with us, quietly whispering more specific questions to the students who were

struggling with answering the broad questions I asked them. Providing that measure of support ensured that they were able to contribute their thoughts to the conversation. After we talked about self-portraits (“Did you know that this picture is of the artist who painted it?”) and how they were made (“Does it look like he used crayons? What do you think?”), I set up the artmaking activity by asking each one of them to tell me which material they would use to create their own self-portrait. Once they had specified the material they wanted to use, I dismissed them from the carpet so that they could begin creating their self-portrait at the table.

Ahead of time, I set up a separate table with an assortment of materials for students to choose from to create their self-portraits. I laid out markers, crayons, oil pastels, watercolor and tempera paints, scissors, glue sticks, colored pencils, and a stack of white and colored papers. For the second 30 minutes of our art block, our classroom turned into the art studio and students turned into the artists. As I have mentioned before, I am less interested in *what* our students make and more interested in keeping them engaged and encouraging them to explore their imaginations and to try new materials or ways of using familiar materials. For this project, most of them gravitated towards materials that they felt comfortable with. Oliver had never used oil pastels and was excited to find out that markings could be smeared to create a soft gradient of color. When each child was finished creating their picture, Anna met with each student individually and asked them to tell her about their artwork. She wrote their responses on index cards, which served as artist statements to hang alongside the portraits, which were then stapled to our school bulletin board in the main hallway of the building. Overall, I

was pleased with the high level of engagement and participation from the group and felt assured that they would be able to handle the docent-led tour.

Social Skills Lesson

On Thursday afternoon, the day directly before our field trip to Laguna Gloria, Anna used our daily social skills block to review museum expected behaviors with our class. The students sat around the classroom table and Anna began the lesson with a discussion about the specific type of museum we were going to visit. She wrote “The Contemporary Austin” on the whiteboard and asked, “who can tell me what the word ‘contemporary’ means?” No one readily offered an answer and Anna looked to me, wondering the best way to define it. “In the context of our field trip,” I explained, “it means that every single piece of art that we are going to see was made by someone who is still alive right now. Some of the art was born after you!” They liked that explanation, questioning out loud how art was born. After our conversation, Anna pulled out a book for us to read. *Museum Trip* by Barbara Lehman (2006) is a unique book full of colorful illustrations and devoid of words. Images show the journey of a young boy who has been separated from his school group at an art museum and finds himself transported into an old painting of a maze that he had been staring at. Anna turned each page slowly and asked students to describe what was happening. This was a timely opportunity to highlight the importance of staying together as a group during our field trip.

When we finished the book, Anna led an interactive conversation on expected behaviors in museums. Instead of standing in front of the board and writing a list of what

behaviors she expected from our class when we went to Laguna Gloria, Anna asked our students to generate their own list. I thought this method of reinforcing positive behavior was incredibly thoughtful because it asked students to relate what they already knew and apply it to a future scenario. Each student provided one rule to our list of museum manners, which turned out as follows:

1. Stay with the group
2. Learn about art and be safe
3. Do not touch anything
4. Stay with our tour guide
5. No screaming

Anna and I both had faith that they would, overall, do just fine on the field trip. All of our students were self-aware to the point where they generally knew when they were doing something inappropriate. What we did worry about were two students in our class who were prone to tantrums that could escalate quickly. In the classroom, we used antecedent interventions to avoid placing students in situations where they would react negatively. However, it was unclear what could set them off when we were in a brand new environment. It would be our responsibility to pay careful attention during the field trip and support our students in whichever ways they needed in order to remain calm and enjoy their experience. In the weeks leading up to our museum visit, Anna and I were in constant conversation about troubleshooting possible behavioral issues on the field trip. In our classroom, patterns of poor behavior would ebb and flow. Habits would emerge and we would implement behavioral plans to minimize them until they subsided. Both of

the students that we were concerned about had been struggling with behavioral issues rather frequently before our field trip. We agreed that if one of them was having any trouble at Laguna Gloria, Anna would take them to the van while I stayed with the group. We hoped that we would not have to use that plan, and we hoped that we had sufficiently prepared ourselves and our class for an exciting trip to the museum.

Process: Reflections

Our field trip exceeded all my expectations and was, in a word, wonderful. It was a real treat to see our students explore Laguna Gloria, a place that is dear to both myself and to Anna. We avoided any morning rush hour traffic on our commute to the museum and arrived ahead of time for our tour. The weather report called for rain all day but it held off for the duration of our time outdoors. There were no tantrums. The art remained safe. Our students remained safe. But the field trip was so much more than the logistical goals and expectations that Anna and I had discussed. I got to witness a group of children interact with contemporary art for the first time in their lives. I watched the ways that they thoughtfully observed different sculptures and I noticed moments when something particular would pique their interest. I saw them reading the information plaques beside each work of art and asking our docent to pronounce the names of the artists correctly for them. I witnessed creative learning in these individuals who mean so much to me, and it was amazing.

There were a few minor hiccups over the course of the day that were worth noting. In the morning, before getting ready to load students into the school van, Oliver

began to panic and insist that he did not want to go on the field trip. He started to cry and throw things across the room, seemingly in an effort to be punished and therefore disqualified from going on the trip. This was disheartening and also confusing because in



Figure 4. Oliver, Ian, and Elizabeth checking out Terry Allen's Road Angel.

the weeks leading up to this day, Oliver had been so curious and excited about our field trip. We really were not sure where the panic was coming from, as he offered no reasoning beyond, "I don't want to go!" Anna and I reminded him of that excitement that he had expressed, but he was adamant that he would not go. We were on a tight schedule because our tour began at 10 am, so after everyone else was loaded into the van and we were ready to leave, Anna gave Oliver two options: stay at school and do math work with

another teacher, or come with us to Laguna Gloria. We were tentative but relieved when he decided to get in the van when he saw that we were indeed going to pull out of the parking lot and leave without him. After that flare up, he was fine for the rest of the morning. As it turned out, he was the most active participant in our tour and had so many questions to ask Emily, who was our docent for the tour. There was also an instance where Joseph, who had done an exceptional job sticking with the group, darted quickly towards one of the sculptures. I wasn't certain if he intended to touch it or not, but I was able to catch him before he got too close. I reminded him that we should give the sculptures personal space and should not touch them, and after that one dash he did not try it again. Lastly, Ian was especially enthralled by all of the plants and trees that lined the walking paths of the park. There were several times when he began to wander into the trees and Anna or I had to redirect him towards the group. He became frustrated that he was not able to explore "the jungle," but nevertheless stuck with us as we travelled around the grounds of Laguna Gloria together. I felt grateful that all these minor issues were easily remedied and that, overall, I was able to focus my energy on observing how our class engaged with the art.

There were several special moments during the field trip that reinforced the power of art to communicate ideas and to invoke curiosity in the viewer. I was touched by how Oliver and Elizabeth sought out every informational plaque to identify the artists. They shouted out "Wow! This one is called *Water Woman* by Wangechi Mutu!!" to no one in particular. We walked by an interactive work by Anya Gallaccio that resembled a massive tree trunk that had been chopped about four feet from the ground. Ian asked

Emily if he could climb it and was surprised when she told them that they could all climb it if they wanted to. It was sweet how, once at the top, Oliver and Ian lent a helping hand to their classmates. They stood on top of the stump and posed for some postcard-worthy pictures and in that moment, I felt validated. Art is for everyone, and art museums should



Figure 5. Helping one another spin a work by Nancy Holt.

also be seen as places where everyone can participate and have a meaningful experience. Even Adam, who is very soft spoken, was willing to share his thoughts when Emily directed questions specifically towards him. Several times in the months since the field trip, Oliver has referenced our morning at Laguna Gloria and how he wishes we could go back. One day during our morning creative writing lessons, the prompt was to tell about your favorite field trip. Elizabeth narrated how she loved seeing *Water Woman* sitting right by the river during our trip a few months prior. All of the planning was worth it to me and I would take our class back to the museum in a heartbeat.

I attribute the success of our field trip to several factors. First, Anna and I put a significant amount of time and energy into hyping up our field trip to our students. We wrote it on the class calendar so that students could see how close we were getting to the actual day. We told other teachers about our scheduled trip and they frequently checked in with us to see if we were getting excited. By outwardly displaying our own excitement, Anna and I had all our students also feeling a sense of anticipation for our art museum trip. In addition to our sustained enthusiasm, my own personal reflections throughout the planning process helped keep me grounded and focused on providing our students with a genuinely special experience. I kept my journal with me at all times. I took notes on questions I had about how to define “meaningful experience” for students with ASD. I jotted down bits of conversations with Anna or others that informed the planning process. I hashed out ideas and wrote many, many lists. My journal became an extension of my thoughts and helped me to visualize how I could coordinate efforts to organize interviews and activities in the months leading up to the field trip. At this point in the writing

process, I am unable to see how one could hold a practice as an artist or as an educator without utilizing reflection. It was essential for me to reflect-in-action during both the planning process and while on our field trip so I could take in as much information as possible. This chapter is the product of reflection-on-action: looking back at the last five months and trying to make sense of it all. My thoughts and conclusions on this study are further explored in the chapter that follows.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

In this chapter, implications of the research findings are examined and further considerations for research are proposed. For this study, I combined my perspectives with those of a museum educator and a special educator in order to paint a multi-dimensional picture of how different educators work and what they value most in their own practices. The input from these educators along with my own reflections were used to answer the central research question: What considerations are made by educators when bringing students with Autism Spectrum Disorder into an art museum setting?

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

I found that the best way for me to answer the research question was by combining my knowledge of art making and art education with educators who had experience and expertise that I did not possess. In this study, I worked with a special educator, Anna Monas, to gain an understanding of the challenges of working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and collaborated with her in planning a field trip to an art museum for our class of children with ASD. Additionally, I interviewed Emily Cayton, a contemporary art museum educator, to learn how docents at her museum are trained, and to hear her perspective on the benefits of bringing students (with or without ASD) to an art museum. I also opened dialogue with both educators about how to best advocate for the museum visit as a valid and worthwhile creative learning experience for individuals with autism.

After I determined that I would like to take our class on their first art museum visit for this thesis study, I consulted with Anna to see if she would be willing to participate in and support this project. Anna, who has a history of working at a museum and frequents museums herself, readily agreed and we then established a plan for moving forward. Before the field trip, I sat down with Anna for a 60-minute semi-structured interview to learn about her personal experience with art, the challenges of teaching children with ASD, and her thoughts on whether or not art museums could be productive places of learning for this population. Anna had little experience with visual arts and described how uninformed she felt when leading art lessons for her class. Behavioral issues and an inability to figure out how to engage children with autism in art lessons left her feeling frustrated even though she believed that it was important to provide her students with creative learning opportunities. After working in Anna's classroom for over seven months before beginning this research, I found that our diverse backgrounds complemented each other and we worked well together. I could offer art education pedagogy and a willingness to conduct art lessons to our class and, in turn, Anna shared with me ways to manage a classroom and effective methods for thoughtfully interacting with and teaching children with ASD. Recognizing the variety of skills that we brought to the table as different kinds of educators verified my assertion in Chapter 1 that art educators could benefit from learning the nuances of a special educator's practice, and vice versa.

I selected The Contemporary Austin's Laguna Gloria outdoor sculpture park as the site for the field trip in this study because of its accessibility and close location to our

school and because I had a working relationship with Emily Cayton, the Associate Director of Education at The Contemporary. I had seen her in action when training the museum's docents, as well as during a tour of the gallery, and suspected that she would not only be willing to lead the tour for our class's visit to Laguna Gloria, but that she would do an effective job in patiently engaging our students. Soon after I interviewed Anna, I met with Emily for a semi-structured interview in which I shared with her my goals for the field trip and provided her with a bit of information about the characteristics of our students. This was done so that she had an idea of what to expect when we arrived for our tour. In our interview, Emily spoke about her own objectives for training docents at the museum. It was clear that she was thorough in preparing them to efficiently teach from objects as well as to work through a variety of instructional challenges during tours, from disengagement to rowdiness to special accommodations that a group might need. However, she clarified that docents did not receive any training targeted towards specific strategies for working with audiences with disabilities beyond seeking assistance from chaperones. During our interview it became apparent that, though we were working in differing settings, Emily and I were both strong advocates for touting the art museum as a beneficial and welcoming place for all audiences. A portion of Emily's practice focused on community outreach and helping to remove barriers for teachers who had not thought of taking a field trip to a museum. Likewise, I was interested in empowering special educators who felt like the art museum was not a safe or receptive place to bring their students. It was reaffirming to know that I had allies across multiple fields of education who were taking different approaches to reaching the same goal.

The intent of this study was to identify the specific considerations educators made when bringing a class of students to Laguna Gloria. I discovered that on The Contemporary's side of things, docents were willing and able to work with a range of audiences and had a mission of providing a flexible and meaningful experience for guests. I specifically requested Emily as our docent for the field trip and knew from our interview that her practice as a museum educator always considered the needs and the experiences of the museum's guests. For Anna and I, considerations for this field trip meant figuring out how to plan for the trip, including making a strategy to prepare our students for the experience. Our own preparation efforts took shape as constant check-ins with each other in the weeks leading up to the field trip. We divided our preparations, as I booked a specific time and date for our trip, and Anna selected a special art museum-themed book to read to our students. I communicated with Emily to disclose the possible accommodations that our group would need. Anna blocked off time before the field trip to conduct a specific art lesson and social skills lesson related to our upcoming visit to Laguna Gloria. It was Anna's first time having an assistant teacher to plan a field trip with, and it was my first time going on a field trip in the role of a teacher. For these reasons, we took the measures we thought necessary to ensure a safe and productive visit for our students, and it was through my reflections after the process was over that I could understand what key takeaways had emerged.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

After I collected and analyzed the data of this study, I added culminating reflections on the entirety of the process that had unfolded over the course of five months. My personal reflections were an essential part of this practitioner action research study; by continuously evaluating each piece of the process as it happened, I was more informed when planning the next step. My reflections on the findings of this study highlight three noteworthy discoveries from answering the research question.

First, this study revealed the value of collaboration between educators. I knew going into this study that I would be relying on the opinions and experiences of other educators to inform how I shaped both the planning process and my evaluation of the data, but I did not anticipate the level of appreciation for collaboration that emerged. After meeting with Anna and Emily and hearing them speak so candidly about their backgrounds and teaching philosophies, my perception of myself as an educator came into sharp focus. These other educators had shown me how much I did not know about the very things I was most interested in—art, museums, and autism—but I also found inspiration and motivation to continue learning from others working in fields that I myself am not as familiar with. I was humbled by this experience and reminded that though it is not possible to be an expert in art education and special education *and* museum education, I could foster alliances with others in those fields who would support me in future endeavors.

Although this study was specific to one museum, one group of children with ASD, and the opinions of three educators, I believe that the process that Anna and I

carried out in preparing our students could be universal. We were motivated to plan in a specific way because we knew that children with autism benefit from predictability and a sense of structure when entering into a new environment, but this just meant that our planning process was especially thorough. Emily expressed to me how some teachers would show up to the museum without knowing anything about The Contemporary, and certainly without preparing their students in any way. Children still benefit from merely being exposed to learning in a new environment, but providing them with information and context ahead of time is a great way to maximize the potential for having a positive experience (Healey, 2012). And so, Anna and I figured that more preparation for our students would mean less of a chance for challenging behavior to arise during the field trip. However, more preparation for any child, with or without ASD, is a way to instill confidence for both the teacher and the class going into an art museum. Based on the results of my study, I generated the following list with all teachers and students in mind.

12 Tips for Planning a Field Trip to an Art Museum

1. Communicate any special needs or concerns to museum staff:
accommodations can often be made if you are willing to ask for them.
2. Collect permission slips from parents: Send out in advance to allow plenty of time for the permission slips to be returned to school before the field trip.
3. Arrange for coverage in the event that a student opts out, is late to school and misses the field trip bus, or does not have permission from parents to go on the field trip.
4. Arrange for transportation ahead of time.

5. Consider teacher-to-student ratio and request assistance from parent volunteers ahead of time, if necessary.
6. No surprises: let students know what the structure of the trip will be like ahead of time and explain to students the purpose of the field trip.
7. Expectations: allow students to generate their own ideas for how to stay safe in a museum so they take ownership of their behavior.
8. Anticipation: prepare classroom activities that relate to the museum's content.
9. Know where the restrooms are at the museum. Inform students that they will have the opportunity to use them.
10. Use the restrooms before leaving the school.
11. Pack necessities, including snacks and any student medications. Be aware of any food allergies that may exist among the group.
12. Enjoy the ride: understand that the entirety of the trip is a learning experience, from riding down the freeway on a bus to seeing new things in the company of friends.

The last discovery that emerged from the findings of this study is personal to me as an artist, a researcher, and an educator. Planning a field trip to an art museum for our class reaffirmed my personal position in a debate that has permeated the field of art education: Which is more preferable, process-based art education or product-based art education? Supporters of product-based art education place value in the culmination of skills. They design lessons that start with a desired final product and work backwards to create the steps to make the product. Grade school art classes are full of these types of

lessons, where students are all making variations of the exact same thing. I agree that it is useful to teach specific techniques and skills to students, and that a product-based lesson may be the easiest way to teach these skills to a class of children. However, I strongly believe that creative choice making should be encouraged whenever possible, and I do not think that product-based art lessons provide room for creativity to flourish. A process-based art education practice emphasizes self-determination and exploration of thoughts. It focuses on the learning that happens when an individual makes their own decisions about how to best communicate an idea in visual form. My own process-based practice informed this study every step of the way. I sought to uncover the exact process that one goes through when planning a special trip to a particular place for a specific audience. That being said, the field trip is a short occurrence. Our trip to Laguna Gloria took 90 minutes, yet I spent months preparing myself and then weeks collaborating with Anna in order to ensure that those 90 minutes were maximized to their fullest potential. The field trip itself was a deeply gratifying experience, and I attribute that satisfaction and success to the process I went through alongside two other educators leading up to our visit.

FURTHER RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS

I would be remiss to avoid mentioning the extraordinary efforts that many museums have made to include individuals with ASD in intentional and meaningful ways. The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore Maryland, The Dallas Museum of Art in Texas, and The Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington, DC are just a few

museums across the country that offer access programs specifically for visitors with autism. Programs for individuals with ASD often take place before the public hours of operation when crowds of people can be overstimulating. These programs are usually flexible in nature and may have multiple activities for guests to take part in at their own pace. A study of an autism family program at The Dallas Museum of Art found that many families of children with ASD reportedly only visited the museum during special event days (Kulik & Fletcher, 2016). It is a noteworthy first step that museums are offering special programs for this audience, but the field of art education would benefit from taking museum accessibility further by devoting attention to empowering participants to come to the museum even on days when these programs are not offered.

Museums might also appear more welcoming if museum staff felt more comfortable and informed on interacting with individuals with intellectual disabilities. The same 2016 study mentioned above took note of how museum staff and volunteers “expressed the need and desire to have more training . . . in topics such as the signs and characteristics of ASD, how to identify a person with ASD, effective communication styles, enabling engagement in the museum, and behavioral-management techniques” (Kulik & Fletcher, 2016, p. 30). Keifer-Boyd and Kraft (2003) attribute discomfort in working with special needs audiences to lack of exposure to these audiences or opportunities to directly engage with them. Another factor that complicates accessibility for this audience is how individuals with autism often have no physical telltale signs of their disability, thus making it more difficult for museum staff to know when to offer accommodations. Providing specialized training on working with guests with intellectual

disabilities is a large undertaking for museums, and many museums may not have the budget or internal knowledge for delivering this type of training. For these reasons, I am interested in learning more about museums forming partnerships with outside organizations in order to support efforts of inclusion. Art museums may not have the expertise to offer the type of content that advocacy organizations such as Autism Speaks or the Autism Society can provide. Any efforts to disseminate knowledge of ASD to those in positions of working with this audience are important.

Another way to support visitors with ASD without putting all the burden on the museum is to make more information and resources about accessibility in museums readily available and easy to find. It would be beneficial for the field of art education to organize and initiate dialogue about accessibility in museums so that parents, teachers, or caretakers of individuals with ASD know their options and are confident that they are welcome in art museums. In addition, it would be helpful to make specific resources that support teachers in organizing museum field trips more widely known. Not all museums are able to defray the cost of admission like The Contemporary Austin offers, but teachers should know that external funding exists. Several corporations, such as Target and Kohl's, offer grants for teachers who want to take their class on a field trip, and crowdfunding sites like GoFundMe.com and AdoptAClassroom.org offer a platform for teachers to raise money for specific endeavors that their schools cannot provide funding for, including field trips. Also, teachers often need to demonstrate ways that a field trip aligns with learning standards in order to advocate for the trip to school administration. Further research should continue to develop more focused content that connects the

benefits of art museum visits to national and state standards that teachers must adhere to. Providing information on how to work through these specific barriers could empower more teachers to plan their first museum field trip.

This thesis study was generated out of my own passion of working at William's Community School with a group of children who have ASD. However, my class represents only a small part of the autism spectrum. All the students in our class are verbal and higher functioning. They are subject to challenging and inappropriate behaviors, but overall, they are cognizant of expectations and are able to express their experiences and feelings. This study would not look the same had I worked with a class of students on the more severe end of the spectrum. It also may have been significantly different with an indoor museum or a different museum educator. The necessity for communication and planning would still be key, but the preparation efforts may have taken a different direction. Conducting similar studies with different ages, group sizes, levels of severity of ASD, and at other types of museums are worth investigating because they could produce completely different but equally significant findings. To that end, it is worthwhile and often necessary to encourage teachers to give their students the opportunity to be exposed to art in a museum setting. Months after our visit to The Contemporary, my students still remember our field trip and ask when we can return. And so, more needs to be done in order to better understand how to empower teachers who do not feel comfortable in museums and how to effectively advocate for the value of the art museum field trip. Providing this opportunity is part of providing a democratic education for all.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

For my own research, I plan to continue investigating ways of transferring knowledge across fields of education. I hope to dig deeper into creating a framework for arts integration for special educators, who do not receive any schooling in teaching art, to utilize in their classrooms. Conversely, I also feel invested in working to inform art educators of the diverse audiences that they may be exposed to, and what the best practices for working with children with ASD are. On a personal level, I intend to continue positioning myself in a place that has connections to the field of art education and also the field of special education. I will continue to seek out the perspectives and expertise of those who have experiences that are different from my own. I will maintain and continue to develop a reflective practice that seeks to be as thorough, thoughtful, and considerate as possible so that I can be the most effective educator possible for my students.

Appendices

Appendix A: Pre-Museum Visit Art Lesson

LOOK. TALK. MAKE.

A museum preparation lesson by Emma Grimes

Lesson Overview

This lesson is designed to familiarize students with the structure of a field trip at The Contemporary Austin. This museum offers a multimodal field trip visit that comprises of a 45-minute docent-led tour and a 45-minute artmaking activity inspired by art in the museum. This hour-long lesson begins with a 30-minute group discussion on select works of art and ends with 30 minutes of open studio time, during which students respond to the art that was discussed.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Respond to works of art through verbal inquiry
- Participate in a group discussion
- Utilize a variety of materials to create an original work of art
- Articulate their process in the form of an artist statement

Featured Artworks

Self-Portrait with Bonito by Frida Kahlo

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/frida-kahlo/self-portrait-with-bonito-1941>

Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear by Vincent Van Gogh

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/vincent-van-gogh-self-portrait-with-bandaged-ear>

Self-Portrait Facing Death by Pablo Picasso

<https://curiator.com/art/pablo-picasso/self-portrait-facing-death>

Materials

This lesson encourages choice-based creation- any additional materials/mediums may be added to this list:

- Printed images of featured artworks (3)
- Small, portable white board, dry-erase marker
- Paper (colored construction, watercolor)
- Paint brushes
- Paint palettes and/or cups
- Paint (tempera, liquid watercolor)
- Oil pastels
- Crayons

- Markers
- Colored pencils
- Scissors
- Glue sticks

Vocabulary

- Museum- a building in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are stored and exhibited.
- Art- the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture

Lesson Steps

Part I: Look. Talk. (30 minutes)

1. Begin sitting in a circle with group. Have a small whiteboard in hand to write student responses to the following questions:
 - a. Who has been to a museum?
 - b. What kinds of things are in a museum?
 - c. How can we define “museum” as a group?
2. Explain the format of the field trip to students. Write on white board:
 - a. We will **LOOK** at things
 - b. We will **TALK** about the things we see
 - c. We will **MAKE** something inspired by what we saw
3. Practice observation skills by looking at self-portraits by 3 different artists. Show the featured artworks to students. Hold one image up at a time and prompt students to share things they notice in the image. Encourage students to point out as much as they can before transitioning into speculation of artist intent (“Why did Frieda Kahlo paint this monkey?”).
4. Lay all 3 images out for students to look at. Ask students to think about how each artist chose to portray themselves. See if students are able to identify specific materials that were used in each artwork. To end the *Look. Talk.* portion of this lesson, ask each student:
 - a. What materials would you use to create your own self-portrait?

Part II: Make. (30 minutes)

1. Introduce the available materials to students (materials should be set up in a way that allows students to pick and choose)
2. Allow students to self-guide their creation of a self-portrait. Assist with specific techniques as necessary. Hang featured artworks in sight of students for reference.
3. When students are finished creating their self-portraits, provide them with a notecard to write a statement about their work. Use the following prompts:
 - a. What is happening in this image?
 - b. Why did you choose to portray yourself in this way?

c. Why did you choose to use (___ material)?

Appendix B: Interview with Emily Cayton

Emily Cayton

Associate Director of Education, The Contemporary Austin

February 17, 2018

EG: So when I typed up these questions for you, I had written your old title, Educator for Teachers and Docents at The Contemporary... so can I just hear a little bit about your new position as Associate Director of Education, what that is? What you're doing?

EC: Yeah, of course. So one of the big differences is that they restructured our department so we used to work under Andrea Mellard, who was the Director of Community Engagement and Public Programs, and she's now her own department with Natalie Baker, who oversees all of the visitor relations people, so in that restructuring, my then coworker and now superior, Abby Mechling, who was in charge of Family Programs and Community Outreach, she ascended to the director role, which I'm not exactly sure what that means for her- I'm pretty sure it means going to a lot more meetings, and um, to share just a little bit of a personal story, I sat down with our HR person, Grayson, and she asked me questions about what my favorite parts of the job were, and I was very giving with what I love about working at The Contemporary, and I feel most strongly about teaching. I do think that it's um, I don't want to say unfortunate, but it is intriguing to me that often times people who are really good at teaching end up in an administrative role where they might not teach as much, so I felt really lucky to be able to talk about why I like being able to put the theoretical into practice, or what we've deemed, you know, a philosophical decision at The Contemporary. I like seeing how that feels. I also think that teaching is, like you get street cred with teachers and docents both if you're also out there doing it yourself. And especially since we rotate our exhibitions so much, I just like testing things out before I start inviting my volunteer docents or teachers in the community to use that artwork in, you know, I don't want to say prescribed, but it is kind of like maybe a suggested thematic use of that artwork-

EG: Yeah, like a framework

EC: Yeah exactly. So I like testing that out and troubleshooting it, and the only way that I know how to do that is by doing it myself. And maybe that's like the little bit of the studio-minded part of my personality, where-

EG: yeah, I think it could be, because I, I feel the same way. I admire what you do and how you deliver your content, it's awesome.

EC: Oh, wow, thank you! That means a lot. Yeah, so one of the things I feel lucky about with the Associate Director position is it seems like a little bit more of a holistic job, in

that I teach the volunteer docents how to teach from objects; I work with teachers to help them integrate contemporary art into their curriculum, and then once they start really getting excited about it, they often times have requests for how a guided tour might go, so then I can take what the teachers want and give it right to the docents, see how the docents respond to it, go back to the teachers, see how that goes. So the biggest change in my role is, I am now taking over the return visit program called Seeing Special Things. Abby was in charge of that before, and that was part of her community outreach piece, in that you know, that program goes out to schools three times a year, the kids come to the museum three times a year, and first time ever that this is happening, but this year we're also going to have an exhibition at each of the campuses, so yeah I guess I'll be doing that.

EG: What's the exhibition going to be like?

EC: So one of the big aspects of that program is having a guest artist visit. So during their February visit, they'll spend time in the galleries for half their time, and the other half of the time they'll be with a guest artist and that person will be like, you know, "I'm an artist, this is my job, this is the stuff I make." And then we work with that artist to help them devise a 30 minute studio project, that's either in the spirit of what they make, or maybe it's like just a really cool material that they use a lot that the kids get to test out. Everything that they make in that session is going to be what's in that exhibition.

EG: That's so cool!

EC: Yeah! So it will be like celebrating the artist, and hopefully they are involved, you know, schedule permitting, but then you know, really celebrating the kids as, they're artists themselves.

EG: Cool! Can you tell me a little more about Seeing Special Things? It's totally not on my list but I am curious about who is involved in it, and who participates, what schools?

EC: So it has gone through a lot of changes, it's existed for 30 years, it's the museum's longest running education program, if you don't count the art school, which you know, is very much an educational program, different type of philosophy. So yeah, it's been running for 30 years, it is, it's facilitated by docents, so the docents get really cute about it, they're like "oh, we're the 'special docents,' you know, we're putting in just a little more time than regular docents would." And, the structure of it is, right now it's only AISD Title 1 schools, that's a requirement, you know, we have reasons for that, and this is the first time that it's been given a huge gift from Impact Austin, so we got an \$80,000 grant for it, which is so awesome, and that is what is allowing us to do this exhibition, and allowed us to hire a bilingual educator, because so many of the schools that we serve are bilingual or dual language, have a large percentage of ESL students, so you know, we feel really lucky to be able to have someone on staff that is always on hand to help either

the docent help interpret the artwork in Spanish, or even helping with translating the materials that the teachers get, and deliver the post-visit lesson in either English or Spanish. And yeah the structure is the kids come to the museum three times, they go to both locations, so their fall visit is usually Jones Center in the morning, picnic lunch at Laguna, and then a tour in the afternoon. Every time they come they make art, of course, and then when it's cold, they come to just the Jones Center, and when it's warm again, they're back at Laguna Gloria in the Spring. And the same week that the kids go on a tour, we go out into their classroom and teach a pre-visit lesson, which is 30 minutes, and we try to divide it 50/50 with talking about stuff and then making something, but you know, 30 minutes is like 15 15, it's a time crunch, so we usually try to show them at least 1 work of art that they're gonna see in the show, which is really special. For example, with Wangechi Mutu's throw, we showed them a picture of that, and then they came to see it and then ALL of them were just like "OH MY GOSH, we thought it was, like, flat!" and it really reinforces the power of seeing something in person, like seeing it in the classroom is really exciting, because in a way you can get closer to it, you can you know, put shadow puppets all over it if we're projecting, but once they get into the museum it's like "whoa, that thing that you showed us that was printed out on a piece of paper is a REAL thing, and I'm in front of it right now." And then the studio project is a little something in line with what they're going to see, so the classroom is one where with Mutu and Bock, they were doing shadow puppets, so we bought a whole bunch of flashlights and they had their partner trace their shadow and then we talked about... So we've done all kinds of things in the classroom, and I'm always surprised how the docents come back with their like "this project is so much fun!" or you know, "this project, I don't know..." So yeah, that's another thing about working with docents, they're very generous with their feedback. So yeah, that's it in- did I answer your question?

EG: Oh yeah, that was super thorough and awesome. So just one more follow up on Seeing Special Things, are you primarily the person that designs these art activities for going into the classroom?

EC: I will be now.

EG: Was it Abby before?

EC: Mhm. And I've always been a Seeing Special Things docent, you know, again, how do I convince my docents to become a SST docent? Probably by being one myself, and like really celebrating how it's unique. So I've been one of the people going out into the community, since I started working at The Contemporary, like 2013. So I've seen, some years I've had multiple schools, this year I only have one. I was at Houston Elementary for a while, I would go to Go Valle, I would go to Boone, I used to go to Odom, and oh- it only serves second through fourth grade, so it's like a very small slice, but it's amazing how much you see them grow and change in the course of one school year.

EG: wow, that's a cool group of kids. That's a cool group to work with.

EC: Yeah, and it's really cute, so we give them family passes, they really take ownership of the experience, especially by that last visit, they're like "Oh yeah, Laguna Gloria, this is my museum, I've been here." Yeah so we hope that they're convincing their parents, their grandparents, their aunts and uncles, whoever they want, the Family Pass never expires, there's no limit on how many people they can bring, so we hope that the kids are so excited that they're the little docents for their parents!

EG: That's so awesome. I feel like that age is so special because they are so excited about things and they're not jaded yet, they don't have that attitude about being too cool for things. They're still so willing to experience things.

EC: Yeah, not to sound predictable or anything, but they're also coming to terms with the fact that art is not old, always, you know. Because if a kid has been to a museum before, they're like "you know, mummies, we saw dinosaurs" and you know, stuff that's definitely associated with being old, so that's one of my favorite things. Being like "no no, Tom Friedman's alive!"

EG: I love that, that really connects with a conversation I had with one of my students last week where I, we have on our class calendar in our classroom that we are going to the museum next Friday, and they've all been really excited about it, and one of them is particularly excited, and he's like "I can't wait to go to the museum, I watched Night at the Museum," so he's like, that's one of his favorite movies and I'm like "so what do you think we're going to see at the museum when we go next week?" and he's like, "um, pirates, and bears, and" and he has like this one idea of what a museum is, and I'm really excited to see how they interact with the space that is one, not even inside, and two, not maybe what they expect for, I mean I don't even know how many of them have been to a museum, but just their perception of what a museum is.

EC: Oh my gosh, yeah, Laguna, like I am still tickled by how many people are like "oh yeah, our walk was cool, but like when are we going IN the museum." And it's like "aww, no, we are like, in it, right now!" so yeah, that's always any tour, not just Seeing Special Things. So it's always a joy to bring people out to Laguna, where they think that they're, yeah, going to look at things with columns, or you know, like go up a staircase and they're gonna "be there." Like, nope, it's all outside.

EG: Yeah, that's a super special thing that we have here.

EC: I agree.

EG: So I want to talk to docents a little bit, just because I know that you know so much more about the role of docents than I do, and how they enhance visitor experience, and I would love to know how you approach your training with them. I'm actually going to go to your Docent Boot Camp in a few weeks, but I'd love to know more about what your expectations for docents are, and how they are trained to interact with different audiences, and how The Contemporary views them as an essential part of tour visits.

EC: Yes. The docent program, I mean there are people who have been in the docent core for over 20 years, some in the 30 year mark, so to put it bluntly, there are docents that I oversee that have been doing the role of docent for longer than I've been alive, so um yes. And there are members of our docent core that were past staff members, so that's another kind of unique joy and a challenge, because there's a lot of institutional memory within our docent core, and you know, we basically changed everything, we donated our collection to the Blanton, we changed the name, we changed the mission, so it's been really wonderful having that institutional memory because they keep us grounded and solid and you know, when we start experimenting with something, and I think I'm doing something brand new, they're like "Oh yeah, remember when McKayla did this with us??" so there's that. I'm like "guys this is brand new, never done this before" and they're like "no, we did this in the nineties." So that's really cool, but I will say they are really challenged by the artwork, in the best way. I mean, you're not a docent at a contemporary art museum if you're not looking to maybe be pushed or learn something, see how human beings on this planet are responding to the times that we are living in, so I really love that about the docents. We have the stereotypical, like every other docent core in the US, maybe in the world, like skews older, white, affluent, female. But, we do have some diversity in there, we do have people under the age of 50, we also have people, we have a couple of males, and we have people who really love contemporary art and that's their entry point, but then we also have people who really love just giving back to the community, and maybe they've never been engaged with art but they're like "oh I love Laguna, I bring my dog on walks here, I want to give back, and you know, I have grandkids, or I was a teacher at some point" so they bring a lot to the table. They remind me of how everybody views things in different ways. So, it keeps this divergent happening. We have about 30 docents.

EG: Wow, that's a big team.

EC: I think so, I think so. I'm proud of who we have. And I love to see them, like when a new docent comes for the first time, they're all clamoring to take her out to lunch, or take him to coffee, and you know, tell him how amazing the opportunity is, so, that's always confirming that you have a good crew, if they are going out trying to like, ?? people. So the museum definitely values the docents. All the way from the director's office to the board, they often times think of the docents as an extension of the staff. They are people out in the community, you know, spreading the word about The Contemporary, so they always want the docents to know things maybe before they're public, so they can start

asking questions that maybe our museum perceives as being maybe a question that anyone would have, because they're not staff. They are, but they aren't. So they know things, but the way that they ask questions may be similar to how maybe our neighbors, or someone who is not, swimming in the deep end of contemporary art institution jargon and stuff. Especially with the master plan out at Laguna Gloria, you know removing invasive species, removing huge trees, that's not a popular thing to do. So the docents get a lot of questions about that, through their inquiry, I feel like the museum is maybe better prepared to share changes to the larger community.

EG: That's cool, so they're like a bridge between the visitors and the staff. They're a unique in-between in a way.

EC: Yeah, I think so. You know, we do have a lot of retired teachers as docents, so some docents, I have to work with training them how to be a teacher, you know, how to be gentle but firm, classroom management style, reminding them that if I'm going to talk about expectations and reality, I have 3 things in mind when I want a docent to feel comfortable, and that is that they know to keep the group safe, number one, keep the artwork safe, number two, so that if you're going at it with some movement-based interpretation, you know that you've actually considered what that might be like in that space or out on the grounds, that you're not like on water's edge, rolling the dice, like maybe a kid falls in, who knows? So you know, keeping the kids or the group safe, keeping our art safe. And the last one is that, just like, have fun, be flexible, because you might have a whole thing planned out but you know, you might see a snake on your walk, and then you start talking about line and rhythm and pattern more, and you start chasing the snake through the woods and you know, you suddenly encounter a really awesome sculpture that's out there. So I like them to have a plan, but also know that that plan should be able to wiggle a little bit. I try my best to teach them how to devise open ended questions, I remind them that most people under the age of 18 care a lot more about "how" and "why" than "who" and "when," and you can always use the label for "who" and "when," so you can always invite a group member to go and read the title, or read the date of when the artist was born, their name or something, but focus really on the idea driving it, and a lot of the docents are artists and they really latch on to that. We talk about, like what if someone was standing in front of a painting that you made and all they were talking about was how you went to college at this university where this person taught, and that you learned from that person, and maybe it's not evident in this painting, but it is in this other one, and they're all like "yeah, that's not as great," yeah if you were like "what about this thing before us?" So they do get really excited about having this tote bag full of stuff and I think that's really valuable for some age groups, you know, having something to touch, having more images, but I push them to really just teach from what's in front of them, and you'd be surprised how deep you can go, where you're like cutting off a conversation because you just spend 30 minutes talking this one work of art, like let's move on. So we do that through modeling, I've been trying to really make our trainings look like how I want them to teach, so they get the slide based lectures from

Curatorial, and even those have become more discursive, where there are questions peppered throughout, maybe it starts with a question and then we go through the curatorial presentation, and then just really asking people what they think is a big role of the docent. And listening! I feel strongly about docents being a friendly face, in what might be an intimidating situation, especially if you've never been to a museum, and then you've never been to a contemporary art museum, and then the number one question I get at Laguna is "Cool, like what do I do here?" so just having someone who's like "I have all of our artwork picked out, we can stop by anything we pass on the way, but you know, I'm your person for the next 45 minutes to an hour, and I can't wait to hear what you have to say about the artwork." So yeah, being friendly, if they're just that, keeping everybody safe, and being nice, it's a win for me.

EG: Awesome, I feel like you kind of touched on some other questions I have about, talking to people who have never been to a museum before and how to engage with art and like how do you approach that specifically?

EC: Yeah, lots of modeling. So it's fun to—we did an early childhood training, um, within the first year that I was working here. Uh, I just love early childhood. I think it's so hilarious and once you get early childhood down, I feel like you're equipped to do anything with anyone, um, because you're not, you don't feel silly anymore. But it was fun because we were doing like a follow the leader interpretation strategy and starting off with, you know, I had my hands behind my back and I'm looking at my neck is just going all over the place, you know, I'm turning my head so much. Looking at every detail of the sculpture. And after we did that, I see almost every docent doing that. Like modeling how to actually look at something and it's just such a treat because we're not really working with rectangles hanging on a wall. So you really do need to show someone maybe that you should walk around the thing or if it's a video like go and sit on the floor, let it surround you. Are we going to talk? Are we not going to talk during the movie? You know, do you want to know about the stuff before we go in or afterwards? Um, so yeah, it really is being transparent. We use the word demystify a lot. So like demystifying the creative process, um, by yeah, being demonstrative and how to experience something. And docents are really good at that.

EG: I love that as someone working in behavioral therapy, just understanding the ways that humans interact with things and just those subtle little things of um, needing to be shown how to navigate a space or, or needing those cues of like, "oh, it's okay to do this." That's a, that's a really cool way that docents get to guide your actions without like subtly saying, "I'm telling you, this is what we're going to do." Just subtly. That's, that's cool.

EC: Exactly. And it is, um, it's a thing that like, you know, I've been reflecting on how often I observe them, you know, like I'm a terrible observer because I just get so like I'm like, oh my gosh, this kid is saying the most amazing thing, like let's keep talking, you know. Um, so it's, it's also a way that I can evaluate docents from afar where they don't

maybe feel like they're in a place where they can look to me and be like, I dunno, like, will you take this one? Or like, Ooh man, like I can be kind of far away and if I could see them modeling those techniques, um, I'm like, oh, I can check that box off of, you know, Lorraine's docent card or whatever. Like she really is guiding the experience.

EG: Very cool. I feel excited about docents at The Contemporary. I feel excited about docents in general.

EC: Yeah. Yeah, there it's a special, special type of person that gives their time to have this work.

EG: Are they all volunteers?

EC: All of them. 100 percent of them. Yeah. And it seems as though that is maybe a, um, I don't want to say it's like a waning trend, but I do see a lot of communication on list serves and then when I go to conferences and seek out other docent leaders there has, there's been a lot of conversation about how to best train them or what can you expect of them because they're volunteers and a lot of museums and galleries have shifted over to paid gallery, whoever's.

EG: So is that a common thing in museums? Docents are generally volunteers?

EC: So...yes, museums almost always have a volunteer group. No, they aren't always the people in the galleries teaching, so, and sometimes it's content and you know, reasons because of content where it's like, oh, it makes more sense to have, you know, people from this organization come and interpret this work of art because, you know, like, it's about, I don't know what, you know, that kind of, um, interdisciplinary connection. Like let's say you had like an exhibition on microorganisms, but you know, it's a contemporary artists making the work, man, wouldn't it be cool to have people from the life sciences come in and be the docents because it's bringing a new perspective, you know, um, so sometimes their decisions based on content with not going with the volunteer corps and sometimes it's based on control that if you have a staff person doing gallery teaching that you can, you can maybe control the outcome more. So yeah, we have a volunteer docent corps where I've been asked about changing it if you ever thought that would be a good idea. Um, and one of the things I really love because it's a personal experience of mine, um, I really love seeing intergenerational learning and I really, um, I feel for the community over the age of 60 and I love seeing kids interact with someone that maybe, you know, they might not have somebody that old in their family yet, you know, and I think that that's um, to learn at a young age that just because you're older doesn't mean that you aren't with it, you know. And I mean that in all the terms, you know, I think that our society has some weird things going on with age and aging populations in terms of respect and wisdom and all that stuff. And I just really love having a large group of, you know, frankly women over the age of 60, 65 tromping the 14-acre sculpture park with a

bunch of littles and them being really little kid about it being like how many grandkids do you have? How old are you? Gosh, you know, and they're showing them artwork that's, that's younger than the kids and that they are presenting these really great contemporary ideas. And I just really love that. So some of the critiques are, you know, in terms of shifting from a volunteer docent corps to shifting to a staff: elements of reliability, if that's ever an issue with the docent corps, you know, you might shift to a staff lead thing because you just have a program that's robust and you can't have people bailing on you. Ours are extremely reliable. They love the work. Like having a no show is highly unusual. Um, and then the other thing is, yeah, being able to control the situation more, which I understand very much so. But um, and you know, I give docents the option to opt out of exhibitions that they might not feel comfortable teaching from because I know I don't want to be the kid on the tour with the lady that doesn't want to be doing it, you know. So I give them a lot of opting out. And same with mobility, you know, if you can't do the sculpture park, I feel lucky that we have the Jones Center. You can teach from an indoor flat, not a rocky terrain kind of situation where you, where you feel comfortable moving your body around there.

EG: Well, I think it's a really great testimonial to the museum that you have such a solid base of continuing docents who are really excited about sticking around.

EC: Yeah, I love it. Yeah. There's one, uh, and she, you know, a kid was like, your hair is so white. She was like, yeah, and when your hair turns this color, nobody asks you any questions about why you're doing stuff anymore. You just like, do whatever you want. And he's like really? And then, uh, you know, then just like and, and she's also the same docent that's, that says, one of the most poignant, important things to remember in that is you can have, she always starts with tours off with: You can have your own opinions. You can choose whether or not to share them, but in this context, you know, we're looking at artwork that has only existed for a short period of time and I would love to hear from you so we can all figure it out together. Um, that she has this openness that, is really refreshing and confirming to this, to every group that she leads, that she cares about what they have to say, and they might not always feel that, you know. So yeah, I love it. I love the volunteer docent corps.

EG: That's inspiring. I feel inspired.

EC: Yay. Well that's great.

EG: So I want to still stay in the vein of docent interacting with kids, but more specifically about what you think about.. it's really cool to hear about the Seeing Special Things opportunity where students can come back multiple times, but I am interested in exploring the benefits of one-time visit students who have maybe never been to art museums and for, or even if they have like they take this one field trip for 45 minutes to

get this experience and then they maybe don't come back ever. What do you perceive just in your own practice as like the benefits of having that one-time visit?

EC: Oh my gosh. So many benefits to the one-time visit. I mean, just reflecting on your own experience, if you were ever lucky enough to attend a school that allowed you to take a field trip, I mean, how cool was that-- to take learning outside of the classroom and maybe you don't even think that you're learning, um, because you know, you're on the bus going somewhere fun. You never been there before. You get to hang out with your friends and you know, even a bus ride I think is extremely beneficial. Like you're not going back home, you're not going to school, you're going somewhere new. Um, I always ask kids about the bus ride because they probably saw something crazy, you know—It was the first time I was ever on an overpass that big! Or oh my gosh, did you know the capitol's right there? Or we had to wait because all these peacocks are crossing the road. Um, so like I just think that kids having more experiences outside of the classroom, outside of the school context is extremely beneficial for just diversifying their experience. You meet more and more kids that like don't leave their neighborhood, you know? So just getting out. They might not know how close they are to certain things. They might not have ever driven over the Congress Avenue Bridge and seeing all the people kayaking. I just love the trip as an opportunity for learning. Then, you know, not all single visits are created equal because there are all kinds of logistic things that can happen, the bus was late or you know, they got the date wrong or you know, the teacher's out sick and now they have a substitute and things are just a little bit different. Um, we also have the teachers that, you know, come to a teacher workshop to learn everything they can and then they're teaching from the artwork leading up to the museum visit like you shared and then they show up and the kids were like, whoa, we saw this in our classroom. Then there's the group that, you know, it's like, oh, it's Friday. I think our art teachers scheduled a field trip for us today. Like, let's go for it. Um, and all of those, even though they're not created equal and the same way, but I think all of those have a learning benefit for just inviting students to remember that you can learn anywhere and that learning can be fun. And also, that there are things out there that you might not know exist and they might be there waiting because you're supposed to be doing that. Um, and I've met a lot of people in either Arts Administration or the museum field that they tell me about a field trip that they had. Even our own Director, Lewis, second grade, he's looking at a still-life painting and you know, there was a docent telling him, you know, at that time probably telling him, not asking, like telling him stuff about the artwork and just imagining like recreating something from life in a two-dimensional version. Like he was just hooked, like, yeah, I'm going to be an art person now, in the second grade. And that's really cool. And then with us, I also really love the way that our tour program functions, because it's multimodal. It's 50/50 art looking and art making, so if, you know, if you're the kid that doesn't really like...one of my favorite quotes from a first grader back in Virginia, she was like, I just don't like to sit and listen. I like to stand, run, and do. And so our tour program I think gets at both, you know, if you're a kid that really loves and excels at, you know, the group talk discussion and asking questions and answering

questions and raising your hand. And you know, even within that context we've been doing a lot more decentralized teaching. Kids are turning and talking to their partner, working in small groups, teaching the docent things rather than the docent always teaching them. So if you're that kid you, you excel and love the tour, but if you're the kid that needs to like rip a bunch of paper down and like use your body to interpret and learn, then the studio portion is, is you know where you get to shine. And um, it really, it really shakes out like that. You know, where you see kids that maybe, who are quiet or less engaged on the tour and the moment they get in the studio, you know, they're the, they're the first kid that's like, oh my gosh, these scissors, they make zig zag lines instead of the normal ones. And it is so, it's cool to be able to hit both of those. So I mean, and that all happens in one visit and you know, the way that schools are now, I mean, they might come into our studio and use things that they, you know, that might be the only time they ever get to use it. So we always try to get something novel or maybe show them how to use something that is really accessible. Like we did a whole thing where we were mostly using office supplies as art materials because convincing a parent or an adult or whatever to buy you a huge thing of paperclips because you know that you can make them all flat and turn them into a wire. Um, might be easier than getting them to take you to the art supply store to buy like the specific, you know, 16-gauge wire or whatever. So, I think the one-time visit, yeah, it's just a, I mean, my first inclination is like, well why not, you know, like why not go on a field trip? Why not go see something new? But I think all the new people that they meet, the bus ride, if they saw something really big, like if they're out at Laguna, I mean they just never forget that. I saw kids that came on a field trip in kindergarten that go to a school that either comes every year or whatever. And then they're like, 'oh my gosh, that's my Tom Friedman, that giant—it's made out of turkey pans! Let's go over there and look at it.' And you saw that like three years ago, four years ago. And you still remember, like every detail. And you know what, the kids say that they get a lot out of it and that means a lot to where they'll say things like, 'I never really knew that you could be an artist *now*,' or 'I never even thought about having an artwork outside' or when we had like a whole floor of our museum in blacklight and they're like, 'I see this at the arcade and now I'm seeing it at the art museum, which lets me know that maybe blacklight is art medium?' You know, like seeing things kind of a dissolve into their lived experience.

EG: Yeah. Yeah. That's cool. The arcade comment, like just seeing connections being made that maybe they wouldn't have the opportunity to just in other areas of their day to day lives.

EC: Yep. Yep. And I always know it was a good experience when the teacher is like, oh my gosh, like we should do this next year, this was great, like thank you so much. And I, and I also think that field trips are both stressful and also super fun for teachers. And I think that they get a lot out of it as well. They get to maybe, you know, maybe they never knew that little Noah was a sculptor because their school doesn't have storage and they don't make sculptures. But in our studio, he excelled at this like amazing spatial

relationship that maybe that teacher never really knew he possessed. Um, and yeah, they feel like a combination of embarrassment and pride, which because it's like, oh my gosh, I can't believe that they try to touch that. But also like, oh my gosh, I can't believe that they knew so much about what a peninsula is!

EG: I love that. So that kind of segways into another question I have. Just hearing you talk about how teachers can get excited about these field trips. I work at this school, this small school for children on the autism spectrum. Um, my class that I'm bringing is between, they're between seven and eight. One of them is nine, so they're that elementary age and they're all verbal. Some of them have communication lapses. You'll get to meet them and experience all this. Some of them have behavioral issues. But other classes at my school are nonverbal. We have the whole gamut of the spectrum. And I've kind of been just curiously inquiring other teachers at my school, like, 'have you ever taken your class on a field trip? What would you think about taking your kids to an art museum?' Um, because most of the field trips on my school center around practical social situations like going to the grocery store and learning how to take, like pick out things and pay, like practical skills. But I have been curious about what they would think about taking their students to an art museum, especially these kids that are not verbal, can't communicate in the same way. Um, and maybe predictably, but kind of, in a depressing way... they kind of just express this like 'why would I do that?' Because, art is precious, like this liability issue, 'what are my kids even going to get out of it?' And that's been a kind of a tough question for me to grapple with because that's kind of the essence of what I'm trying to figure out. Like what can they get out of it exactly?

EC: Yeah, like basically asking me why my passion exists....

EG: Exactly. Like, I feel so excited about museums, I feel excited about art and I have this group of kids that had been working with for eight months and I feel so excited about them. But before I started working with them I was kind of thinking about art in this narrow-minded way of like, people who like coming to museums can experience it in this special way, but then I'm thinking about this audience that, maybe their parents never take them to museums because what if they have a tantrum and they like, like punch a piece of art or, or they just, you know, they're afraid of being stared at, their kid is drooling and they just can't talk, just having the kind of awkward social situation just like, why would I even go there? I'm thinking of ways like, well, I love art, I love museums, I love these kids and I want these worlds to feel comfortable connecting. Um, so I guess maybe like what's your perception of this attitude that a lot of teachers that I've talked to, just like, why would I, why would I even bring my students here? What can they get out of it?

EC: Oh yeah. Or even going further up the chain where it's like, I know my students would get a lot out of it. I know that they would want to go, but my principal doesn't think that that's the thing that we should be investing our time in or whatever. So yeah,

making that case. Yeah. Advocating for, first off it would be like advocating for an experience outside of, you know, a school setting, which it sounds like that's already happening. Um, but then advocating for having an experience. Yeah, with a cultural institution, whether it's, you know, going to the ballet or a museum or going to see hear the symphony or whatever that there is this um, you know, maybe assumption that those kinds of things are for types of people. When really, I mean it could be for anyone. And I feel really lucky working at The Contemporary because we have Laguna Gloria *and* the Jones Center and like the Jones Center could not be more like 'I'm a contemporary art institution,' like it is a white cube from outside. So, um, that has its own intimidations but it has the roof deck which like, oh my gosh, so much potential up there for um, if you felt as though you needed an escape that is a place where you can go and have a moment outside of where you think you might be being watched. And then Laguna especially I think has so many opportunities for an experience that you might not even know that you're going to go see art work; you might be going to bird watch or you know, just be outside and be in a huge field or something. And then like, oh my gosh, there's artwork here. I guess that's what this is, you know. Sometimes when I work with teachers, are they people that enjoy museums? because if, if, if you're not, or if you've never felt comfortable there then I would think that the barrier would seem even greater. Like if I don't even feel like I can go there or want to or even know what it would offer. Um, so then I'm definitely not gonna wanna take my students. I hear from teachers so often when I ask them just point blank, like 'why don't you go on a field trip?' once we get past the funding, once we get past the principal, once we get past that thing and it's like, oh my students, like, they couldn't handle it. I was like, well, when are they going to be able to try, you know, like sooner the better. Right? And that's why I think Laguna especially is a wonderful place. If you ever have the opportunity to have a docent, you have one that's just for you, like they're there for you and we respond directly to the group. With any group you, if you're taking a group of people around and they're not into what you're showing them, you take them somewhere else. If you take a group to a work of art that, I mean they just can't stop wanting to touch it, you know, they just can't. Then you have all of these really awesome strategies for viewing it from afar or celebrating the multiple perspectives where you don't stay in one spot for very long, you know. I do feel confident that, any sort of challenge, that there is a way to get around it. Now I can understand it in indoor context because sometimes, even the people that work at the museum are nervous to walk through certain areas of the space so I can understand that in an indoor setting for sure. And that's why I'm happy that we rotate our exhibitions so often where it's like, Whoa, this show, okay, like we're crawling through this one I guess, um, or you know, like, and I know it's only going to be up for this amount of time in the next show is a lot more sparse with a lot more open space and this would be the perfect show to bring x group or whatever. But yeah, I think it, I think it maybe stems with advocating for why it's important, and why would you keep anyone from having an experience? Like who are you to say what they would love and hey, you know, without trying it out. Funding is the number one barrier and I feel lucky to work at a place that wants to remove that. So there are opportunities to cover substitutes if you need one, cover the transportation if

that's something that you need, um, and waive any of the fees, you know, it's just a suggested donation for group tours anyway, and that could easily be waived. But yeah, I'm thinking maybe the root of your question is like how to best advocate for a field trip.

EG: Yeah, I mean that's something I'm continually thinking about, like how, I mean, like you mentioned a few minutes ago, it's essentially validating the thing that I'm most excited about and kind of at first It's like a shock. Like, I'm so excited about this and I feel like you are totally just, you haven't even opened up the possibility of this being a thing that you could also be excited about too. And my wheels are turning, like, how do I - okay, where do I even begin?

EC: And in terms of, some of the things that you, that you laid out as examples, you know, um, I mean we, we've worked with all types of groups and we work with the GO Project which is through AISD and that is that kind of like life skills bridge. It's for students I think ages like 17 all the way to maybe 25 and yeah, they go to the grocery store, go to buy movie tickets and go to a movie. And they come to the museum because that is part of urban life and part of the fabric of your community. And it's, those tours are always a lot more free form because one of the main things, again, make everybody feel safe. Safety can be on a spectrum, you know, on a continuum of 'I feel safe because I have someone making sure I don't, you know, lean into something' or 'I feel safe because I have plenty of room around me to, you know, express my emotions physically or whatever.' And one of the things I love about those groups is they're, there, they engage with our front desk people. They tell us where they want to go first. They talked to us about, you know, and not all of them do talk. Sometimes it's a gesture and sometimes it's a, 'oh my gosh, I'm your docent, I'm going to tell you where we're going to start. So I, I, I see a lot of opportunities for... I see a lot of opportunities for all types of people to experience our work and how would you know without ever doing it. So it's kind of like almost like a food conversation where like if you've ever had a conversation with a picky eater and you're just so frustrated that they just never even tried it, you know, it's like we've never even done it. Um, and I've had, you know, I've had a lot of experiences with the state hospital, which is one of our neighbors that Laguna and um, all different types of all different types of people that come through. Um, sometimes it's a one-to-one, you know, where it's one of the people, one of the residents at the state hospital with their, you know, their aid or their person, sometimes it's a group that, you know, these folks want to take a long walk and that's that. And maybe we talk about things, maybe we just stand in front of the water and look at it, you know. So, um, I don't know, the lagoon to me is like its own work of art. So anyway, understandable to feel intimidated or less than enthusiastic because maybe you don't go to museums on your own.

EG: I feel like it's kind of like a two-part thing, like advocating for why this is an important experience, which I feel like I can articulate in a way because I feel personally excited about it. Yeah. And then I feel like there's this other component which, um,

maybe this conversation is the way it is because you were so excited about what you do and you have such a special role with The Contemporary. And then I think about museums in general and things like, I can advocate for the importance of this, but does every museum have a person like you who is so comfortable working with people with intellectual disabilities or does every museum have the same kind of attitude? Like, I feel like I'm in this, my results are not necessarily to be generalizable because you are excited about what you do at The Contemporary and you have this philosophy that you instill in the way that you teach your docents. And then across the board, I think that there are different variables that would say, okay, so this one museum I know is great. We should take our kids here. But what about this other museum? I don't know if they're as receptive.

EC: I think that there's a level of fluency that can happen once you find a person that you can be like, okay, is this possible? Is this possible? Is this possible? And then once you find out what is possible, then you can bring those same requests or questions to any museum and maybe sometimes they're, they're not equipped and maybe it's you reading it and you being the person because you still want the students to see what that place has to offer. But it might not be the same kind of staff relationship. I've found that once teachers get used to the way that we work, they feel more comfortable asking for things in other places. Like, 'Hey, on our guided tour that I know that you have, like on our guided tour, would it be possible for us to have extra time to blank?' or 'Do you have any, um, clipboards if I bring paper or do you have any clipboards that I could use that way when we get to a work of art or when we get to a historical exhibit? I know my students like to sit and draw' and they never knew that that was the thing that you could do until you just asked for it. Um, yeah. I would like to think that there's a Me at every museum.

EG: I hope that there's a you at every museum. I wonder, like I said, I'm having this one experience because this is where I'm taking my class, but I think about museums, capital m across the board and how this could, um, vary just based on my own personal experiences as, as an art-centered, excited person going to museums and then going to museums with people who aren't museum people and what that experience has been like and just um, thinking about all the possibilities. But you do bring up a good point which is what I'm curious about, it's like how, how the special education teachers can better prepare themselves to bring their students. I was thinking specifically about the pre-visit projects that you do with Seeing Special Things; I think that's a really cool way of introducing the art and then I hadn't considered just like encouraging teachers to ask for what they need. Is that like a common thing? Do you get a lot of teachers asking like, I mean, I don't know.

EC: No. No, we don't. I mean we have a lot of teachers asking what's possible, you know, and I mean, a lot obviously, so much is possible and um, yeah, sometimes it's just like a 'hey we need to go on a field trip and someone told me about you guys and we're excited, like can't wait' and some um, request specific docents because they had them

before or you know, they'll be like, 'hey, we did this art project last time. Can we do that again? Because it was super fun.' Um, but a lot of times we are pretty forthcoming with what we have, what we can offer, and if there are any special considerations that we need to be aware of and that kind of thing. I think the biggest thing that teachers ask is how they can get the most amount of students at the museum at once. So there's a lot of conversation about itinerary because, really reinforcing that quantity is not quality. We do things in a certain way, not just because we believe in it, but also because it's a way to make sure that everybody has the same experience, right? Like if the first group gets an hour in the studio and the last group gets 30 minutes, like they're not making or doing the same thing. So we want to keep things consistent. Now I know, and I tell all my docents as well, it's naive and wrong to think that you know those groups better than their group organizer. So when it comes to, you know, groups that have special needs of any kind, I always remind the docent and I'm like the teacher or the chaperone or the aid, those people are your allies. It's like you rely on to know if, if something's not going the way that you thought it would, those are the people that are going to be able to help you realign or whatever. And to really think of the teacher or the chaperone as like a team member for you because you're the person that knows all about the artwork, but they're the people that know all about the students that are with them. And some, some things might be inappropriate coming from a docent. Um, and so I feel pretty confident that the docents are aware of that and they've been looking at chaperones as aids in different ways. More as, yeah, like team members, allies, like we're doing this together. And I rely on that as well because I mean through our tour program we see about 10,000 students and anyone that says that they know those 10,000 students on a level like there, look, that's not true. And you know, in my training and everything, you know, you, you get training on accessibility and all of that. But, um, you know, I don't make decisions about what the museum shows or how it organizes anything. I, I'm in a responsive context. So I just love to find out what's possible. And more often than not, that comes from conversations with the teachers.

EG: That's awesome.

EC: Yeah, and I usually work with teachers that are really open. Where like, we're on the same page at like, 'Hey, we're just gonna go for it. And if we need to scale it back we'll just scale it back and if we need to go forward even more then we'll just do that,' you know, if we're on a nature hike and it is awesome and we don't want to stop, then we'll shorten the studio and that's fine. I don't really like forcing, I never like making people do something they don't want to do, but I also don't want to force it just because of like 'Well we said, you know, at 10:40 we're going to be doing this.' So with groups like yours, I oftentimes make it so we're not on the same kind of timed logistic itinerary. We've worked with a group of all middle school boys on the spectrum and yeah, I was like, 'we're just gonna do the things as long as we need to do the things and then, and then we'll transition to something else and you know, I'm gonna look to you teacher, Miss Green, looking to you for like the hi sign of maybe when we need to like transition.'

EG: That's great. That's something that my school is really emphasizes this some element of flexibility. Being able to read situation, and I think it's interesting. The perspective of 'I'm using the teacher as an ally' and not pretending to know the students necessarily.

EC: Right, right, right. Oh, you'll get to know him, but like you said, it's like 45 minutes is not a lot of time. Who do you get to know? 45 minutes, you know, especially when it's not just one on one. So, yeah, I really value that. And with the AISD Go Project that I mentioned earlier, it's almost always the same docent that does it because she is just, she is as, as flexible and relaxed as it comes. You know, people are not wanting to look at this thing? She doesn't force anything and sometimes it's just 'let's walk through together and pick out what we're going to do.' And a lot of times I will also mention, a lot of times our school groups happen before the museum's open to the public so that sometimes comforts the teachers in a way that I never really thought it would. And I'm like, Oh yeah, no, you'll be here like by yourself, like we're not open, just for you guys. So that's always like a thing like, ah, okay, okay.

EG: That's, that's, I mean it's a whole, it's a whole other variable like bringing other people into the mix who are not museum stuff, that are not my own kids, or other people who are also trying to enjoy their experience. And I think about my experience colliding with theirs.

EC: I am very unapologetic about giving tours while we're open to the public. I'm like 'Oh weird, like what? We have kids in the museum? Oh that's disrupting you?' Like please.

EG: Yeah, I mean that should be exciting because it's like the next generation of museum supporters.

EC: Exactly, exactly and like, what, you wandered in off of the street? You can come here whenever you want. This might be the only time that these kids get to sit here and look at this. I would say 99 percent of the time people are like trying to join in on the tour. Maybe a visitor come up and be like, oh my gosh. Like I learned so much from what those kids were saying. They were saying the same stuff I was thinking but didn't think that it was right. You know, because I didn't know and I'm like, oh yeah, no, like, yeah, no, they're, they got it.

EG: I love that. I mean the kids have this kind of honesty that... I love that age of like, early elementary or just elementary kids in general, were they, they're honest in their expression of ideas where I feel like as we get older we limit ourselves and our inquiry and to the point where it seems like the things that we're thinking are wrong.

EC: Exactly. And their lived experience. Like they're really trying to sort things out. So when you encounter an abstract object, whether it's abstract in its ideas or abstract in its appearance, like you encounter something that and you are trying to figure it out the same way. You're trying to figure out that weird comment that one of your friends said that makes you think that maybe your friendship is changing or you know, like, well, I always had my ideas of what I thought that color green meant, but now I'm seeing it here and it's making me feel gross or it's making me feel, you know, really excited or whatever. And maybe you have all those ideas all in one group. And then the diversity of people's response then gives you permission to, like Penny says on her tours: You know, it's okay to have your own opinions and it's okay to share them because like, you know, we're figuring this stuff out. I also think as an artist on the artist side, it is really refreshing to see thousands of people identify things in similar ways because, you know, as a practicing artist myself, like I don't want to tell people what they should be thinking, but I am making something with some kind of something in mind. I'm presenting a question through my artwork or an experience through my artwork. And it's really cool when, you know, if I have the privilege to hear the artist talk about their project, I hear curatorial give a presentation on that project. I bring thousands of people to see that project. And what they notice about it is in line with what the artist's goals were, like that is also really confirming and cool to be like, 'oh my gosh, you know what? Everybody that comes here thinks that- you're not alone! I also think that, you know, I don't know, it looks like an alien or I also think that, you know, this has kind of a sad thing going on' or 'this also changed my perception of what the color black can mean.' So as an artist it's really sometimes hard but really great to see the power of art and how it can communicate things to all different people of all ages, you know?

EG: Yes. I mean that's completely unrelated to the questions that I had for you today, but something that I think about all the time about. I mean that's something that I work with a lot with my students when I was a TA the last three semesters, of how your art speaks, the idea that you can communicate, and having those things in mind when you make something, not just like I'm gonna make something, it looks cool. Like thinking deeper about 'how are people going to perceive this' and are you okay with it? Completely unrelated, but I, uh, appreciate your own interpretation on that topic because that's something that I think about all the time.

EC: Oh Yeah, oh yeah.

EG: Especially as someone who is merging these worlds with like making my own things and then talking to other people about something that someone else made, like maybe he's seeing things in a different way of people just thinking, here's this thing, I'm going to offer my opinion on it. And then knowing maybe that's not what the artist meant, but still validating people's right to have an opinion and encouraging their inquiry.

EC: And also like who's to say what anyone is thinking or what they really mean unless you start unpacking it in different scenarios. And, yeah, it's fun and it's fun to hear the docents be like, 'yeah, every kid thinks it's a blank' or 'I can't take students to this work of art without them noticing blank.' So that's really, it's really cool. And it creates this kind of, you know, we could all talk about like what meaning is, but it does create like this kind of sphere of meaning around or maybe like an orb of meaning around something and it makes the really off the wall comments that much crazier. Like, 'wow, I been bringing people that this sculpture for four years and I have never heard anybody say that before. Like amazing.'

EG: Wow. Yeah. That's awesome. Well those are the questions I have for you and I kept you a little bit over an hour, but I so value your opinion and your thoughts on this. I'm so excited for you to lead our tour next week. My kids are excited. I can't wait to, reflect on these questions and type them out, read them again and think about them and then see this all unfold again when I bring my kids and they interact with art maybe for the first time and just see, here is how they perceive things. I'm so excited for one of my students. He has this stuffed Miffy, and I've been thinking about it this like since I started working there in the summer, just thinking like I have to get him to see the Miffy fountain. I just have to.

EC: Yeah, and these cold days too, like we'll bust out some of the Miffy books and go read in the villa, you know, like 'Oh, let's just like what adventures did Miffy go on? Like maybe we can figure out what made her cry so much.' Why is she crying? That's one of my favorite pieces to teach from. Because like there isn't an answer, like, yeah, okay cool. We came up with all these but hey Miss, but like, why *is* she crying? I, all of your answers sound good. I don't know.. I know why I think she's crying, but Tom Sachs didn't tell me. And really isn't he just one opinion too? Yeah. It's so fun.

EG: Yeah, It's going to be a cool experience for everyone and I can't wait.

Appendix C: Interview with Anna Monas

Anna Monas

Lead Teacher, William's Community School

February 20, 2018

EG: Okay. I want to talk about the field trip a little bit after we talk about art in general. I remember over the summer like my first experience, like that was like my first experience in a classroom setting with kids doing art. Like I have been an artist for my whole life and make things on my own. Um, and my views of art education are not... I don't intend to like be a classroom art teacher per se. So that was my first experience, like seeing what that was like and you were leading these lessons and then they were like so many kids in the room. It's really chaotic. I'm just like, thinking through like everything I had learned through my first year of Grad school. I remember you saying in the fall, because I had this one idea for a thesis, you saying like, well it's not necessarily about resources, like materials. It's just like 'I don't know how to make art work for these kids.' Can you tell me more about your experience in doing art these kids? I was thinking especially about yesterday, how Dee Dee was like, 'We're supposed to do an hour of art, like I don't know what to do with that. They were fine just doing math.' I'm like, 'ahhhh' but then I think like probably what you got in school is so different than what I'm getting.

AM: Yeah, I mean, so I guess my general life experience of art, I'm one of those--and no one ever said this to me, but I was one of those kids who always felt like I couldn't really draw, that visual arts were really not a strength for me and then, but also like I loved to sing and do theater, so that was always more my focus kind of when choosing art electives in middle school and high school and into college. So I hadn't 'made' art, I mean I think seventh grade was the last time I had any kind of visual art class and then I never, it was never something I did on my own as a hobby. Like I would go through different kind of crafting phases, like knitting at one point. And I love, I still do embroidery. I like that, but never like visual art. So, um, so I just didn't have a lot of experience with learning it. So when I became a teacher, you know, at first my first teaching experience I taught with someone who, for her, doing art with the kids was really doing crafts with the kids and doing a lot of the, you know, pinterest, like 'here's how you make a snowman out of cotton balls' and that kind of thing, which was always fun for the kids. But I always thought was kind of not worth anyone's time except that, you know, except for fun. Like the kids had fun with it but didn't really learn anything, wasn't really an experience of making art. And then the next school I went to, um, we had a wonderful art teacher who she, she does, you know, she's someone I'm still friends with and I see what she works on with the kids and like has a real passion for, you know, she does different units on like surrealism and um, you know, portraits and she, she does these projects with the kids that take weeks to do and just wonderful. So they were all getting really great art but I wasn't teaching it to them. So when I started here at William's School, and I started as a lead teacher, it was pretty clear that any art

experience the kids were going to get what's going to come from me and again, like I had no idea what to do. Um, and so I kind of fell back to the kind of the crafty projects that we could get done, and with these kids, it's also such a different group because the crafting stuff does work pretty well because following, like a step-by-step instruction is, you know, the easiest to teach, the easiest to set up and also the easiest for them to process. The idea of kind of coming up with something where they could be creative independently, it was just beyond my abilities, you know. So I guess I've always thought art was important and knew that I should be exposing them to that but had no training and no idea really where to start. So then I found this art curriculum that I do really like because I, what I like about it is, um, I do like the idea that when we do the projects where we're all kind of working on the same thing, um, the kids who don't do art beyond, you know, drawing a stick figure of themselves, they get an experience with materials and they, hopefully that will lead them into being able to be comfortable doing other art projects. Whereas like, you know, if you just kinda throw paint and paint brush in front of them. And tell them they can do whatever they want, you know, that would be really overwhelming for them. So yeah, it's mostly just been I wanted them to have art experiences, but I had no real idea where to start. So kind of falling back on other people's lessons and projects and doing it that way. I guess that answers the question.

EG: Yeah, the curriculum is deep space..?

AM: Deep Space Sparkle.

EG: Cool. Yeah. I actually just, when I was like looking for specific, um, I was trying to come up with an idea for yesterday of how to like, introduce them to what to expect for the field trip, but also like something related to what they're going to see, which I couldn't figure out a way to do without like...they're going to be seeing sculptures and I didn't want to like... I have such a hard time with 'art education' as a field because it's so wasteful. Like half of the stuff that's in this field is like, like junk, like I feel morally opposed to it. Like I don't, I feel morally opposed to having kids make things just for the sake of making them and then take them home and throw it away. That's so wasteful. It's a waste of everyone's time and it's not...worthwhile. It's not like requiring any critical thinking, it's just like a thing to pass the time, which is a really hard place to be in because, I'm in a field that it's centered around making things. So I'm trying to translate making meaning and making ideas in this like abstract way with this group of kids that sometimes has a hard time thinking in abstract ways and like trying to mediate between wanting them to do something creative without really caring what they make because I don't, I don't really care what they make. I just want them to be excited about exploring something...

AM: Yeah. It's like a lot of kind of the beginning steps of many skills. Like when you teach a kid to read using like the readers, like that has so little to do with literature, you know, but that they need this, this feeling like 'they need to start reading somewhere' is

kind of how I felt about the art. It's like, yeah, I don't think that like, you know, when we all paint a picture of a princess or something that they're having a really meaningful art experience with that. But it does feel like there's got to be kind of a bridge between just picking up a Crayon and drawing the same thing over and over into, you know, making art more independently.

EG: Yeah, totally. It's like, it's like reinforcing habits. Like on this day we sit down and we don't do math, we don't do reading. We make things. It's like this, this routine and getting comfortable with like knowing what's going to happen. I have to say that I was so. Um, I was surprised by Andrew's picture that he drew yesterday because he always draws the same two things every day. He'll draw the picture of mom, Dad, and Andrew in front of the house with the apple tree and the purple flower and the sun and the purple clouds. It's like the exact same thing. So-

AM: I imagine that's been like, part of a goal in OT at some point or something, like with a kid like him who's just been in ABA for years and you know, working with therapists like, 'Okay, Andrew, draw me the house with the people' and like that's a goal that people tick off.

EG: Yeah, that's exactly what Molly told me. She's like, 'You know that had to have been like something that was reinforced with him.' Like that's the picture that he draws when he makes art. So I like, I try to look at everything that I do through this lens of 'small victories' instead of like this overall super successful experience, and that was like a small victory, like he like drew this field of flowers at a park like, I don't know, maybe that's like a brand new ABA goal and actually not this creative expression. But I'm like 'Whoa, you did not just draw a self-portrait of you in front of your house like you...drew yourself, in a new environment.'

AM: Well I was noticing that with him, like we were doing one of those like draw the line from one side to the next and he was just like copying exactly what I had done on the page. So it's like, okay, I need to draw it and then cover it so that he at least has to think about--because it's, yeah, it's a different, it's not like really processing it, it's just 'doing' as he's been told...

EG: It's repeating tasks, which I'm sure is some objective for something, like modeling behavior and then repeating that behavior because I definitely noticed that, in the fall when we had art next door with Monica's class, like he would look specifically for like... he's very good at his, his writing and like positioning things exactly the same way you would do it.

AM: And Eric does the same thing too in there also like just the exact copy of—

EG: Which is interesting and I think there's something to be said for the ability to follow a process so precisely, but it's like activating a completely different side of the brain, which I have like no idea how to do it to this group—

AM: Yeah, me either!

EG: Or something like Jackson and Israel are so into like creating stories. Like Jackson creates a lot of stories about himself or like really random things, but there's like a, there's like a plotline, like it's like a series of ideas and same thing with Israel. I think he's was really inspired by video games and movies that he's seeing, books, and he twists them with people that he knows, which is so cool. So I didn't know they have these, these really interesting ways of thinking about things. But they are two that I haven't like, I don't know. Yeah. I don't know. Like what, what..what would be fun for them. I don't know. I guess the most I can do right now is just keep trying. Yeah. Trying new things, seeing what works. Um, I don't mean this question in the way of wanting you to necessarily critique the delivery, but like do you think that setting them up in the way that I did yesterday by like, letting them know that we're going to look at things and then talk about things and make things, and then like sitting and talking for half an hour-- it really was 30 minutes exactly--like, how did you think that went?

AM: I thought it went well, I thought because it was about half and half, you know, we were talking about the museum and that trip and then segwaying into talking about the self-portraits and looking at them. Um, I thought it went well. They were definitely engaged in it the whole time. Yeah, I don't know that I would've done anything differently than that. I thought it went well except like, I dunno, maybe I should have thought of it too, but like if we're going to sit on the floor, like having them get comfortable sit into something like that. Um, but I thought that went really well.

EG: Cool. So much of like what I do is focused on the role of like the practitioner, like my role or your role in activities and I think, I feel like Jackson was really engaged because you were sitting there helping him and he was willing to sit there... I always feel sad when we have art and he's like done so fast. No interest in participating at all because.. I know he has like interesting things to contribute. It's just like needing to set things up in a way that doesn't feel like this, like strenuous academic thing that's going to be boring and demanding. So have you ever taken your class to a museum before?

AM: We have, we went to a museum, we went to the Bob Bullock Museum, a year ago, September, for, they had, um, it was like native American indigenous history or, I can't remember what it was, but it was some, like they had a, you know, is in a big school trip day. So we were one of many groups and the main part was they had, a group of native Americans, they had a drum circle and then they had dancers and, you know, in, in Regalia, in, in full dress. So they, you know, we, we walked around the museum a little bit, Tamra and I both went and we walked around a little bit and then we came and they

sat and we watched the performance. I have a video, like at the end they asked for volunteers to get up and do the ring dance, which is just a kind of a circle shuffle dance around while they play the drums and they asked for volunteers and Jackson's hand goes up and he got up there like I'm like standing on the edge, and he just started with us like two or three weeks earlier. And I'm like, 'I want to give him this chance, but this kid is going to bolt, like what is going to happen if I lose him?' Like we are in the lobby, I mean there's like three or 400 kids there, like this huge group. And, and he, like, he raised his hand. They called on him with like 20 other kids and he got up and he like walked right up to one of the women who had, who was one of the dancers and grabbed her hand like no one else was holding hands, but he grabbed her hand, she held his hand. She was very sweet and they did, it was like a three minute dance and he did the whole thing. It was, it was pretty amazing.

EG: My heart is warm I'm just thinking..

AM: Yeah. It was pretty great.

EG: So who was in your class at the time?

AM: So that would've been, that was Jackson, Elinor, Elias, who had also just started, and Akash. It was just the four of them, but then we went with Tamera's class, which, of that group, I guess Caleb was in it, Caleb and Peyton, but then it was a bunch of other kids who have moved on and were like four other kids in her class last year. So there were about 10 kids altogether. We had a couple parents, Elias's dad came with us to drive and supervise, so Holland was there too. But yeah, yeah, it was pretty fun.

EG: That sounds so cool. I went to the Bullock for the first time a few months ago and it was like, I was pretty overwhelmed by, I think I expected it to be this one thing. And I, I knew that it was like the Texas State History Museum, but then it was like 'Texas Propaganda Museum' and like there were like lots of like questionable things where I'm like, I learned history like differently, like I knew this happened, but I didn't think that it happened like this. And now I'm questioning if I am remembering things correctly or if this is just framed incorrectly. Um, so did you go because it was a school, like..not incentive, but it was framed as like a-

AM: I feel like every, every year I start off going, 'We're going to go on field trips this year we're going to do these things!' and so that was like a field trip I found. And um, you know, and then like went to the, the Wildflower Center, we went to a few and then just like my ability to plan multiple things peters out. But yeah, I think that was just probably on like a list of things happening around Austin in September. So I hooked us up with that. But yeah, that was about it.

EG: Awesome. So would you do more field trips? It's like, what's the main restriction? I know you said once, like obviously like money is, like that has to be taken into consideration-

AM: Yeah, money is one. Um, you know, I, I get nervous about, especially depending on kind of the configuration of kids we have, um, and adults available, like last year also I didn't have an assistant so it was a little tricky to think about how, you know, what kind of field trips can I do, um, who, you know, who, who's going to come with us, how can we do this? It was kind of an extra layer of planning for those things. Um, and then just nervousness about how are these kids going to be? I'm not so concerned about this trip. I am a little on edge about the theater trip, just not being sure how they're gonna react, you know, if, if it becomes a thing where Jackson doesn't like the music that's being played or Osiris gets frustrated because, you know, someone's sitting in front of him and just, you know, all of those bits and pieces, um, kind of get in the way. But you know, it's more just kind of logistics of planning and that has kind of stood in the way.

EG: Okay. Yeah, I wonder the same things and I feel like the study that I'm doing is like, so it's not generalizable at all because our class is unique. No other class of children anywhere or the same as ours.

AM: Or like, in this school, any class in this school.

EG: Yeah, in this school, too. But then I think about, like I've talked to Molly a little bit about this too because I, I love museums. I've grown up going to museums. But there are people who didn't grow up going to museums and that's just like, even if they participate in cultural happenings around town, they're like, like if people don't grow up in that, they're like, 'I don't, I'm not a museum goer. Like that's not a thing that I do.' I'm so excited about museums and how accessible they are, but then trying to like, like I feel like I'm in this position, like I'm trying to advocate like 'It's worthwhile! You should do it!' And then, and then I think about how it differs, like you said through the school and like trying to convince any other teacher, like 'Would you take your kids to an art museum?' And then I think I would get some pushback there. Like 'Why would I?'

AM: Yeah, you know, my employment history, like I'm a former museum employee and an intern and volunteer and like, you know, I grew up going to Laguna Gloria because my grandmother was a docent there. Like so I, yeah, it's definitely for me it's not, it's not like a personal 'why would you go to museums' because like I go to museums on my days off, like that's, that's something I love to do and whenever I'm traveling that's, that's kind of my first thing that I want to do is see whatever important cultural institutions of the place that I go to, but it's, it's, it's really more about like this group and you know, making it a good experience for them, making sure that they don't impact anyone else's experience of the museum, you know, and making sure everyone's going to be safe, kind of those things.

EG: Yeah. Yeah. I've been thinking about this from both perspectives and like I'm thinking about museums in general, but I do think that Laguna is a really great place for a field trip to an art museum because it's outside. Like I would worry about taking them to the Jones Center downtown for a different reason. Like the show that's coming up right now is going to be super heavy and racially charged and controversial and it's not like, I think like truly, I wouldn't take any class there. I don't know, they're going to figure out a way to lead their tours but maybe suggest Laguna would be a better option during the period that that's open. But then I think just like are museum staffs trained to engage with audiences besides just like neurotypical school children. I think especially because the Blanton Museum on UT's campus, um, their gallery teachers are mostly graduate students in art history and art education. And maybe they have some from other grad schools too, but I heard from one of my classmates who works there, um, about an experience that some of the gallery teachers had one day in the fall where a group of kids came in, um, with, I don't know exactly what was happening with the group. They were having behavioral issues. She didn't explain to me like if they were special needs or just if this group of kids was rowdy. But the docents, the gallery teachers were so mad at the staff at the Blanton for not telling them like, they felt like they should've known up front, like we're going to be dealing with a group that has specific needs. Um, so then that made me feel like, I don't know. I feel like from your position and our position, working with these groups of kids, I want to feel like wherever, if we wanted to take them anywhere, wherever we took them would be receptive and open to working with them. But then I hear that I'm like, I dunno, it rubbed me the wrong way.

AM: Yeah, like what would you have done differently if you had known at the time?

EG: Exactly. Like is there like some protocol that you feel like you wish you would've been trained in? And if that is the case, why isn't that a thing? So I think about those things too. But then from our perspective, I was thinking of ways to prepare them because like I found out yesterday they don't go to museums, which doesn't surprise me, when I think about like maybe their parents just like decided like, oh, I'm going to just take them to a museum. I don't know, it hasn't happened for most of them. Do you think that next week on maybe Thursday afternoon we should, like—

AM: It's in my planner! It says "Field Trip Behavior" for Social Skills on Thursday.

EG: Amazing. Okay. Because I remember we did that every morning before pool day, like go over the rules and it was like the same thing every time. But I think it was a good reinforcer just for expectations. I found this, I, this isn't like necessary for our group, I don't think. But, the Dallas Museum of Art, they do Access Programs, and one of their access programs is four times a year. They open up the museum early in the morning before, like the general public can come in and I think it's, it's like what do they call it, like Autism Family Celebration Days or something and they have the lights dim and I

think they do special guided tours but sensory friendly. Then I found this, this document that they made on their website for people to use, which like I said, I don't think that like our kids necessarily need this, but just that the Dallas Museum of Art is thinking in this way of creating resources, I was super excited about it. Just for like expectations and so like this strange new place with weird things are just not a giant surprise.

AM: Yeah. That's fantastic.

EG: Yeah. They're obviously a much bigger museum with permanent collections and just like way more resources in a bigger city. I don't think The Contemporary is going to be doing anything like that, but I'm still interested in thinking about ways to create resources for people who wouldn't necessarily think that a field trip to an art museum is something that they would do such as like some of the teachers in the school maybe. And then I feel like I lucked out so much getting to work in your class because you're totally on board with this kind of thing. So it's like I don't have to advocate for it with you. I just suggested it and I and I know that you can understand the positive benefits of it.

AM: No, you know, I think honestly the other thing that might just kind of be in the way of people choosing to take groups of kids like this on trips is also wondering, you know, well what are they going to get out of it? and how, how can I, you know, for the kids, not so much this group but like the kids who are nonverbal, the kids, like you think about Jaden or you know Abby or like that, that group, and then all of Molly's class also you kind of wonder, okay, if I can bring them to a museum and we can walk around it, but...are they going to connect at all to what they're seeing? Are they even really going to notice it? Like is this going to be a meaningful experience for them or is it just what I think they should be doing? So I'm taking them here because like that's what you do is you take kids on field trips to museums. You know, because like having worked in a very different kind of museum, when I worked at the Living History Museum, you know, the number of kids who would come in with like a list of questions and just like sit and stare at the questions and you know, ask you one and write it down, ask you and write it down, then just leave without even like looking around at this, you know, one room dogged mud cottage with the reproduction furniture or there's a fire and there's cooking and they like, they're just so focused on getting the answers, and completely, there's no experience and always feeling like why, why are you even, why are you spending the amount of money and bringing these kids here if you're not gonna prepare them to like actually experience this museum. They could have found all the information they needed in a book, you know, or online. So that's the, that's the other part I think with, like not really this group, like you know, they can look at a picture and notice things. So I think that they're gonna do great at the museum, but you know, so how, I guess just sort of the challenge for you in your field is how to make, is it possible to make a museum experience meaningful for these other kids?

EG: I, yeah, I have been thinking about that too. Especially when I think about, like I mentioned my study is specific to our group and our group is, for two reasons I feel like I have an advantage, because you are super supportive and our kids are, they're verbal. They, they have shown me that they have this capability to connect with things in a way just by prompting them in a specific way. Like they're more receptive to being prompted and guided into this creative way of thinking and it's, it's not that difficult to get them to do that, like they just need to be asked the right things. But then I think about what I'm excited about in general and I think about all the kids in the school and working with just people with autism in general as a whole group and that there's such a big spectrum of what that could mean. And then I think about how excited I am about museums and how excited I am about art and then I look at the literature that's out there and the kinds of resources that are out there, like some museums, like the Dallas Museum of Art have made a really cool attempt to bridge that gap. But by and large there's not a big crossover between these worlds. And I, and I don't think it's an intentional way, but it comes off as very... I know that no museum wants to be seen this way, but it seems like this 'elitist institution,' like museums are for museum people. And I know no museum wants to be seen like that. But then I think there need to be more conversations about like, okay, well if we really are an educational institution for everyone, how can we make that be a real thing and not just part of our mission statement, but then we don't really like have our docents feel prepared to work with anybody that walks in the door. Yeah, I was thinking the exact same thing and I talked to, the woman that is going to be giving our tour is the Associate Director of Education and she's fantastic. I think she's going to be great with them. She has this great energy that's gonna be I think really good for their tour. And then I think like she would be great for any, like if we brought any of our classes, but then I feel like she's like this Unicorn. Like I don't know if every museum has someone like her. I asked her that question. I'm like, if these tours are centered around verbal prompting, like do your or your docents like receptive to a group of kids that are nonverbal, like what are the expectations? And I kind of essentially has the same thing. Like what do you like, what is there for them to get out of it? And um, I was kinda taken aback. Like she didn't, she didn't blink at that question at all. She was like 'why would, why would you not give anyone the chance to experience something new? You never have any idea if someone's going to get something out of it or not. And if you, if you can get past the hurdles of finances and getting approval, like you have the ability to bring anybody here, I can't even imagine what the argument would be for like not.' Like they could have, just like being in a new place, seeing new things. Like that in itself is such a special thing, which I thought was, I don't know, just asking her that question in kind of the same way that you did, just like, I feel weird about asking this because it's something that I struggle with but I just don't, I don't know. Like I don't wanna think that the thing that I'm most excited about is not meaningful for everyone. And she's like 'Well I think it is,' like no hesitation.

AM: That's great.

EG: But yeah, and I think like if you're having the same questions that I am and then I think like talking to someone like molly, like would you ever take your kids to the museum? She was like no. The thing like there, there needs to be more out there to make that conversation even happen. And like, I don't know. Like I said, I feel like it's like the sense of like I need to advocate for this thing that I feel like is so important. But then there are these questions that I don't have, like, they're abstract answers, like, well, they could have this great experience. But that's not a definable and guaranteed thing.

AM: I may have told you about this because she told me about it while we were working together, but my aunt who works in the state commission on the arts, so she kind of got a read on a lot of the stuff happening around the state. Um, and she says, when I told her when I was going out to Midland for that Sib Shops thing that I did with Larkin, that there is a museum out there, apparently about the school for the blind. Did I tell you this? Where, what she says and I can, you know, I didn't really know what to look up. I couldn't find it, but what she said was there's, in Midland or Odessa somewhere out there. There's a museum, an art museum, and I'm also in the area is a school for the blind. So it's kind of the center in west Texas for blind education. Um, and so they have a program where families come and the kids who have different visual disabilities are led on, they have like a sensory garden with sculptures and like sound elements and touch elements and smell elements, like all these different things to give them an experience and then at the same time they have a program for the parents where they have like specially designed headsets or eye blinders or something that, that they can kind of match to the eyesight of the children and put them on the parents and the family and then take them on a tour around the museum so that they can experience what their children experience every day with their disability. And like I said, I couldn't find it so I wasn't sure if it was like a permanent thing or something that had existed and didn't anymore. But I love that idea also of like the sensory garden and like, you know, we're an art museum. How the hell are you going to make an art museum relevant to someone who can't see? So, okay, let's, let's figure out what they can do and still give them an experience, but yeah. And then that, I don't even know how they would do that with the eyesight. Yeah, just like, you know, is it glasses with just a tiny pinprick to look through or what even is that? But she'd heard that from, you know, she's in charge of like all the grants and you're going out.

EG: So super awesome. And then I think about The Contemporary, like contemporary art stretches so many boundaries that if you went to a fine art museum, um, you maybe wouldn't have access to contemporary art that is taking advantage of like so much more than visual content. There's so much sound involved, sometimes artist who use scent, like there more than one sense can be engaged, which I think is like opening up the playing field for so many more ways to make art interactive. But still there's like, I don't know, everything that I think about when I think about the questions I have are revolved around...there's something missing. It's like is it the not the right training or like people aren't having the right conversations or like I don't, I don't know. Like, and like I said, I'm

looking through and trying to find as much literature as I can and nothing is crossing into the positive, what I'm wondering. They're all skirting around it. Like so much, so much research on, if you just looked up like art and autism and so much is centered around art based activities that are like making things more accessible for kids, kids who struggle with their motor skills, like making things. And then like I already mentioned earlier, I know I'll have to get over that at some point in time or like find a good way to get around that or come to a good compromise. But like I, I hate the idea of having kids make things that are pointless for them and pointless for everyone involved, and wasteful. Then a museum is like it is this experience and that can be a lot more lasting if it's like a place that they never been to and they really have a good experience, but I think so much of that is dependent on the people that are involved in... Like I've already said, I feel like our kids are in good hands because you were really supportive of this and we're going to take them somewhere where they're going to be in good care, but I know that's not the case across the board.

AM: Yeah, I mean and then just the other reality of it is, you know, that field trips and you know art in general, but especially field trips and other things are just considered a waste of time by a lot of people know, which is awful and I completely—

EG: There's so there is so much, so many studies and so much information out there that points to the benefits of like one-time, like single visited field trips to museums.

AM: Like they used to, before I started, but it was like every Friday, they would take the kids somewhere. You know, they didn't have as many kids but every Friday they would go, like they would go to Waco, to the zoo I guess is what they have in Waco, but like they would, they would go on field trips, but then they had parents who started saying like, 'I don't want my kid leaving the school once a week or, you know, spending all this time away. I want them, I want them there so they can be getting their therapies and doing their work. Like this is, this is a waste of our time.'

EG: Really.

AM: Yeah. And like, you know, this, kind of the same as a parent who is still on our board, is my understanding of kind of the, the squeaky wheel for all that. But like same with like, Tamra used to have these big projects that they would do, you know, kind of interdisciplinary projects with research and writing and like that was taking away from working on math facts and so..

EG: That is, that's so surprising to me.

AM: Yeah. Well I mean, you know and you get it honestly, you get it in typical schools too, like regular schools too, where, you know, with field trips and with electives and arts and things like that where parents, but also teachers are saying this is a waste of

everyone's time. We should be, we need to be doing our academic work, we need to be doing math, we need to be doing reading, we need to be working on these things, music, art, all of those are a waste of time because my kids are only going to learn if I'm the one teaching them. Yeah, I mean that, that kind of gets into the devaluation of the arts, it, which is a whole other can of worms. But um, but yeah, I would say that that's part of the problem is just that people don't value the cultural experience.

EG: You've definitely answered all my questions and more. And I am so grateful for you letting me interview you. I don't think that I have anything else. I'm excited to go next Friday. I've been looking forward to this for months and I think that our, our social skills on Thursday will be a great way to tie in, getting them ready. I hope that we can go on more field trips this spring.

AM: Yeah. Where would you want to go?

EG: Well, I hadn't thought about going to a play. That's not something that like crosses my radar. I mean I would go to someone like that for myself, but I hadn't, like—

AM: Yeah, I'd only ever really thought about it because my mom is friends with the woman who is the director at the Scottish Rite Theater and so she just had mentioned them to me in the past and I had kind of kept thinking about it and then missing the boat on, like getting the tickets or you know, it just never really, I was never thinking about it at the right time to get it set up. So yeah, I'm excited about that one too. Um, yeah, like I said, nervous about it too, but I think it should be good. I hope Jackson doesn't climb up on the stage like his mom said he had tried to do. When we were planning to go back in, I guess December, and I sent the email out to the parents saying that this was the plan and she wrote back and said she thought that was great. She had taken the kids there a number of times before for the kid shows up, but the only thing to pay attention to was a couple of times he's tried to run up onto the stage, just to get closer to the action I think. Yeah, they, they got kicked out of the Bullock Museum for the same reason he like tried to climb [inaudible]. So we'll just keep a real close eye on him.

EG: So that's good information to know what you're thinking about just like reinforcing, like not, not being able to touch things or just like, like what appropriate behavior is in settings where they've never been in before. Especially at Laguna, there are some sculptures that look like they are for climbing. They just so tempting. Like I know that when docents take kids on tours, they obviously are there to watch, but if people are just coming with their kids and they see this thing like and they don't like, I don't know, it, it looks, some of this stuff really looks like it's interactive.

AM: Now I remember when I worked at the, at the Picture Book Museum, there was this constant back and forth about, um, 'cause it's the Eric Carle Museum. And so, about getting a, like there are a lot of people who thought that the museum really needed- and

this is like just an, just an incredibly beautiful, like perfectly built museum for what it holds. You know, it was designed so nicely that they have this beautiful kind of atrium, not atrium, but you know, the entrance hall, one side is all glass and it's bright, but there's this big space and everyone was like, 'You know what we need here? We need a sculpture of the Very Hungry Caterpillar.' You know, and there's that camp, and there's the other camp that was like, 'We're an art museum. We're not a children's museum. We are not putting up this thing that, you know, there are a lot of children who come to our museum, but we don't want this to be like, we've got the Hungry Caterpillar for the kids to climb on and, that it's going to be this like physical activity museum,' like they were very serious about like 'this is an art experience, not like a children's activity.' Like you know, there's an art studio on site where you do art and it wasn't like about crafting. It's an interesting museum. It was really a fun experience to work there.

EG: Wow. The way you phrased that. You were like, this is an art museum and not a children's museum, but like the sentence right before that, you were like, they wanted to put up the sculpture of the Hungry, Hungry Caterpillar. I'm like, wait, like a piece of art, in an art museum?

AM: No, not like a, not like a, not like a small sculpture, but like a huge, like caterpillar that would inevitably become like people are gonna climb it. Have you ever been to the little kids playground by the Thinkery at Mueller? They have this beautiful, it's beautiful mosaic, like glass mirror, mosaic tiled sculpture of Nessie, the loch ness monster. And there are signs saying 'Don't Climb on it.' They put like, outside of children's playground, it's like, they really don't want you to like climb up Nessie and do all these things, but it's just the funniest--that's like, it always reminds me of that. It's like we don't, we don't want this to be like a climbing gym. And it has this beautiful, and they may have changed it by now, but Eric Carl made these massive canvases that he painted, like he paints his tissue paper in like, I think it's red, yellow, green and blue. Just gorgeous works of art. So they're like, we're not going sell you this, like this kind of cheesy thing that is for children to play with. Like we're, we're an art museum.

EG: That is interesting. I mean, I feel like just in the times that we're living in, I've noticed so much of what museums are trying to do seems like it's entertainment based. Like, one of my, my classmates is writing her thesis on this program called Museum Hacks. Have you heard of it? It's this guided tour by this company, Museum Hacks that, it's for adults and basically the docent knows the ins and out of the museum. They're not an employee of the museum so you can go to one at like the Met and MoMA, like they do big museums and you can pay, it's expensive. It's like \$50 to go on this tour and basically your tour guide is... funny and like really knowledgeable about the art but they like, they make it related to things like non-museum goers, like it's like a museum experience for people that don't know how go to a museum, or think, like, it would be boring. Yeah, like I just gotta walk through this stuff and like not like know that you can, like that can be enough or that can be exciting. So yeah. And then I think about like, I don't know that

conversation, like ‘no the museum, is this like pristine place where we have these things...’

AM: Yeah, I think for them it was more about wanting to be taken seriously as an art museum and wanting children's illustration to be not considered part of a children's museum but like legitimate art in its own, for its own value and not just like nostalgic or fun for kids to look at. But like, we don't want our reputation to be that we're just this place for kids to come and run wild, but rather this place for people to come experience this as art and really, you know, because these artists are not always respected as artists were. In fact, you know, it's like most of our first exposure to art is through beautiful art in children's books. So that, that kind of wanting to protect it as a museum and as an art form..

EG: I completely get that. And it's an interesting conversation about how museums present themselves and how things evolve and just the way that people interact with things now and the way the kids interact with things now... things are changing. I feel like I'm coming across stuff that was written 15 years ago. It's like “it's not the way things are anymore!” and it's interesting because I feel like a lot of docents and, I mean museum staff is like an older generation. It's like museums have historically been one way, but then the way things are now it's like, I don't know, it's, I don't think it's not worthwhile to try to preserve things the way they were, but I think that people interact with things differently and it makes things challenging and there needs to be some kind of flex, but that doesn't necessarily mean it needs to be a caterpillar. Just like thinking about things in general about how things that once were sufficient, like just going to a museum now need an explanation and like a big statement about why it's worthwhile and maybe something really fun to do to make it like, ‘okay, we go do this thing. At least we can do something fun at the end.’

AM: Yeah, yeah. It's not like taking medicine or eating your vegetables.

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