Supporting Artists in the Gallery: The Role of the Museum Educator at an Art College

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Supporting Artists in the Gallery: the Role of the Museum Educator at an Art College

by

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FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES

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Abstract

Campus museums are uniquely positioned to enhance student learning and support faculty in achieving course objectives. By tapping the potential of objects, exhibition themes, and the gallery environment, museum professionals can empower faculty and students to make meaningful and relevant connections to curriculum content. Inspired by the successes in such endeavors of revered teaching museums at elite liberal arts colleges, but frustrated by the challenges of transferring model practices to the context of an art college, I set out to investigate what was possible at my own place of employment, the nation’s only publicly funded art college, Massachusetts College of Art and Design. Applying to the gallery context several theoretical frameworks that detail how art students engage in thinking and learning, I was able to investigate the potentially rich relationship between art exhibitions and studio and scholarly classes and begin to uncover and describe ways of cultivating supportive relationships with faculty and students at an art college.
Introduction
Introduction

When I graduated from Skidmore College, I thought that all campus museums were like the museum at Skidmore. The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Galleries (Tang) opened its doors during my freshman year. Throughout my college career, I was invited to engage with the Tang in many ways: I took classes inside the museum, worked behind the scenes as an intern, and even got the green light from the Tang’s curator to plan a party that used the museum as a platform for art installation, video projection, and musical performance. At the Tang, it seemed like green lights all the time as far as student involvement was concerned. Tang staff invited exploration, inquiry, and even institutional critique in many forms.

I was so inspired by the Tang’s teaching mission that I decided to pursue the field of museum education as a graduate student. I chose Skidmore’s Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS) program specifically so that I could continue to use the Tang as a laboratory and study under the mentorship of its staff. Because I assumed the Tang’s foundational commitment to education to be fundamental to all campus museums and galleries, my plan became specifically to use my degree to launch my career at a campus art museum.

Midway through my graduate studies I moved to Boston and started working in the Bakalar & Paine Galleries at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt), where I quickly found that all campus museums and galleries were not like the Tang. Things were different at MassArt in many ways.

I was fortunate to begin working in the Curatorial Programs department that runs MassArt’s professional galleries at a time when there was still much to be developed and discovered in the way of educational programming. The college had
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recently hired a consultant who, aware of the current trends in campus museums and galleries, had stressed the importance of an increased educational focus including what I’ll call “in-reach”—reaching within the college community to enhance the Galleries’ educational support for faculty and students. Given my experiences and training, I was full of ideas about how to approach such a project.

But I was often discouraged to find that my ideas didn’t seem to fit at MassArt. I sensed a general lack of interest in the Galleries from faculty and students, which perplexed me, because what could be more natural than for artists to want to learn from art and exhibitions?

When lack of student and faculty interest wasn’t the obstacle, there was often the problem of limited resources or lagging institutional commitment. I was frustrated and confused. All of my experiences, training, theoretical background, and professional development through conferences and symposia often specifically focused on campus museums, hadn’t prepared me for the challenges of using exhibitions to connect with the internal MassArt community.

Eventually, I was able to turn my frustration into motivation to figure out what was so different about MassArt and to unpacking assumptions I must have been holding that were interfering with my work there. Having established an understanding that my frame of reference was actually quite privileged and unique, and having developed the inclination to shift paradigms, I became deeply interested in discovering what was singularly possible in my role as a museum educator at the MassArt Galleries.

This intrinsic curiosity led me to design the study detailed in this paper. What resulted was a much-enriched understanding of my institutional and broader
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professional communities, of my own capacities as a museum educator, and of the courageous endeavor of art making.

I found that, in order to support high-quality learning experiences that extend and enhance the curriculum at an art college, a museum educator needs to understand that faculty and students often share a profound commitment to their work and identity as artists, which affects how and what they learn. In the art college context, this understanding must be embedded in the museum educator's developing disposition to inhabit multiple forms of connector roles.

With a newfound appreciation for the discipline of studio art—the habits of mind that artists develop as students and use as professionals—I now see a clearer pathway for how I can make a difference as a museum educator at MassArt: by developing my disposition—the necessary skills, inclinations, and alertness—to support artists in the gallery.
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Since the 1980s, new museum theory has changed the way many museums look and function. A shift in emphasis away from research, collections care, and the authority of the institution and toward a more public mission of education and visitor participation has affected the museum community at large. Within the smaller collective of college and university museums and galleries, this emphasis on education and audience has had many institutions questioning whether they should focus on serving their internal or external communities.

Historically, campus museums have catered to both communities at different times. According to Laurel Bradley’s research, beginning in the 1940s, campus museums tended primarily to serve the academic curriculum. But as times changed and museums sought resources outside of their parent institutions, museum practitioners often felt the need to serve the neighboring communities that supported them (Bradley, 1). Then in the 1990s, a series of large grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s College and University Art Museums program (CUAM) triggered another pendulum swing, and campus museums began to investigate better service to their internal campus communities. This is the trend that MassArt’s gallery improvements consultant, Marcy Goodwin, was likely referring to in her recommendations to increase education and in-reach efforts.

Campus museums are unique in the potential they offer for educational rigor. Unlike autonomous museums, which provide free-choice programming without the assurance of critical response or repeat visitation, campus museums and galleries have a built-in audience and can support deeper, more engaged learning by weaving their offerings into the curriculum.
At many campus museums and galleries, attention to the possibilities and pitfalls of deepening relations with academic communities has yielded groundbreaking practices. The preeminent examples of curriculum connections are found at museums like the Tang at Skidmore College and the Hood at Dartmouth. These institutions have placed teaching at the forefronts of their missions, integrating education into everything they do.

The results have been exciting and speak for themselves. The Tang, the Hood, and the 17 other Mellon-funded campus art museums have managed to increase the relevance of the museum to campus and community life, to activate collections use and to stretch individuals—faculty, students, museum staff, general visitors, and artists—to learn and participate more. These efforts and experiments have yielded many inspiring publications and professional forums about what it means for campus museums to be a resource to the college.

But how might inspired colleagues, such as myself, transfer these model practices to related but consequentially different contexts? Because the touted examples have all been liberal arts colleges with ample resources, elite student scholars, and art museums with permanent collections, the field-wide discourse on curriculum connections at campus museums has ruminated on assumptions, trends, and themes

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1 Select conferences, symposia, and presentations:
- *The College Museum: A Collision of Disciplines, A Laboratory of Perception*, hosted by the Tang Museum, Skidmore College, April 2006
- *Core Matters: Students, Faculty, Collections: A Symposium for College and University Art Museums*, hosted by the Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, April 2010
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that can cause an otherwise exciting topic to feel inhospitable to a museum professional
in a context like mine at MassArt.

It is from my perspective as a museum educator for a non-collecting,
contemporary art gallery at a public art college that I will detail and respond to some of
the salient assumptions, trends, and themes from the discourse on campus museums.

The assumption of ample resources

Without the privilege of ample resources, museums like the Tang and Hood
would not have been able to achieve the groundbreaking academic relevance for which
they are so often featured in the literature and professional forums. The foundational
resources these museums depend on come not just in the form of direct funding, but
also include the hidden costs of space, staff positions and staff time, permanent
collections, and a firm college-wide commitment to museum learning. These resources
are the bedrock that academically engaged campus museums seem to rest upon, and
while the museums themselves may not take such hard-won resources for granted, the
literature often does.

In What a Mess! Claiming a Space for Undergraduate Student Experimentation in
the University Museum, Janet Marstine details examples from the Hood and Tang
museums to explore what becomes possible when sacred time, space, and funding are
committed towards student learning.

The Hood Museum has set aside several spaces for student and faculty learning
in addition to their galleries with permanent and temporary exhibitions. They have a
designated teaching gallery, a study-storage center, and a space for exhibitions curated
by senior student interns, located prominently in the museum’s front lobby. In each of
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these spaces, the Hood draws from its extensive permanent collection as an educational resource.

Now in its ninth year, the Hood’s series of small exhibitions mounted by senior student interns is called *A Space for Dialogue: Fresh Perspectives on the Permanent Collection from Dartmouth Students*. The introductory text explains:

“These presentations are the result of direct, hands-on experience by the curatorial, education, and public relations senior interns with their mentors on the Hood staff. Each student chooses the objects, conducts curatorial research, writes the labels and accompanying brochure, assists in the design and installation, and presents a public gallery talk” (Marstine, 7).

In citing this example, Marstine doesn’t mention that a commitment to this type of extraordinary student learning experience requires considerable investment, starting with the fixed cost of the designated space. The museum must also support substantial hidden costs of staff time for mentorship, in addition to funding the five senior interns who are each paid a stipend of $2,450 for their work over the fall, winter, and spring terms. To do this, the Hood has now established an Educational Access Endowment, funded by grants and alumni donations.

Similar to the Hood and many other campus museums, the Tang has a designated classroom, lecture hall, and print study room where courses are taught inside the museum, as well as spaces where student artworks and mini-exhibitions organized by students, faculty members, and Skidmore classes are sometimes staged alongside premier exhibitions.

Marstine wrote about one such mini-exhibition. Developed by students in an anthropology seminar, the exhibition *Many Different Heavens* critiqued the Tang’s
concurrent professional exhibition, *A Very Liquid Heaven*, thus displaying multiple voices and narratives within the museum. According to Marstine,

“This was a bold move that many university museums, fearing that student projects could undermine the institution’s authority, would never take. But Tang museum staff had the confidence to know that a student critique of a major exhibition only serves to encourage intellectual inquiry, the primary mission of the institution” (12).

To encourage this level of student inquiry, a deep commitment to education must be shared by museum staff and campus stakeholders alike. Also, a degree of what Marstine calls *messiness* must be tolerated. But Marstine is clear about not lowering professional standards.²

Seemingly unaware of the hidden costs involved, Marstine presents the example of the *Many Different Heavens* exhibition as a “low-budget” educational initiative:

“The Tang did not have many objects in its permanent collection relevant to the show and the class had a modest budget that precluded loans. Yet, because teaching trumps museological convention in student projects at the Tang, participants were not hindered by a need to display only original artwork and historical artifacts. They relied on inexpensive reproductions and sites from the internet to represent their ideas” (12).

Given the common reliance on permanent collections as the primary tool in making course connections, this example is refreshing. But Marstine leaves out that this “low-budget” project rests on a hefty financial investment that the Tang has already made. Overhead costs must be taken into account as a part of Skidmore’s commitment to

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² “I certainly don’t mean to advocate poorly written wall texts, bad paint jobs, poor framing, technical glitches, disorganized programming, sloppy handling of objects and the like. It is imperative that students learn ‘best practice’ before and while producing their exhibitions” (Marstin, 3).
museum learning—the fixed investment of exhibition and classroom space and the
ongoing investment in faculty training that makes such course connections possible.

Marstine’s *Many Different Heavens* case also takes for granted that the Tang was
able to enjoy the luxury of time. *A Very Liquid Heaven*, on which *Many Different Heavens*
was a commentary, was a large-scale, heavily-researched exhibition in which the Tang
had invested a great deal of planning. At many campus museums with ample resources,
the amount of time spent researching and planning exhibitions is considerable; the
Tang often spends two to three years in planning major exhibitions. This indicates a
commitment of funding and staff time that can be challenging for institutions like
MassArt, where budgets are lower and staff wear many hats.

The luxury of an exhibition’s lengthy duration on view is also easily taken for
granted. When years have been spent in planning, it makes sense for the exhibition run
to be considerable, but this means setting aside sacred time and space, which may not
be possible at institutions like MassArt, where there is competition for the use of the
gallery.

Without lengthy exhibitions, many educational opportunities become impossible.
For *Many Different Heavens* to happen at the Tang, *A Very Liquid Heaven* had to be on
display for longer than the course of a semester (October 23, 2004 - June 5, 2005).
Students needed a full semester to investigate the parent exhibition, establish their
critique, and develop, plan, and install their response exhibition. Then, more time was
needed for the response exhibition to be viewed alongside the original.

Marstine’s publication is but one of many that praises the accomplishments of
the Tang and Hood museums. This field-wide reverence is understandable given the
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extraordinary successes that have come from these museums. But it is important to acknowledge that what these renowned museums’ accomplishments are the fruit of the considerable resources that are their privilege.

**The creative campus trend and the museum’s role in interdisciplinary learning**

Given the necessary resources, many campus museums have been poised to enhance overall creativity and interdisciplinarity at liberal arts schools, which has been widely reflected in the literature. The now-common practice of interconnectedness through the arts is often referred to as the *creative campus*. In her article titled *Curricular Connections: The College/University Art Museum as Site for Teaching and Learning*, Laurel Bradley quotes Steven J. Tepper of Emory University as defining the creative campus in these terms:

”Creativity thrives on those campuses where there is abundant cross-cultural exchange and a great deal of ‘border’ activity between disciplines, where collaborative work is commonplace, risk taking is rewarded, failure is expected, and the creative arts are pervasive and integrated into campus life” (2).

The creative campus philosophy has become important to many institutions, with powerful results. In an address at the symposium *Creator, Collector, Catalyst*, sponsored by the Princeton University Art Museum and The Wolfsonian-Florida International University, Princeton President Shirley Tilghman convincingly illustrated the effect of the creative campus on individuals:

”We want them to (study the arts) not because they may one day have a one-person show in Chelsea or join the Chicago Symphony – most, in fact, will not – but because a creative mindset can inform and enrich whatever vocation they pursue.... (Because) the habits of mind that one acquires through the arts spill over into every other occupation” (Tilghman, 2).
Each school describes and implements their creative campus initiatives uniquely, but often museums and collections have played a primary role. Campus leaders at Yale University recommended in a 2003 prospectus “that the arts be brought into the mainstream of liberal arts education,” and were “eager to see Yale’s collections brought more fully into the education of undergraduates” (Bradley, 3). At Skidmore, where the Tang has been central to activating creativity on campus, the school motto is Creative Thought Matters. According to Marstine’s profile, “sparking discourse among disciplines is central to (the Tang’s) mission” (10). In Bradley’s words, this is all part of Skidmore’s “ambitious and radical plan to make new museum theory a linchpin of arts, humanities, and science education” (4).

In 2006, a roundtable discussion on The Role of the University Art Museum and Gallery featured campus art museum professionals from several institutions. Representing Williams College Museum of Art, John Stomberg said, “We try to center ourselves within the campus-wide discussion on visual culture” (Hammond, 25). Perhaps the reason it works so well to position museums at the heart of the creative campus is that, as described in Mellon’s CUAM Program Summary Report, “curricular goals of open, experiential, cross-disciplinary, and out-of-the-classroom academic experiences lend themselves to precisely the resources that museums can offer” (Goethals, 9).

For many institutions—especially those in the liberal arts—museums have become an invaluable means of achieving campus-wide creativity and connectivity. But charged with supporting learning comprehensively across disciplines, museums have had to solve some major problems: first, how to get faculty and students from unrelated
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disciplines in the door, and second, once inside, how should museum practitioners help these new visitors to know what to do? Many solutions to these problems have been strategized, leading to another common theme in the field-wide discourse: the courting and training of the unusual suspects.

The theme of courting and training the unusual suspects

Much attention has been devoted to the subject of educating the faculty and students most unlikely to use museums. Katherine Hart of the Hood Museum at Dartmouth expressed this focus in these terms:

“Our main goal is...to create visual literacy among the widest number of students possible by reaching as far into the curriculum as possible. It is about getting to the students who wouldn’t normally go into museums (to) deal with art and helping them think visually” (Hammond, 26).

With a goal of increasing interest, comfort, and proficiency in museum use for unlikely visitors, training by museum staff becomes necessary. Efforts to cultivate visual, object, and museum literacy across campus have played out in various ways. One method established at Skidmore is the Faculty Seminar. With funding from the Luce Foundation, Skidmore hired conceptual artist and museum researcher Fred Wilson from 2004 – 2006 to lead faculty from various departments in museum literacy seminars. Since 2006, the Faculty Seminar has continued with funding from the Mellon Foundation. The Seminar is currently co-led by the director of the Tang and a changing Skidmore faculty member. Adopting similar models, many campus museums have devoted themselves to faculty training, often relying heavily on collections to enable course connections.

Another widely established method of both courting and training unlikely museum visitors is to create new staff positions specifically dedicated to bridging the
gap between college and museum. Bradley discusses the proliferation of these positions (often called faculty liaison or coordinator/curator of academic affairs) and notes that “without this dedicated faculty liaison, the staff usually fell into a reactive mode” (Bradley, 5). All of the faculty liaison positions mentioned by Bradley are at liberal arts schools. At first, these positions were mostly Mellon-funded, but as their value to the institution has increasingly been shown, colleges have begun to fund them internally.

The faculty liaison must develop a disciplinary understanding of many domains, both across the college and within the museum. Understanding the unique issues that individuals face logistically, personally, and conceptually in their field is critical to facilitating connections across disciplinary divides. The faculty liaison can investigate obstacles that stand in the way of museum use, including those based on fears, preferences, or biases held by faculty and students.

Discussions about faculty use of campus art museums have often focused on the challenges that arise around teaching outside of one’s comfort zone, especially for faculty from unlikely disciplines such as history or science. Bradley quotes faculty liaison Alison Barnes and anthropology professor Susan Bender from Skidmore as expressing faculty challenges and museum response in this way:

“While our hunch is that the college museum professional would mentor as many active faculty users of their exhibitions as possible, we will venture the suggestion that this form of faculty engagement with their campus museum may not always be a comfortable fit” (4).

But with tenacity, in many cases such mentoring has engendered poignant metamorphoses. In her speech, Princeton President Tilghman shared a moving quotation from a Professor Cook: “I have spent most of my career as a more-or-less
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aniconic, textually oriented historian; teaching in the Museum opened my eyes to the riches of a world I had been missing out on’ (4).

Enlisting museums and the arts in this kind of transformation is clearly a worthwhile endeavor. But in maximizing attention on the unlikely disciplines, it seems that opportunities for important transformations in the disciplines most complementary to art museums and galleries have increasingly gone overlooked.

**A new problem: complementary disciplines have been overlooked**

Throughout the published literature and professional forums there is a discernable lack of interest in investigating and deepening relationships with what Bradley calls the “complementary” disciplines. Abounding references to studio art, art history, and anthropology as “obvious connections” reveal the broad assumption that faculty and students from these fields are already making sufficient use of campus art museums and galleries.

This assumption may be shared by faculty, students, and museum practitioners alike; while its truth likely varies by individual, institution, and based on the specifics of exhibitions and objects, I suspect that more often than not, individuals from complementary disciplines are not making sufficient use of campus museums. Based on informal conversations with museum colleagues and on my own observations at MassArt, it seems that faculty and students can be surprisingly uncomfortable or disinterested in campus galleries, and that they often lack substantial skills in museum literacy and pedagogy. It follows, then, that museum professionals may face just as many problems in connecting with complementary disciplines as they do with the unlikely disciplines. Assuming the opposite means missing opportunities.
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Perhaps some art college faculty actually feel pressured and inhibited to teach in art galleries because of their expertise as artists. With an MFA and a career of making and teaching behind them, they may assume that teaching about art in museums is synonymous with their own domain, when, in fact, it is a related but different domain. Thus, art faculty may feel inadequate to the task of teaching in art galleries and avoid it altogether, or simply send students to view exhibitions on their own.

Another danger for art faculty is that they may feel perfectly comfortable teaching in museums and galleries and not realize that they lack the skills to facilitate high-quality experiences for their students. As artists, studio art professors have a uniquely intimate relationship with artworks, which their training and practice necessitate. This means that they have adapted a distinct set of behaviors regarding artworks that are different from those of trained museum professionals. For example, art professors are highly skilled in the study, observation, and creation of art and objects, and often they are even highly museum literate, but these skills don’t amount to literacy in museum pedagogy.

At MassArt, I have often seen studio art faculty exhibit behavior in the gallery that is more appropriate to the studio classroom, such as touching artworks, or to training in a particular skill, such as lecturing didactically and modeling their own expertise as artists. These approaches do little to increase student comfort and encourage curiosity in the gallery setting.

So, perhaps surprisingly given the assumptions of literature, some art faculty who utilize campus museums and galleries may do a poor job of guiding their students, while others may simply not visit at all.
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It is also surprising that art students, who might be naturally inclined to visit exhibitions as a form of exposure to their chosen discipline, often don't show up in campus museums and galleries unless required by a class. Parallel to art faculty, art students are extremely busy, often voraciously tunneling into their studio lives in a way that, while productive, can be isolating and can keep them from being alert to relevant opportunities to understand and contextualize their work within their larger field by visiting on-campus exhibitions.

In informal discussions with colleagues from fine arts and liberal arts colleges alike, as well as from the Addison Gallery of American Art, a high school art museum at Phillips Andover Academy, I have brought up the challenges of connecting with studio art faculty and students. Each colleague has corroborated the frustration that, counter-intuitively, studio art can be the hardest discipline to wrangle. This flies in the face of the established notion that studio art wholly comprises museums’ limited circle of devotees.

As a museum educator at an art college, I have become interested in the unique and thus-far unsolved puzzle of how to connect with complementary disciplines, a gap in the literature on museum education.

**Why investigate the relationship of artists to campus art galleries?**

Although I know of no formal study that has investigated this topic to date, it seems clear that if relationships with faculty and students from complementary disciplines are important to campus art museums and galleries, these relationships must be tended to with special care. While campus museums and galleries have been established as useful for building campus-wide creativity and interdisciplinarity at
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liberal arts colleges, they are an equally, or perhaps even more important resource at art colleges, which have different contextual opportunities and constraints.

It may be counter-intuitive, but the creative campus mentality of “cross-cultural exchange” is not necessarily the norm at arts colleges. In an academic culture where disciplines share more in common than they do in liberal arts, cross-cultural exchange may require even more daring.

For example, at MassArt the tradition of “media shops” has perpetuated the well-known silo effect that often impedes interdepartmental exchange in higher education. Since the equipment necessary to work in large metals, printmaking, or film-video is extensive and requires a lot of space, maintenance, funding, and technical expertise, time spent working in these “shops” tends to build unique, enclosed cultures. So, within an arts college like MassArt, faculty and students can become somewhat culturally divided when it would seem that they are all united in the discipline of art.

This perceived unity, I believe, is what distinguishes the challenge of cross-cultural exchange at an art school from that of a liberal arts institution. While an individual’s lack of expertise in a totally unrelated discipline comes as no surprise, lacking understanding of a discipline closely related to one’s own may generate feelings of insecurity. This may be especially true for faculty, who are used to working from a position of authority.

Because of cultural divisions between art disciplines, crossing boundaries can necessitate great courage, so incentives to come out of one’s home media shop and mesh with others must be compelling. So adopting a creative campus mentality at an art school will require support, just as it does at liberal arts institutions. This support must
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come both in the form of professional development for faculty and in human and fiscal resources for the museum or gallery.

While funding and developing cross-disciplinary culture within an art school may at first glance seem less urgent, it is actually critical if art students are to adopt the creative mindset to engage in contemporary art practice and to deeply impact the world they emerge into. The very willingness to cross borders that Steven Tepper talks about as essential to the creative campus is also essential to contemporary art practice. Unique to contemporary art is the common thread of intermingling material forms and techniques. Whereas previous art historical eras and genres saw artists devoting themselves to a single artistic discipline—photography, printmaking, painting—the contemporary artist makes it a habit to experiment in various media, letting their ideas drive the techniques they adopt.

Since this is the reality of the contemporary field in which artists work, it makes sense for artist teachers to reflect it in their teaching. They can do this not only by discussing contemporary practice with students and modeling it in their own artwork, should that be their bent as an artist, but also by modeling it in their willingness to collaborate inter-departmentally, which museum educators can support.

Summary: leading to my research at MassArt

Judging by the outcomes of the Mellon Foundation’s 15-year CUAM project and the zeitgeist of the professional discourse, to date, campus museum educators may actually know more about how to train and empower faculty from non-complementary
disciplines to make cross-disciplinary connections to art, objects, and museums than we do about connecting with the so-called complementary or obvious discipline of studio art. And though the tides may be changing with the trend of artist-as-curatorial exhibitions and the burgeoning educational efforts of such programs as Art21\(^3\), we still seem to know more about teaching from collections than we do about teaching from the contemporary.

I began this study with the belief that, at MassArt, most faculty and students could benefit in some way from support by museum professionals, whether in the form of training, exhibition-specific resources, improved communications, or educational experiences, and my hunch was that this was also true elsewhere. I also believed that, in order to do our jobs to the best of our abilities, campus museum professionals needed continually to learn from faculty and students.

Driven by a commitment to the idea that all campus galleries and museums offer unique opportunities for student learning and faculty engagement, I set out to investigate the nature of the museum educator’s connections to curriculum at Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

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\(^3\) Art21 is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing knowledge of contemporary art through public television, the internet, and educational curricula.
Methodology
Methodology

FOCUS QUESTION

What does a museum educator at an art college gallery need to understand in order to provide high quality learning experiences that extend and enhance the curriculum across the college?

TYPE OF RESEARCH: PORTRAITURE

I wanted to assess the quality of learning experiences in connection with the Bakalar & Paine Galleries, the professional galleries at MassArt, so it was clear that I needed a qualitative research methodology. I chose Portraiture, a method developed by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis because it would allow me to include myself as a voice in the study, to incorporate case study and narrative, and to take aesthetics into account.

Portraiture is best described by its theorists in their book, The Art and Science of Portraiture:

“Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image. The relationship between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and becomes the arena for navigating empirical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of authentic and compelling narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, xv).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

I was motivated to conduct this study because I had many questions about why and how the MassArt Galleries were unique and how I could support faculty and
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students to engage in learning opportunities. How could we make our programming relevant to them? I wanted to know what was happening already, what I could make happen, and what the challenges and benefits would be.
BACKGROUND: EXHIBITIONS
Three exhibitions were on view throughout the fall semester when I conducted my research, two in the Bakalar Gallery and one in the Paine Gallery.

*William Kentridge: Ambivalent Affinities* and *Projects* in the Bakalar Gallery

Through artistic media as diverse as printmaking, drawing, painting, and filmmaking, William Kentridge critically examines aspects of his native South African society and the aftermath of apartheid. Artistically, he is best known for his unique animated films, which he laboriously constructs by filming a charcoal drawing, making erasures and changes, and filming it over and over again until it becomes an entire scene. In the animations, traces from previous drawings haunt later iterations. Revealing narrative through ironic juxtapositions and protean imagery, Kentridge probes what is often left unsaid and depicts emotional and political struggles that reflect the lives of many contemporary South Africans. The two exhibitions on view in the Bakalar Gallery - *Ambivalent Affinities* and *Projects* - will showcase Kentridge's work from 1989 to present.

William Kentridge: Ambivalent Affinities is curated by Allyson Purpura and organized by Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.4

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4 Text and image courtesy of the Bakalar & Paine Galleries at MassArt.
Graphic Intervention: 25 Years of AIDS Awareness Posters in the Paine Gallery

Graphic Intervention: 25 Years of International AIDS Awareness Posters 1985-2010 draws from an extensive archive of arresting, graphic, intense, and fearless international public health announcements. With 153 examples from 44 countries this exhibition presents a comprehensive overview of the diverse visual strategies employed by government agencies, community activists, grassroots organizations, and motivated citizens to educate the local population. The messages in Graphic Intervention deftly champion pertinent sociopolitical issues - disease research and eradication, world health, international relations, sexual education, social prejudices, and discrimination - in a remarkable way. The exhibition draws upon James Lapides’ extensive archive of international AIDS Awareness posters along with posters generously donated to Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

Graphic Intervention was curated by Elizabeth Resnick, Professor and Chair of Graphic Design at MassArt, and Javier Cortes, Partner and Creative Director at Korn Design, Boston.5

5 Text and image courtesy of the Bakalar & Paine Galleries at MassArt.
BACKGROUND: CASE STUDIES

I designed my research to focus on three cases. In the first case, I was a passive observer. In the second two cases, I initiated contact and carefully orchestrated planning and execution in collaboration with faculty. These latter two cases serve as modest attempts to illustrate how gallery professionals might extend and enhance the curriculum at art colleges.

Case 1: Liberal Studies’ Freshmen Level Course, Written Communication

Course Description for Written Communication: *An introduction to essay writing. Six to eight writing assignments concentrate on the expository and critical essay and may include some subjective writing and a research paper. Students also read and discuss outstanding pieces of prose, poetry, and fiction.*

This gallery visit to the *William Kentridge* exhibitions was initiated and lead by writing professor, Ricco Siosocco, without the intervention of gallery staff. This case presents a unique example of an interdisciplinary course connection: a liberal studies class filled with artists making use of an art gallery to learn writing.

Although interdisciplinary course connections have been explored extensively by other museum practitioners, this case stands out because the students in the course were all artists. I was curious about the unique conditions surrounding exhibition connections to a “not-obvious” or “not-complementary” course when the students in the course were devoted to a complementary discipline. How would this differ from other examples? What would Ricco have to do to enhance student learning in the discipline of writing when students’ stated focus was studio art?

I asked if I could tag along when his class visited the gallery, record audio of the visit, and ask some questions. Ricco was open and willing. After the visit, he and his

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6 Course description courtesy of MassArt’s 2010-2011 academic catalog.
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students filled out written questionnaires to help me zero in on what had been taught and learned and what opportunities were being presented, made use of, or missed.

Case 2: Printmaking’s Sophomore Level Course, Beginning Etching

Course Description for Beginning Etching: *A presentation of basic intaglio skills: drypoint, hard and soft ground etching, and aquatint. Emphasis is on using the craft and the process of printmaking to explore the more familiar ideas of line, value, and form.*

This gallery visit to the *William Kentridge* exhibitions was initiated and led by me in collaboration with printmaking professor, Nona Hershy. This case presents an example of the potential for curriculum enhancements through a simple but rich learning experience during a single gallery visit.

For this case, I was interested in determining what the results would be when a studio art class that is focused on teaching a specific medium visited the gallery to see an exhibition in which artworks in that medium were displayed. I contacted professor Nona Hershey in the Printmaking department to see if she was interested in bringing a group. Nona and I had worked together minimally in the past when her own artworks had been part of a faculty show in the galleries. She was a seasoned escort with a habit of bringing her students to the galleries every semester. She also often brings her classes to nearby museums, such as the Museum of Fine Arts, where she is able to pull specific pieces for her students to examine. So it didn’t take much convincing to get Nona to come to the MassArt Galleries with her class.

When I contacted Nona by email and asked if she was interested in working together in some capacity, she was very willing. Perhaps because she is highly organized, she did not seem overwhelmed by being asked to collaborate in a more

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7 Course description courtesy of MassArt’s 2010-2011 academic catalog.
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involved gallery visit than she was used to leading. During an hour-long conversation, which I recorded, I learned what her learning objectives were at this particular point in the semester for her Beginning Etching class. Once I clarified these goals, I suggested some simple ways that we could use the William Kentridge exhibitions to achieve them. We chose a date and time—the visit would take an hour—and over the course of the following week, I spent a few hours writing a lesson plan for the visit that kept Nona’s learning objectives central. I found this to be a delightful experience, and Nona, too, expressed her enjoyment.

To gather data on the impact of the visit, I prepared a set of written questions for Nona and another for her students to answer before their visit, and a second set for students to answer afterwards. Responses to these questions helped me to assess what students learned, how their perceptions and inclinations changed before and after the visit, and how well I was able to support Nona in achieving her teaching objectives. Because the gallery visit included a students-at-work component, I was also able to collect additional data from the written work of students in response to the prompt that I provided.

During the visit, I lead the discussion from the structure I had planned, but Nona agreed to jump in wherever she felt her expertise, curiosity or participation might augment the visit. So in effect, I both planned and taught the lesson in collaboration with Nona.

Case 3: Art Education’s Junior Level Course, Pre-Practicum I: The Family Day Unit

Pre-Practicum I course description: An intensive study of a variety of teaching models and their respective planning strategies. Reading and discussions will address writing lesson plans, conducting instructional sessions, and assessing student learning. Students make direct field observations in schools, community settings, and museums. Students will
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also be required to serve as research and teaching assistants to the Saturday Studios teachers (Pre-Practicum II students) on at least three Saturday mornings.

Family Day Event Description: Twice a year, the Bakalar & Paine Galleries host Family Day, an interactive event planned and run by gallery education staff with the help of MassArt students. Visitors of all ages are invited to drop in any time to enjoy art making, writing, guided conversations, games, and take-home creations. Activities are tailored to the current exhibition’s theme and designed to illuminate meaning and facilitate social connections. Family Day is free and open to the public. Materials and refreshments are provided.

This case presents a rich and complex collaboration between the Bakalar & Paine Galleries and the art education course Pre-Practicum I (Pre-Practicum I or PPI) over the course of six weeks. The partnership was initiated by me and the project made use of the William Kentridge and Graphic Intervention exhibitions. Co-taught by professor Aimée DeBose and me, art education students were challenged to design activities for a community event in the galleries called Family Day.

During the semester previous to this study, I had initiated the Family Day collaboration with the same course when professor John Crowe taught it. At that time, my idea had been to create a partnership with an art education class in order to solve a problem that we as gallery education staff had identified: we were having trouble staffing our Family Day event with reliable, intrinsically motivated volunteers, which was bringing down the tone of the event. Thinking that it would be a mutually beneficial opportunity for the gallery and for students, I sent out an email to several faculty members in the Art Education department asking if they would be interested. John Crowe replied that this was just the sort of inspiration he was looking for.

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8 Course description courtesy of MassArt’s 2010-2011 academic catalog.
9 Text courtesy of the Bakalar & Paine Galleries at MassArt.
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A semester later, largely because of John Crowe’s enthusiasm and the success of the previous Family Day from the perspective of students, gallery staff, and visitors, it wasn’t a tough sell to get professor Aimée DeBose involved, even though she was teaching the class for the first time.

Aimée and I began a month-long working relationship involving numerous planning, reflection, and assessment meetings that typically lasted two hours or longer. We team-taught multiple classes in advance of Family Day. While Aimée was focused on establishing students’ understanding of various teaching models, my job was to present the goals of Family Day and to teach about the uniqueness of gallery learners and the gallery-learning context as distinct from the classroom. While student learning weighed more heavily on Aimée’s shoulders and the visitor experience more heavily on mine, with time, we increasingly shared the responsibility of advocating for both.

I collected data by soliciting written responses to questions from students before and after Family Day, and from Aimée after Family Day. An in-depth interview with John Crowe was another a rich source of data, so my analytical narrative of this case also weaves in data from the PPI/Family Day collaboration with John’s class during the spring semester of 2010.
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**ANALYSIS**

In order to assess the type and quality of student and faculty engagement with the Galleries, I chose four theoretical lenses that address understanding and its development: Howard Gardner and Veronica Boix Mansilla’s *Disciplinary Understanding Framework*; the two lenses of the Studio Thinking framework developed by Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan: the *Studio Habits of Mind* and the *Studio Structures*; and the *Theory of Dispositional Thinking* developed by Perkins, Jay & Tishman and re-contextualized in Studio Thinking.

The Disciplinary Understanding Framework, developed as part of the *Teaching for Understanding* research conducted at Project Zero and the Harvard Graduate School of Education between 1989-1998, allowed me to assess how students’ disciplinary understanding developed as a result of their gallery experience. Because the framework’s use varies according to the discipline to which it is applied, using it entails having a strong understanding of the conventions of the discipline in question. In this case, the disciplines were Printmaking, Art Education, and Writing, all coupled with Museum Education. My understandings of these disciplines also developed through conversation with faculty and exposure to their teachings.

The methods and conventions specific to the discipline of studio art are laid out nicely in *Studio Thinking*. The eight Studio Habits of Mind were applicable not only to the studio art class I worked with, but also to Art Education and Writing, so using this lens allowed me to assess across all three cases what faculty expected from students and also what students came to understand as a result of the lessons.
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I also wanted to be attentive to the experiences of faculty. How did working with the galleries affect their personal involvement and their ability to meet their course objectives? The Studio Structures framework was instrumental here, because it helped me to investigate the ways the lessons were organized in relation to course objectives.

1. THE DISCIPLINARY UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORK

Howard Gardner and Veronica Boix Mansilla developed the Disciplinary Understanding Framework “to assess students’ work and orient their development” (Wiske, 162). They were driven by the question “what qualities are embodied in deep understanding?” (161). The Teaching for Understanding framework defines understanding as a performance: “the ability to use knowledge in novel situations” (182).

The Understanding Framework includes four dimensions of understanding and four levels of understanding discernable in student performances in various disciplines. Although understanding manifests differently within the cultures of disparate domains, the levels and types of understanding can be described universally. Students demonstrate understanding using conventions relevant to their fields. So Gardner and Boix Mansilla sought to systematize qualities and levels of understanding “in a way that honors their disciplinary specificity but generates a language to talk about understanding across domains” (171). In their words:

“The quality of students’ understanding rests on their ability to master and use bodies of knowledge that are valued by their culture. More specifically, it rests on their ability to make productive use of the concepts, theories, narratives and procedures available in such disparate domains as biology, history, and the arts. Students should be able to understand the humanly constructed nature of this knowledge and to draw on it to solve problems, create products, make decisions, and in the end transform the world around them. Put differently, students
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should use knowledge to engage in a repertoire of performances valued by the societies in which they live" (162).

The four dimensions of understanding proposed in the Understanding Framework are knowledge, methods, purposes and forms. Within each of these, the framework describes four levels of understanding, sequentially: naïve, novice, apprentice and master.

**Dimensions of Understanding**

**Knowledge:**

This dimension assesses “the extent to which students have transcended intuitive or unschooled perspectives and the degree to which they can move flexibly between examples and generalizations in a coherent and rich conceptual web” (173).

**Methods:**

This dimension assesses “students’ ability to entertain healthy skepticism about what they know or what they are told as well as their use of reliable methods for building and validating claims and works as true, morally acceptable, or aesthetically valuable” (174).

- Methods for science: hypothesis-testing, control of variables, careful observation, interpretation of results (175).
- Methods for history: considering multiple perspectives on an event, building explanations that consider multiple causes, and identifying continuities and changes within a single process over time (175).
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Purposes:

This dimension assesses “students’ ability to recognize the purposes and interests that drive knowledge construction, their ability to use knowledge in multiple situations, and the consequences of doing so” (176).

Forms:

This dimension assesses “students’ use of symbol systems (e.g. visual, verbal, mathematical, and bodily kinesthetic) to express what they know within established genres or types of performances (e.g. writing essays, performing a musical, giving a presentation, or explaining an algorithm). Because of its communicative nature, this dimension also emphasizes students’ ability to consider audience and context as shaping forces in their performances” (178).

Levels of Understanding (186).

Naïve:

- Grounded in intuitive knowledge
- What is learned is unrelated to their everyday lives (not considering purposes)
- No ownership of what they know
- Performances don’t reflect understanding of where audience is coming from

Novice:

- Grounded in rituals and mechanisms of testing and schooling
- Performances are simple, rehearsed
- Validation from external authority

Apprentice:

- Performances demonstrate disciplinary concepts or ideas
- Knowledge construction seen as complex, following procedures and criteria used by experts
- With support, performances highlight the relationship between disciplinary knowledge and everyday life, examining opportunities and consequences of using knowledge
- Flexible and appropriate expression and communication to audience

Master:

- Performances are integrative, creative, critical
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- Knowledge is seen as complex, driven by conflicting frameworks and worldviews
- Using knowledge to reinterpret and act upon the world around them
- Expressed and communicated to audience in creative ways
- Metadisciplinary understanding: the ability to combine disciplines in interdisciplinary performances of understanding

2. STUDIO THINKING FRAMEWORKS

Whereas the Disciplinary Understanding Framework is used to assess what, and to what degree of mastery, students learn about a discipline, the Studio Habits of Mind frame “general cognitive and attitudinal dispositions (that) are developed in serious visual arts classes” (Hetland et al., 4). This specificity to visual arts classrooms is what made this lens appropriate for my study. But Hetland and her collaborators are careful to point out that these Habits of Mind are central to many types of learning and may also be developed in disciplines besides the visual arts; therefore the framework is useful in comparing how students develop in different domains.

Eight Studio Habits of Mind (Hetland et al., 6).

1. *Develop Craft*: learning to use tools, materials, and artistic (or other disciplinary) conventions
2. *Engage and Persist*: learning to embrace problems (of personal or disciplinary relevance), to develop focus and other mental states conducive to working and persevering at art (or other disciplinary) tasks
3. *Envision*: learning to picture mentally what cannot be directly observed and imagine possible next steps
4. *Express*: learning to convey ideas, feelings, and personal meanings
5. *Observe*: learning to attend more closely than ordinary and thereby noticing things that otherwise might not be noticed (taking time, noting and analyzing parts, synthesizing to think about the impact of the whole)
6. *Reflect*: learning to question and explain, to think and talk with others, to evaluate and judge one’s own work and the work of others in relation to standards of the field
7. *Stretch and explore*: learning to reach beyond one’s capacities, to explore playfully without a preconceived plan, and to embrace learning from mistakes and accidents
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8. Understand the Art World (or other disciplinary field): learning about the history and current practice of the field, and to interact with other members of the community of the discipline

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking of the Studio Habits of Mind simply as skills. They sound a lot like skills and, in fact, they are skills. But beyond a simple skill to be acquired, Hetland et al., using Perkins, Jay, & Tishman’s theory of dispositional thinking, emphasize that the Habits of Mind are in fact dispositions, involving three important parts that link to create opportunities for development: ability, inclination, and alertness.

**Ability (skill)**

Skills can involve physical, intellectual, and emotional capacities. Hetland et al. describe ability in a studio context:

“In a studio context (ability) involves controlling materials, tools, and processes such that intentions can be realized. But there are subtler skills, too, that involve students in learning to handle verbal and visual information, plan artworks and processes, make decisions about taking risks and addressing errors, and manage mental and emotional states to enhance their capacities to continue working.” (Hetland et al., 17-18).

“An assignment ‘works’ when it guides students at diverse skill levels to develop one or more habits that are just at the edge of their skill, so that their efforts advance their disciplinary understanding.” (Hetland et al., 18).

**Inclination (motivation)**

Linked closely to ability, inclination is the motivation to put skills to use—either intrinsic, extrinsic, or both. In highest-level work, students and experts are intrinsically inclined to make use of their abilities because they perceive relevance to their lives, pursuits, and interests.
Alertness (sensitivity/opportunism)

Alertness refers to one’s capacity for perceiving opportunities to put ability and inclination to use.

For example, maybe my grandfather was a skilled artist whose paintings showed a great mastery of perspective. Because I am alert to that quality of his work, I become interested in learning how to render accurate perspective. I have the inclination; I am intrinsically motivated. So I take a lesson and acquire the ability to make a perspective drawing. But then, leaving class, I am lost. Perspective is, of course, everywhere, but it seems too hard to grasp. If I don’t happen to notice that I’m standing on a tile floor—in other words, if I don’t have that alertness to the opportunity to use my skill and inclination—then I don’t develop. Unless, of course, someone intervenes to guide me, substituting their alertness for my own lacking internal alertness.

Three Studio Structures

A third framework mapped out in Studio Thinking is the Studio Structures, three flexible teaching formats that art teachers typically use. Again, these are broadly applicable to other disciplinary contexts, including gallery visits. For my purposes, the studio structures were useful because they allowed me to understand what faculty in my three cases typically do, to envision what they might do differently, and to assess how their gallery experiences fit into the structure of their curriculum.

1. The Demonstration-Lecture

In the studio classroom, the demonstration-lecture is “a brief, visually rich lecture by the teacher to the class (or to a small group) that conveys information that students will
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use immediately. Students see authentic art being made, tools being used, or images of work made by others. Demonstration-lectures, therefore, offer inspiring models” (Hetland et al., 22).

In a studio classroom context, demonstration-lectures have five main features:

1. Group focus
2. Visual emphasis
3. Immediate relevance
4. Brevity
5. Connection (relating skills, attitudes, and concepts already introduced to those that will be explored and developed soon)

In the case of another discipline, such as writing, the demonstration-lecture could include showing examples of written forms (e.g. essays, paragraphs, transition sentences) as a way to illustrate what students will presently be asked to do.

In some cases, the demonstration-lecture is expanded to be a demonstration-lecture interactive, in which student and teacher work together as a group to model what students will shortly be asked to do individually. This happens frequently in a gallery context, which offers the perfect opportunity for collective group focus on a single thing and for developing a conversation in which individuals’ ideas and personal meanings are built on similarities and contrasts with others’ comments and opinions.

2. Students-at-Work

In the studio classroom, during the students-at-work structure, students work independently or collaboratively on a project, typically one recently introduced in a demonstration-lecture. Their primary means for learning in this structure is through doing. Meanwhile, the teacher circulates and observes the students at work, offering timely, informal interventions. (Hetland et al., 26).
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In a studio classroom context, the students-at-work structure has four main features:

1. *Focus on making*
2. *Independent work*
3. *Ongoing assessment* (by teachers)
4. *Individualized interventions* (comments by teacher are tailored to the individuals' needs and goals with regard to the assignment)

The students-at-work structure could be similar in a disciplinary setting such as a writing class, although because writing requires quiet focus and doesn’t require the specific types of designated, messy space and tools that the art studio requires, writing students often do their students-at-work portion individually outside of class and return for assessment and interventions from the teacher later. However, sometimes in a writing context, smaller writing exercises do take place on the spot in the classroom.

In a gallery context, the students-at-work structure can be a rich time in which students connect intimately with what is on view and with one another—through careful observation, investigating works, comparing and contrasting, and other kinds of exercises designed to guide thorough experience and reflection.

3. *The Critique*

To paraphrase Studio Thinking, in the studio classroom, the critique is a chance for students and teachers to reflect as a group on their work and working process. Critiques do not have a rigid format or single purpose, but they do have two distinguishing features: they focus attention on students’ work and working process, and they are explicitly social.

In the studio classroom context, critiques have four main features:
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1. **Focus on artworks**
2. **Reflective** (thinking about meanings and expressions conveyed, what is successful, what is not, and why)
3. **Verbal** (putting reflections into words)
4. **Forward-looking** (discussion aims to guide the individual's future work and help them envision new possibilities)

A similar classroom structure is typical in the context of a writing class, for example, but tends to be referred to as a “workshop” rather than a critique. In this structure, the group has prepared in advance by reading individuals’ work and commenting on it. Similar to the studio critique, there is focus on individual work by the group, which gives verbal, reflective, forward-looking feedback.

Two of the frameworks that I have chosen (Habits of Mind and Studio Structures) refer to what is taught and learned in the studio classroom but also have implications beyond the studio context. So, too, my study is related to this realm but also extends beyond it.

For the Beginning Etching case, for example, the question was how gallery experiences enhanced studio learning, so the Studio Habits of Mind could be applied concisely. In the cases of Written Communication and Art Education, the curriculum was not designed around a studio classroom, so in asking how gallery experiences extended and enhanced the curriculum in these cases, the frameworks need gentle stretching.

Additionally, I was interested in documenting learning that took place (or didn’t take place) beyond what was planned in the curriculum, so in some cases these
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frameworks are an exact fit, and in others I stretch the frameworks to fit the context, which is what the theorists intended.
CASE STUDIES

Case 1: Written Communication
VISIT NARRATIVE

“The next thing that we’re going to do is an essay that has some elements of persuasion. I’ll talk a little bit about that, and then we’ll do an exercise of persuasion in here.”

From our perspective as gallery staff, it is, for a variety of reasons, particularly delightful when faculty get in touch in advance of showing up with a class to visit exhibitions. With Ricco Siosocco, a professor of the required first year course, Written Communication, a call to be sure that the Galleries would be open when he planned to bring his class allowed Darci, our Curatorial Assistant, to mark off the date and time on the staff calendar. That is how I found out about the upcoming visit.

10 Image courtesy of the Bakalar & Paine Galleries at MassArt.
Ricco is a seasoned gallery escort. Over the course of six semesters as an adjunct writing professor, he has made it a point to bring students to the galleries every semester; as a result, he is fairly comfortable using exhibitions and objects as a part of his course assignments. Each time he visits, depending on how the dates and hours when the exhibition is open correspond with his class schedule, he focuses his gallery visit on a different type of assignment. This time, the William Kentridge exhibitions that he wanted to use weren’t open until a bit later in the semester, so he designed the gallery lesson as a lead-in to a long-term assignment on persuasive essay writing.

Ricco’s visit with Written Communication can be described through the Studio Structures lens. It began with a demonstration-lecture in which he introduced most of the key concepts. Then, he moved into students-at-work time, during which he introduced one last important concept to individuals consecutively. Ricco ended with a critique, in which he further developed the idea introduced. Since the 50-minute gallery visit was an exercise leading up to a longer-term assignment, the entire visit structure could also be understood as a demonstration-lecture-interactive, with teacher demonstrating new knowledge and techniques and students practicing them with support before heading off to work on their own.

The main objectives of Ricco’s gallery visit were to engage students by changing the learning environment and focusing on art, and to use artworks as a tool to experiment with new concepts important to the discipline of writing. Specifically, the concepts introduced were claims (statements that combine facts and opinions) and evidence (including various specific types, all supportive of claims). Students were asked to experiment with making their own claims in small groups, using exhibited
artworks as the subject. Then, through all-class conversation guided by Ricco, they began to build an understanding of how claims are made stronger when supported by evidence. From these basic understandings established in the gallery, Ricco would build the following weeks’ assignments: first, a series of free-writes to help students pick a topic, then, a longer-term assignment to write a persuasive essay.

During the first 12 minutes of class in the gallery, Ricco introduced knowledge, methods, purposes, and forms of the discipline of writing in a demonstration-lecture, engaging students’ dispositions to understand the writing world. First, he told students that their next big assignment would be to write a persuasive essay and, to do that, they would need to choose a topic. So after this class session and for the following week, they would be responsible for five free-writes about topics that interested them. Ricco orally gave them five flexible free-write prompts and a printed handout detailing the prompts. Then he reviewed the concept of a persuasive essay, asking students what they remembered from past writing experiences. Finally, Ricco ended his demonstration-lecture with instructions on what to do next in the gallery. He did not orient students with a comprehensive overview of what they could expect from the entire gallery visit, but left certain key concepts and parts of the class structure to be inserted later.

Although museum education theory emphasizes the importance of orientation in setting up visitor expectations, which opens up the possibility of learning, Ricco’s choice to selectively orient students seemed to be strategic and worked well for his lesson.

The next 13 minutes were spent in a students-at-work structure. Four groups, each comprised of two or three students, walked around the gallery, chose artworks that interested them, and developed claims about the chosen artworks. Ricco asked
them to develop their claims in steps, engaging first their disposition to express by asking them to generate a list of ten opinions about the chosen piece, then their disposition to observe by listing ten observations, and finally, to develop craft by combining observations and opinions to write two or three claims. Students stretched & explored to make new forms of claims and engaged & persisted to see their work through. During this time, Ricco chatted with me for a bit, then walked around checking in with students and began to introduce the concept of evidence to each small group.

Twenty-five minutes, or half-way into the visit, Ricco brought the class back together for critique, and they began to move around the gallery as a cohesive group as Ricco lead them from one artwork to another, each small group in turn. Standing in front of their chosen artwork, each group presented their claim.

Whether or not he realized it, Ricco’s expectations for this critique structure were similar to a studio critique: he wanted honest, indiscriminate feedback (he told students “we should pick it apart whether it is a strong claim or whether it’s more fact or more opinion”) and he wanted students to adopt the Studio Habits of Mind in giving feedback, especially observing each others’ claims, engaging & persisting, envisioning, and stretching & exploring in making improvements to claims, and then understanding the writing world and reflecting / evaluating by exemplifying and collectively building understanding of what strong claims really are.

In small groups, students presented a range of strong and not-so-strong claims to the rest of the class and were able to learn from one another in either case. A strong claim provided a good example, enabling them to observe closely how strong claims are composed. A weak claim gave everyone the opportunity to stretch & explore in order to
envision what would strengthen it. As each group presented, Ricco continued to encourage the rest of the students to provide feedback, asking, “What do we think about this claim? Strong claim?”—and began to layer in basic knowledge about the concept of evidence by asking, “How would you guys start to provide evidence for that claim?” One group wasn’t able to finish a claim in time, so they worked through it together with the class, making the creative claim-writing process overt as students stretched & explored to develop craft as a group.

Half way through the critique, with two groups left to present, Ricco began another brief demonstration-lecture, formally introducing the concept of evidence, the methods used to present it, and the forms it can take: research, expert opinion, anecdote, statistics, and observation. He let these concepts sink in as the last two groups presented their claims, then finished out the last ten minutes with more demonstration-lecture by reviewing the forms of evidence and introducing the final form of invented analogies.

Ricco did not mention the parallels between these methods in the discipline of writing and in art making, which could have strengthened these art students’ inclination and alertness to use their new skills. It would also have given them an opportunity to develop understanding of the art world. Understandably, this last opportunity was not Ricco’s primary objective in a writing class, but it would have met larger institutional objectives for these art students’ learning.
FINDINGS

How Ricco and his students benefitted from their gallery visit:

By the end of the visit, Ricco’s students had engaged in each of the eight Studio Habits of Mind within the discipline of writing, and in some ways also in the discipline of Studio Art. The claims exercise helped them to cultivate the following dispositions:

1) **Develop Craft** by learning knowledge, methods and forms of the discipline of writing; by using the opportunity to try out crafting their own claims.
2) **Engage & Persist** by embracing the challenge of the claims exercise and persevering to improve their first attempts; by observing the more polished examples of others, boosting their inclination to further persist.
3) **Envision** by dreaming up new sentences in claim form from their collected observations and opinions.
4) **Express** by communicating opinions through writing, the symbol system of the target discipline (written communication).
5) **Observe** by looking closely at physical art objects; by “looking closely” at one another’s examples of written claims.
6) **Reflect** by presenting claims to the group and critiquing each one, assessing and asserting ideas.
7) **Stretch & Explore** by experimenting with new and challenging concepts; by learning from error.
8) **Understand the Writing World/Art World** by introducing knowledge, methods, forms, and purposes related to writing; by further exploring understanding about the art world through exposure to objects in the gallery.

There is clear evidence that students’ disciplinary understanding of writing increased as a result of their visit. The information or knowledge that was the seed of student understanding was introduced first in lecture form, which Ricco could easily have done in the classroom, but he appreciated that “artwork in a gallery setting is rich source material for writing prompts and discussion.” The gallery setting and the artworks displayed offered students the opportunity to experiment with their new knowledge through different methods and forms, deepening their understanding of...
purpose, which is closely linked to inclination and alertness to use understanding. In other words, the gallery visit both enabled students to acquire new knowledge and skills and increased the likelihood that they would be inclined to use them.

According to post-visit written responses from Ricco and his students, there was a general increase in inclination to learn about writing as a result of the gallery visit. This was generated first by the gallery atmosphere itself, which was a welcome change from the classroom setting. Shifting out of the ordinary classroom context generated a unique, visceral experience that was engaging to students, perhaps especially to art students. The authenticity of objects and the specialness of the gallery atmosphere has often been discussed as having an elevating effect, which Ricco and his students noted.

Second, increased inclination was generated by the opportunity the gallery setting offered for meaningful group work and shared focus. Because of the enjoyment and healthy pressure of social learning, students’ inclination to improve skills increased. For these students, given their artistic identities, group work in the classroom would not likely have been so generative.

Third, students’ inclination was also increased by focusing on artworks as the subject of the writing exercise, which demonstrated relevance to their lives and identities. As artists, they are intrinsically motivated to learn about art as a subject of innate, personal interest to them.

In his written reflection about the visit, Ricco noted, “when teaching writing to artists, I find it helpful to draw parallels between the artistic and writing processes.” Given his varied experience teaching at different types of colleges, Ricco recognized that art students are unique and that exhibitions provide a context in which to enhance
disciplinary understanding of writing by comparing it to art and by using art as a relevant subject by which to ground writing exercises.

Ricco also stressed the importance of interactivity in increasing his students’ inclination to learn, which was supported by the gallery setting: “I believe in active learning, and the environmental stimulation of out-of-class learning. Rather than passive lecturing about the writing process, I find it useful to make learning interactive and physical.”

Students’ comments in the gallery and in their post-visit reflections revealed varied levels of understanding, engagement, inclination and alertness. One benefit that they consistently expressed was a deepening understanding of art and writing as connected and related.

Although this ended up being implied rather than overtly discussed, the William Kentridge exhibitions were the perfect arena for Ricco and his students to explore the concepts of analysis and persuasion because persuasion is a technique Kentridge uses deliberately to influence his viewers.
Obstacles that the gallery presented for Ricco and his students

Situating his lesson in the Galleries also created obstacles for Ricco and his students. First, logistical challenges such as exhibition dates and open hours for the gallery being out of sync with class times and curriculum timelines meant that Ricco and gallery staff had to be flexible and tenacious if the gallery visit was to happen. Because he contacted us in advance, we were able to open the space for him outside of regular hours.

Ricco also faced logistical challenges in timing his lesson and making choices about how to use the space. He was repeatedly tripped up by lacking certain relied-upon classroom tools and conventions, like a blackboard and the engrained classroom behavior of facing front, taking notes, and giving extra focus to the teacher and what the teacher writes on the board. To get around this, Ricco could have relied on a handout, but not having that, he used repetition and envisioning, stating important concepts over and over again (“claims and evidence, claims and evidence”) and asking students to conjure the classroom scenario:

“If you imagined this is our chalkboard, I would just take a piece of chalk and write across the top ‘claims and evidence’ and then as good students you would write it down because it seems important since I’m writing it. But instead we have a lot of distractions.”

Distractions constituted a major set of obstacles for Ricco and his class. At the beginning of the visit, he happened to situate the group in an area of the gallery where a series of Kentridge’s animated films were projected, complete with audio that filled the space. Ricco’s impulse to use this space was a quick decision; knowing his demonstration-lecture would take some time and wanting students to be comfortable,
he went for the benches. This turned out to be a poor choice, since this area was the
darkest, loudest, most distracting part of the exhibition. Ricco even expressed that it
was distracting to him, as well. The problem could have been easily avoided by either
working in a different part of the gallery or by doing the demonstration-lecture before
entering the gallery.

Another thing that Ricco classified as a distraction was “digressions about the
artists’ meaning and art criticism, rather than the use of art as a springboard for
discussing the writing process.” He goes on to explain, “The art itself often inspires my
students and distracts from seeing the art as a vehicle for writing.” This comment points
to differences in understanding of purpose, both the purpose of the visit and the
purpose of learning the discipline of writing for art students. These differences in
understanding are reflected here in Ricco’s comments and was also reflected in the
students’.

This begs the question: what is the purpose of learning the discipline of writing
at an art school? Is it purely for writing’s sake, for the joy of creative expression? Is it to
learn to clearly communicate ideas? And if so, because written communication is
generally important, because written communication is important to artists, or because
written communication develops the artist’s ability to communicate visually? Getting
aligned institutionally about the answers to these questions would help professors like
Ricco to make most effective use of class time in the gallery and elsewhere.

Another obstacle that Ricco expressed is that the art on view isn’t always most
appropriate for him to design writing exercises around, or may not be a type of art he is
personally comfortable working with: “As a teacher of writing, I don’t always feel I have
the knowledge or understanding to create writing exercises around sculpture or video work.” Ricco is certainly not alone in his discomfort using certain types of art as a teaching tool. As mentioned in the literature review section, many liberal arts college museums have made extensive efforts to give faculty from disciplines unrelated to art the necessary training to teach with museum objects. Within arts colleges, perhaps similar efforts are necessary for faculty approaching the galleries from an interdisciplinary perspective that includes Liberal Studies disciplines. And as I have noted, even studio art faculty could benefit, since many are not comfortable or proficient at teaching outside of their chosen medium or atmosphere.

Where Ricco may differ from other art college faculty who teach studio art courses is in his willingness to recognize his deficits in museum, visual, and object literacy. Perhaps this willingness comes from the fact that he understands he shouldn’t be expected to have those types of literacy since they are obviously outside of his domain. In using the Galleries and incorporating art-based assignments into his curriculum, Ricco is going above and beyond what a writing teacher might normally do in order to make the most favorable learning environment for his students. Ricco can feel confident experimenting in the galleries. He is able to *confidently not know* because that type of knowledge is not an assumed part of his discipline. By contrast, studio art professors may feel that museum and object literacy are close enough to the knowledge-bases of their home disciplines that they either assume they have that knowledge or feel embarrassment at not having it, which, counter-intuitively, could make the gallery even more inhospitable for them than for Ricco.
How gallery staff might support faculty members like Ricco to stretch & explore

Had Ricco collaborated with gallery staff rather than planning and leading the gallery visit all on his own, we might have been able to support him in several ways. First and most simply, gallery staff could have acted as a sounding board for thinking through the visit logistics and objectives in advance. This could have helped Ricco to clarify his goals and anticipate possible challenges, such as the auditory distractions he faced. Thinking aloud and collaboratively, we may have been able to troubleshoot and find solutions in advance to problems like not having a board to write on. Perhaps Ricco would even have chosen to do the 7-minute demonstration-lecture in the classroom or outside of the gallery in the hallway.

It wouldn’t take a trained museum educator to think of these types of solutions—Ricco would likely have come to them himself had he found the time to visit the galleries and run through his lesson in advance. But faculty are busy and don’t often find time to do the legwork that would help them avoid these types of challenges. Part of the gallery educator’s role, therefore, could be to educate faculty about the importance and kinds of careful planning useful in preparing for and carrying out effective museum visits. In Case 2, I illustrate how much can be accomplished in about 15 minutes of conversation between a faculty member and a museum educator.

Museum educators could also help faculty like Ricco to understand that literacy in museum pedagogy is a complex, ongoing pursuit, not a static, simple skill. Offering trainings in museum pedagogy might have helped Ricco to repurpose what he referred to as “digressions about meaning” so that these would serve the goals he had in mind. For example, in his comments to me, Ricco mentioned the presence of persuasion in
William Kentridge’s work as a reason for choosing that exhibition. But he did not highlight that quality of the works in his visit.

Finally, finding a graceful way to offer feedback to professors like Ricco would enable museum educators to help faculty improve, empowering them to meet their own goals as well as broader institutional learning goals. In Ricco’s case, he might have further emphasized art and objects as a valid and valuable source of evidence in order to meet his own course learning goal of developing understanding of evidence as important to writing persuasive essays. Expanding his learning goals to include institution-wide goals, such as the goal to understand the art world, would have leveraged a paradigm shift, changing his conception of student interest in artworks as “digressions.”
Case 2: Beginning Etching
NARRATIVE PART 1: COLLABORATING TO PLAN THE VISIT

Professor Nona Hershey and I met up in the gallery to plan the upcoming visit with her Beginning Etching class. Against the soundstage of William Kentridge’s animated films—melodious murmurings I can still hear today—Nona taught me about her students, the course, and the discipline and curriculum of printmaking.

For the first ten minutes, I mainly listened. During this time, I was a learner. Filtering new knowledge through my understandings about museum pedagogy and about the *William Kentridge* exhibitions, I was generating ideas about how we could structure a gallery visit to elevate student learning and enhance Nona’s ability to teach what she wanted. But for the time being, I kept my ideas to myself. I simply listened, made notes, probed Nona for more information, and reflected back to her what I was hearing so that she would feel heard and so that I could be sure we shared the same understandings.

Most of the students in the class were sophomore printmaking majors who were also taking Beginning Silkscreen and Beginning Lithography. “So it’s all technique right now,” Nona said.

“They’re hardly dealing with ideas. The first semester for the printmaking majors—sophomore fall semester—is almost totally concentrating on techniques because we want them to be self-sufficient in the print studio. Then they can choose which of the media they want to use and develop their ideas when they go into the sophomore seminar next semester.”

It was late in the semester by this point, so Nona knew her students’ strengths and weaknesses well. “A lot of them are at the point in their careers where they’re trying to find out what their work is about,” she told me.

“They don’t really know yet what their own voice is. They’ll see something and they’ll say ‘Oh that’s cool, I’m going to try that.’ Then they’ll see another thing
completely different: ‘That’s cool, I want to try that.’ So they think they have to reinvent the wheel, coming up with a new idea every time. Or they’re satisfied too easily.”

Nona wanted to challenge her students to think more deeply and personally, and to persevere at the process of seeing prints through to new states. To overlay the Studio Habits Framework on Nona’s comments, by now, students had each honed their disposition to develop craft, so using their technical aptitude as a foundation, Nona felt they ought to begin to express more, and to stretch & explore. The gallery visit would therefore function as a segue, helping students to transition towards the more elevated thinking they would have to do the following semester.

Nona’s focus questions for students were What am I gut level interested in? What kind of imagery do I want to make and what does it mean? and What does the whole process mean to me? Whether these questions were clear to her before our conversation or became clear through the process of thinking aloud, I don’t know.

Finding meaningful answers to these questions would entail students deepening their understanding of printmaking as a discipline, as well as deepening their understanding of themselves as individuals. “What I think is particular about printmaking is the metamorphic quality,” Nona taught me.

“So what I’m trying to encourage them to do (is) not only to find their own voice, but to realize that in printmaking—just as what Kentridge is doing—you keep at it, you keep developing it. You let the imagery tell you where it needs to go and you keep adding to it.”

In other words, Nona wanted her students to understand the art world, to develop a disciplinary understanding of knowledge, methods and purposes to match their understanding of its forms, and to understand that printmaking engages the Studio
Habits to express, engage & persist, and stretch & explore, as well as to develop craft.

“Printmaking is so metamorphic,” she explained.

“So you can work additively and subtractively, and you know they could work on one plate for the whole year, basically... changing and changing and changing it. And that’s something that’s very much a part of printmaking but also a part of thinking. But, at their stage as sophomores the idea of taking something and developing it incrementally is – they haven’t experienced that much yet."

“So, would you like to have series and morphing as sort of a big idea?” I asked, and Nona agreed that she would. So, with a much-enhanced understanding of student background, course objectives, and the printmaking major and discipline, I began to make some suggestions about where in the exhibitions it might be useful to focus our attention, what artworks would be most relevant, and how we might structure the hour-long gallery visit.

In making suggestions, I was careful to do several things to make us both comfortable, clarify our roles, and ensure the success of our collaboration. First, I honored and encouraged the unique contribution that Nona could make given her expertise in printmaking and her authority and knowledge of students. I left space for her to feel empowered as a partner by acknowledging my weaknesses, but was conscientious (and honest) to present my weaknesses as curiosities so that my not knowing became an asset. To this, Nona responded by expressing weaknesses and curiosities of her own. We were both engaged and excited. Here is an excerpt of our conversation:

India: “So what’s really interesting to me about you and I doing this together is you have a whole knowledge about the work that’s in here, even if you don’t know specifics about it, that I don’t have because I don’t know a whole lot about printmaking. I know, probably, very little. And I’ve learned about, I mean I’d never heard of sugarlift before this show came here. So I would be personally really interested, if it’s relevant to your class, to sort of share in the guiding of
this visit in a way that you’re able to continue, as you have already started in your class, to share your expertise. And then probably what I have to offer is some knowledge about the specific pieces and—"

Nona: “Well also being able to draw them out is probably something you’re very good at, I would imagine.”

India: “A lot of my background is in conversations in the galleries, so I’m pretty comfortable guiding a conversation.”

Nona: “So that part is very interesting to me; to see how they respond to that. That’s great. I mean I’d love to—sometimes I don’t necessarily know what they’re thinking. You know, in critiques they might be guarded or careful, so I’m very curious to see how they would respond with you.”

Nona and I were both able to make meaningful contributions that drew from the reservoirs of our respective disciplines and experiences, and also to identify gaps in our knowledge or weaknesses that we were interested to develop. I was inclined to learn more about printmaking, first so that I could make better-informed interpretations of artwork, and second, so that I would be better able to provide information for visitors, should they be interested. Nona was inclined to learn more about guiding conversation so that she could draw students out more during critiques.

Also during the portion of our meeting in which I made suggestions, I provided information about the exhibitions when necessary and modeled some possibilities for group dialogue based on my past experiences with the artworks on view. At some points I was assertive, expressing convictions about which artworks would be most powerful to use. Although Nona was a very sophisticated viewer, I had spent more time with the work in the exhibitions, giving me the privilege to attune more to some of its complexities. My convictions about where to focus were based on my knowledge of museum education theory and on my previous experiences leading groups in the
exhibitions. They sometimes reflected logistical issues (such as the size of a given piece of artwork in relation to the size of the group, which could rule a piece out as a viable place to collectively focus) and other times were more reflective of meaning.

When I made suggestions about how we might structure the gallery visit, they reflected my sense of appropriate visit timing, pace, and rhythm, and also highlighted a hidden objective that I had noted from Nona’s comments:

India: “Since it sounds like you’re interested in getting a glimpse into how (students are) thinking about their own work, one thing that might be really nice—I like to sort of balance in a gallery visit time working as a group with time working individually or as partners or something. I wonder if it would be useful to have them do a written reflection and ask them maybe one or two questions that give them a tie-in to start reflecting on how what they’re seeing relates to their own ideas?”

In posing this suggestion, I naturally used a lot of softening phrases (sort of, or something..., maybe) to take myself out of a position of authority, and framed my ideas as curiosities or questions (I wonder if it would be useful...?) rather than as heavy-handed assertions about what should happen. These choices reflected my sensitivity to possible authority issues around our age differences, Nona being considerably older than I, and around disciplinary expertise, a sensitivity I had developed due to past experiences with artist professors who were less open to the collaborative process of being co-learners.

In a total of seventeen minutes, our planning conversation was complete. Next, it was up to me to write a lesson plan for the visit, which I spent a few hours developing over the course of the next week.
Because my intention for the gallery visit was for Nona, students, and I all to be co-learners, it didn’t make sense for me to use a demonstration-lecture structure, but I did begin the experience with some orientation. First, I welcomed the group to the Bakalar & Paine Galleries, introduced myself as Curator of Education, and talked a bit about my professional role as a means of alerting them to future career possibilities. I was not much older than these students during the museum visit in which I first learned of the field of museum education. I had chosen art history as a major, but as my academic interests developed, I grew frustrated with the authoritative position art

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11 Image courtesy of the Bakalar & Paine Galleries at MassArt.
Case 2: Beginning Etching

history often took. With its emphasis on visitor-constructed meaning, museum education solved a problem for me. Ever since, I have believed in the importance of exposure to as many career choices as possible during undergraduate study.

Also as a part of the orientation, I tried to set students at ease and therefore open up the possibility of learning by letting them know what they could expect from the hour we would spend together. Then, I tried to wake them up a bit personally and give them some authority by talking directly about them and their background:

India: “So, you’re all printmakers. So as viewers, you’re a little bit unique as a group. This show has a lot of different types of prints in here, and I’m not a printmaker. I’m the only one in this whole collection (of people) that is not a printmaker, so I’m really excited to learn from you guys and hear what you have to say.”

Nona: “We’ll try to treat you well!”

Next, I tried to discover what knowledge the students brought with them about William Kentridge and his work in order to honor it, engage them, not have to be didactic, and to utilize it in keeping my comments relevant to them. Where there were gaps we felt important to fill in, Nona and I provided additional information about Kentridge, his background as a white, Jewish South African son of trial lawyers who fought Apartheid, and about his art-making themes and techniques. Then, I began to establish expectations that I hoped would serve us throughout the gallery visit.

I wanted to give students permission to begin with the simplest possible observations about artworks. Beyond permission, I actually wanted to ask them to slow down and restrict themselves to stating obvious observations first, before moving into interpretation. I wanted them to do this for three reasons: first, because the obvious can be still profound; second, because in general, what is obvious to one person isn’t
obvious to all, and in group conversation, we build upon one another’s observations and opinions; and third, because, when commenting on one’s own domain around colleagues, the pressure for insight can be great. I wanted to relieve this pressure.

Also, I knew that Nona would articulately model a highly developed visual literacy for students and I wanted their experience to be magnetized between two opposite types of inspiration: on one side, the insightful artist-spokesperson they might aspire to be and on the other, a firm support to remain honest and confident with who they are right now.

We started out looking at a very large lithograph called Middle Aged Love (Couple Dancing). (Image on previous page, left). I ask students to take stock of the image, noticing all its parts, then to share the most obvious observations.

Student 1: “There’s two figures.”

Student 2: “They look like they’re dancing or fighting.”

India: “Ok. So we’re already getting a little bit into narrative. What else do we notice about this?”

Nona “They’re splattered either with age or blood, maybe. Or dirt of some kind.”

India: “Splattered with age blood or dirt. So what do you see that makes you think they’re splattered with age blood or dirt?”

Here, using a Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) technique, I was asking Nona to ground her interpretation in visual evidence from the piece.

Nona: “Well they’re so, just so many markings on them that are... seem to me representing that. I mean he’s very careful about making markings that look like wood (beneath the figures’ feet). So he’s definitely trying to describe something specific. So, on the body it could be age marks, it could be just the difficulty of living through life, which becomes manifest as some kind of scarring, or it could be dirt or blood, in my mind.”
India: “Ok, so you’re focused really on the marks that are on these bodies. These two figures that are sort of splattered—”

Nona: “Yeah, because they’re not describing musculature and they’re not describing clothing. They feel to me like skin, or experience.”

India: “Ok. Do you guys agree with that?”

I wanted to be careful to keep the discussion open and to include many opinions. Nona, too, invited disagreement with humor:

Nona: “I hope not!” (laughter)

India: “What do you think? Does it look like age marks?”

Student: “To me it might be also reflecting, you see the marks in the background? Um like on the wall, cause I think that’s a wall. And then there’s a kind of markings at the top, which is like the separation between the wall and I guess like the sky or the ceiling, so I guess maybe he’s just making marks on both surfaces to make the image feel more coherent. Or not coherent, cohesive.”

India: “Ok so I’m going to just take that apart piece by piece...”

When students made complex observations like this, I engaged Visual Thinking Strategies and the habit of mind to reflect by rephrasing what they had said. I did this to validate their position, ensure we had all heard and understood the comment, and to keep the rest of the group included by integrating one person’s ideas with my comments that advanced us toward new observations and ideas.

As we spent time together looking, students demonstrated a number of disciplinary understandings and Studio Habits of Mind. We focused on developing craft and they enlightened me as to how Kentridge might have done his mark making. They observed & expressed, and made note of how Kentridge expresses. They demonstrated
Case Studies

Case 2: Beginning Etching

a developing understanding of the relationship between maker and viewer, which as
artists, is critical. And they engaged & persisted in making reflections and observations:

India: “Ok, random marks and specific marks together creating a feeling of
unplanned execution. Does everybody agree with that? Does anybody have a
different interpretation of his mark making?”

Student 1: “He’s creating movement.”

India: “So what kind of marks create the movement?”

Student 1: “There’s a lot of diagonals. And that one is annoying me a lot, actually.”

India: “You’re irritated by this one right here?”

Student 1: “Yeah! What is that?!”

India: “Is there anything else that goes with that line?”

Student 1: “It’s breaking both of their legs!”

Student 2: “He’s so like, careful about this and then there’s like that one (line)
randomly cut in and, I mean, maybe it’s supposed to be movement on top of
them but then it’s like, erased so that it would go through this black part, this
black part, and then it’s like not fully expressed there, and then it’s super dark.
So is it something or is it just supposed to be movement? I don’t know. I’ve just
been staring at it for a while.”

Student 3: “Also, he outlines the figures multiple times, and so that doesn’t give
us a direct line. It’s multiple lines, so that creates movement as well. You can see
the figure is not standing still, obviously.”

India “So the diagonal lines are one way of showing movement, and also the
multiple outlines of the figures are showing movement. And this line that seems
kind of like an anomaly down here. Anybody else irritated by that?”

Student 4: “No I like it.”

India: “What do you like about it?”

Because Nona’s goal was for students to develop a sense of their own voice and
taste, I challenged them to express their own varying opinions. We tried out different
forms of expression; when I asked them what words might describe the anomalous mark in question, they responded with spontaneous, unforgiving, aggressive, automatic, fast, gestural, and fluid.

We worked on recognizing and embracing ambiguity in the image and its meaning—the ambiguity of dancing or fighting; the ambiguity of inside or outside. Ambiguity is an important trend in Kentridge’s work and also in understanding the art world.

Student: “I mean, I think those things are just some things he’s trying to say. And we’re just meant to interpret it.”

India “So he’s giving us some indications to go with. So let’s go for a minute with the idea that they’re dancing. What has he done here to support the idea that they’re dancing, as one possibility?”

Here I was taking her suggestion and adapting a VTS strategy to build evidence as a group for one possible interpretation. Then, I ask them to stretch & explore, envisioning how Kentridge might engage & persist to make changes to this piece if he wanted express something different.

We stayed with this image for almost twenty minutes before moving to another area of the exhibition. Another group may not have been able to sustain interest in a single piece for that long, but these students, as artists, were inclined to engage & persist. The discussion was fluid and willing.

Now that we were warmed up at making careful observations, we moved to another area to focus on Kentridge’s Typewriter Series, consisting of nine small sugarlift prints and two larger ones:
I asked the group again to start out very simply, but we quickly progressed to a more sophisticated level of observation, insight, and interpretation. This is likely in part due to having close observation skills warmed up and engaged, and partly due to Nona’s contributions, which, sophisticated and confidently courageous, inspired and challenged students to elevate their thinking.

Nona: “Well, these were made in 2003, and I’m just thinking in 2003 nobody had typewriters any more. So there’s something—it brings a kind of nostalgia, in a way, a kind of urgency in my mind, about typing out what could be a flier or some kind of an avviso about something happening. Or a news—there’s a rawness about it that seems to me like the kind of thing that wouldn’t be, you know, sit down and write an offhand modern love letter or anything like that. I mean, there’s something very urgent and bleak about just the fact that they’re typewriters, that they’re so black, that they’re isolated seems to me, made in 2003, that they’re representing something different (not just typewriters).”

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12 Image courtesy of the Bakalar & Paine Galleries at MassArt.
Nona was modeling the habits to engage & persist and to stretch & explore as a viewer. She was guessing, based on her observations of the image and of the feelings it inspired in her. She was thinking aloud, exposing her ideas half-baked, and they were not weak ideas. Students immediately elevated their comments:

Student: “The style he’s using, sugarlifting, it harkens back to a typewriter the way you have to let the ink dry.”

And they also became more courageous. One student said, “I don’t know if it means anything, but all of the typewriters are actually stenographers typewriters, not just regular typewriters.” No one else in the group, including Nona and I, had realized this, and it changed the way we saw the works. Suddenly we had new associations and meanings.

For a while I let the conversation unfold without managing it, but keeping Nona’s objectives in mind, I wanted to highlight the concept of series and the fact that artists have the advantage (also the burden) of a great deal of choice:

India: “So, just again to reflect on these as a series, what is the advantage that William Kentridge gains by creating a series and by showing these as a series, that he couldn’t have done if he showed us just one?”

Students discussed this a bit. And then, to advance our objectives even further, Nona focused some comments on these students’ habits as artists, pushing them to make sure they understood the value of iterations and morphing in the context of their own work, as well as in relation to Kentridge’s. In other words, pushing them to engage & persist and to stretch & explore:

Nona: “When you folks are trying to come up with an idea or a theme or a project, often you are coming up with brand new ideas and you don’t want to repeat what you’ve already done. So when you see something like this, I mean, it is a
repeat of the same thing nine times, in this series right here. Is that boring? Or is it powerful? Or, if it's not boring, how come it's not boring? Cause he said the same thing nine times.”

Student: “I think it’s someone restating similar information without saying the same thing. It’s the difference, I mean... restating it restating it restating it and making it each time clearer and clearer by using the conglomerate all at the same time, as well as each individual statement on their own.”

Student 2: “I think they all represent different things. These are all obviously little machines that physically were used to do different things. You know, they were all in different courtrooms or wherever. And so I think that when you see all of them together it’s like this whole portion of history, like all separate things that are like, all together showing themselves to you, kind of.”

Student 3: “Having this many allows you to compare and contrast each one of them. And they’re kind of set up like portraits. Like, there’s not a lot of space and they’re all turning the same way.”

Student 4: “You can see each one, and you have the image in your mind like you know what a typewriter is, but seeing several different you’re forced to bring yourself out of that mindset and process each one as its own individual piece, like as a machine rather than just as a typewriter, as you would if you were processing it as an individual image.”

India: “So, as viewers, we’re actually forced to confront each of these as individual rather than just thinking ‘Oh, typewriter. Simple. Typewriter.’ It requires a little bit more of us and we see a little bit more of the differences between them. It’s interesting to think of them as portraits.”

Through these comments, students developed and expressed an understanding of the value of series, which was a key objective of the visit.

With the remaining twenty minutes, I asked students to explore individually, moving freely throughout the exhibition with a clipboard and pencil and a writing prompt that asked them to reflect on their own style and interests in relation to Kentridge’s work. My intention was to achieve Nona’s goal for students to think about the question what am I gut-level interested in? and to have them get into relationship with Kentridge’s work, bumping up against themselves in the process.
1. Choose a piece that speaks to you by somehow relating to your interests, what your own work is about, or what you would like your own work to be about. Get comfortable, take your time and look closely. Describe how Kentridge achieves or expresses what interests you. How is his work similar to your own and how is it different?

2. Find a piece that you perceive to be about something that doesn't interest you. It could actually be repellent to you, or simply not hold your attention. Get comfortable and give it your attention. Looking closely, describe what you dislike. What about you makes you dislike it?
FINDINGS

Viewing and writing activity outcomes

The viewing and writing activity enabled students to develop many of the Studio Habits of Mind in a way that was unique to the gallery context, and to viewing. Students were asked to engage & persist, choosing works of interest to them and spending time comfortably thinking about why they were interested. They were also asked to persist even if they weren't comfortable or interested. By choosing a piece they disliked and making a decision to stay with it, interrogating why they disliked it, they developed the ability to persist under challenging conditions. In some cases, they grew to like a piece they initially disliked, or to appreciate parts of it.

In many cases, spending time individually observing artworks with the expectation of expressing a response allowed students to identify qualities of artworks that either attract & engage or repel & don’t engage. In noting these qualities, students were both identifying personal tastes and developing their disciplinary understanding of some possible methods for achieving certain results in printmaking. Qualities they mentioned that attracted & engaged them were ambiguity, humor, irony, form, raising questions, evoking mood, and resonating with personal taste. The qualities they mentioned finding repellent & unengaging were poor technique, poor form or composition, obvious meaning, lack of emotion, lack of a figure, and triggering negative associations or personal connotations.

The viewing and writing activity caused some students to reflect on the relationship between artist and viewer, which was also a form of self-reflection. They saw that viewers’ opinions and interpretations can change with time—that viewer
opinion can be based on personal association and is therefore not always a value judgment. One student came to understand that if a viewer has difficulty getting meaning out of a piece, the onus could be on the artist or on the viewer: “Sometimes I find that a work without a figure is difficult to read the meaning of,” she said. Another student, feeling connected to the ambiguity in *Middle Aged Love (Couple Dancing)*, expressed that, by leaving artworks open-ended, artists can empower viewers to “finish” the piece by giving it meaning: “I often find myself... starting on a piece with one thing in mind, however undeveloped an idea may be, and letting it take it and myself to some middle ground, later to be determined by the viewer.”

Students often expressed that what they observed resonated in some way with what they do or who they are, creating a mirroring effect that also caused them to self-reflect. What they saw in Kentridge’s artworks reminded them of their own work, interests, or methods. There was resonance with personal experiences, subject matter, concepts of interest, processes, forms, and techniques they had used. Recognizing themselves in the other was an opportunity for self-awareness and developing a sense of identity, as artists and as individuals.

Sometimes, noticing a resonance between the artwork they were viewing and their own work challenged or inspired students to stretch & explore or to develop craft. Kentridge’s work became the model that elevated their expectations of themselves, thereby increasing inclination. In these cases, the connection or resonance with their own concerns was key, hooking them by being similar, then luring them to improve by being different. These motivating resonances were in response to forms and processes, techniques, and meanings. For example:
Process:
“The markings (in Kentridge’s prints) are sometimes slow and fluid while other times full of excitement, anguish, and uncertainty. This can relate to my work because I often find myself getting worked-up and exasperated in certain parts but wanting to find peace with very simple movements and marks.”

Meaning:
“By Kentridge putting the figure in this wasteland setting, it expresses to me that it has gone through a struggle and is speaking out. This interests me because I hope that my work will one day portray the presence of me and people like me.”

Being in the role of viewer and reflecting on themselves as artists allowed some students to identify problems, develop goals, and ask questions about their own work. This created an increase in inclination to envision solutions, and to engage & persist in their work to achieve their goals and answer their questions. For example:

“I am attracted to the organic flow to the piece and the small size of the print. I wish I could amplify my own imagery to create something powerful. His mark making is very simple and loose. My own work is very tight. I would like to loosen up and let my work have a freer feeling to it.”

In other cases, viewing Kentridge’s artworks in the gallery actually helped students find solutions to existing problems or answers to existing questions. One student discovered in the piece *Atlas Procession* 1 that, “the circle gives the piece a rotation and meaning in itself that I wish to do in my piece. I’m very interested in patterns and cycles in everyday life and am striving myself to figure out how to correctly execute it.”

In sum, I found that engaging in this viewing and writing activity as individuals and as artists put students in touch with who they are, what they do, and who they can
Case Studies  Case 2: Beginning Etching

become. To recap in simpler language, below is a list of some of the things students learned:

1. Here’s what I like, here’s what I don’t like
2. I am a viewer, I am a maker
3. I do this kind of stuff, which is similar to that kind of stuff (that a professional does)
4. I do this but could try that
5. I want to do/know/figure out this
6. Now I understand how I can do this!

It is also noteworthy that several students chose the artwork we had focused on as a group, *Middle Aged Love (Couple Dancing)* as the piece that speaks to you by somehow relating to your interests. One student chose it as the piece they disliked but said that their opinion had changed through our lengthy discussion:

“When I first walked in I disliked the lithograph of the two dancers. But after discussing it and looking at it in more depth, I had a greater appreciation of the piece and Kentridge’s successful balance of grace and aggression.”

This shows that our visit alerted students to the fact that spending more time viewing and discussing artworks can affect our opinions and the meanings we perceive.

**Benefits to students**

In addition to the outcomes detailed above, many of the students mentioned in their post-visit reflections that after the gallery visit they went on to try out new ideas or techniques that were inspired by William Kentridge’s artwork. Here is the question I asked them and some of their responses:

*Did your visit to the William Kentridge exhibition influence your art-making practice? How so?*

YES (6 out of 14 students):

- “Made me want to be more expressive with my work.”
- “Yes, after seeing his lithographs and etchings it inspired me to be more adventurous in my own work and process.”
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- “Very much so! His chine-collé, selective wiping and even his charcoal animations. I’ve been incorporating all of these into my latest works!”
- “Kentridge inspires me to be looser but it’s difficult sometimes. The piece that reminded me of my childhood lake inspired me to do my final as a map of my lake but I changed my plate/idea in the end because I was unhappy with it.”
- “Yes because I love William Kentridge’s work.”
- “Very much so! I really enjoyed his fingerprints as shading in his etchings. I’ve been trying it out recently. Also just his ability to work large in printmaking. Sometimes a big copper plate can be intimidating!”

William Kentridge, Untitled (artist bending), 1998

NOT SPECIFICALLY BUT STILL A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE (4 out of 14 students):
- “No but I enjoyed seeing his work”
- “Not really but it was interesting to look at.”
- “Not particularly but I do enjoy his work and was inspired by his innovative ideas.”
- “It gave me more knowledge about the artist and added more to the things I take in as a viewer. I haven’t consciously been influenced by the exhibit but who knows?”

NO (1 out of 14 students):
- “No.”

INCONCLUSIVE (3 out of 14 students):
- 1 left blank
- “I don’t feel that it impacted me any more than anything else.”
- “I did not sleep last night. Can’t think. Sorry.”

13 Image courtesy of the Bakalar & Paine Galleries at MassArt; shows fingerprint technique mentioned by the student.
Benefits to professor Nona Hershey and discussion of implications

According to Nona, if she had guided students on her own in the William Kentridge exhibition, she would have “probably only (given) a brief introduction of history and technique.” In collaboration, we were able to offer much more.

After the visit, Nona sent me this warm email:

India, Thanks so much for the wonderful visit you orchestrated for my class. The inclusive way you manage to pull thoughts from the students is marvelous. It was a pleasure seeing them interact in the atmosphere you create. Nona

Her mention of “pulling thoughts from the students” points to one significant way that the work of museum educators can extend to the studio classroom: by enhancing critiques.

Benefits to me / gallery education at MassArt

Nona’s knowledge of her students’ interests and of their developmental challenges helped me immeasurably in planning the gallery visit. Without this insider information, I would have had to guess what would be relevant for the students, leaving me less able to plan and lead a successful visit.

Collaborating with Nona was also of great benefit to me. By fully inhabiting the role of expert printmaker, Nona left me free to facilitate. I became a foil. I didn’t need to spend extra time researching the art of printmaking in order to be well enough informed to relate to the group of printmaking students. Nona had that fully covered and, in fact, my not knowing was an asset. I let Nona and the students teach me, which, to borrow a phrase from art education professor John Crowe, was a way of “fooling them into learning.”
Partnerships like this are crucial if exhibitions are to become relevant to campus life. The benefits of having built this relationship with Nona extended into the following semester; the gallery education team had just developed a new faculty resource in the form of detailed information packets about each exhibition. We sent them out, but knowing how busy faculty are and how much information they are flooded with during the course of a short semester, I wanted to use my personal network to generate interest by word of mouth. Nona was the first to respond to my email. She said the resource was “FABULOUS!” and was thinking of bringing her junior and senior printmaking majors to see the shows—which, incidentally, did not include a single print.

Response from other faculty about the information packets was minimal. It is impossible to know who looked at them and to what extent they found them useful. But Nona did, and I suspect the special relationship we had developed through the simple collaboration detailed in this case study increased her alertness and inclination to engage with anything that had to do with me or the Bakalar & Paine Galleries. And hopefully, as she shares her experiences among her community at the college, there will be a ripple effect.
Case 3: Art Education and Family Day
Family Day Background

In the spring semester of 2008, our education team – which at the time consisted of one full-time staff member acting as director of education, me in a half-time, grant-funded gallery educator position, and a student intern – held our first family event at the Bakalar & Paine Galleries. For twelve years, the only educational programming at the Galleries had been Looking to Learn, a 3-visit program that coupled classroom with gallery learning for 4th – 12th grade Boston Public School students. In an effort to expand our offerings to a larger audience, we decided to hold a free community event that would use guided conversation, interactive activities, and art making as a way for visitors to engage with the artworks on view in our current exhibitions.

For our first Family Day, there was fairly good turnout of about 100 people during the 5-hour event and feedback was positive. We kept the event fun and creative, providing materials, ideas, and refreshments, and we learned that the value of Family Day for visitors was that, in addition to having richer experiences with the exhibition than they would have independently, visitors were bonding with one another through the experience of shared focus on artworks and projects. We also learned that, with so much going on in the galleries, it was not the best format for group conversations with visitors.

Behind the scenes, we found that it was hard to find volunteers to staff the event. We relied mainly on MassArt students from the Art Education (Art Ed) department, whose volunteer time could count as “observation hours” for their major, but they were surprisingly hard to come by and, with a couple significant exceptions, they were also surprisingly unengaged and unenthusiastic as activity leaders.
The following semester we offered Family Day again with the fine-tuned goal for visitors to make meaningful connections to artworks and to each other. In the months and weeks leading up to the event, we busily designed the activities and prepared art-making materials for each station, in addition to negotiating institutional protocol and handling an array of other important event-planning details. We designed, printed, and distributed marketing materials, built relationships to increase our community audience, garnered refreshment donations, established wayfinding and orientation methods, and worked to pin down and train student volunteers.

On the day of the event we were excited but exhausted, drained by the planning process and torn between the multiple roles we had to play. Because we didn’t have enough volunteers, we were running activity stations, welcoming and engaging visitors, replenishing refreshments and materials, and overseeing the overall flow of the event. When rainy weather kept our numbers down to 75 visitors in 5 hours, we were both relieved and dismayed.

There had to be a better way. If we could engage Art Ed students through a class, I thought we might solve several problems. We wouldn’t have trouble staffing the event and the students would be better prepared and more enthusiastic. If we challenged students to plan and provision for activities, we would be free to handle other event logistics. By asking students to partner in hosting Family Day, they would become invested in its outcome and show up intrinsically motivated to engage in high quality gallery teaching. Plus, the relationship would be symbiotic. Students would learn a great deal about lesson planning and about the specifics of teaching in the gallery context, which I believed to be important exposure.
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Case 3: Art Education and Family Day

Those were the motivating ideas that led me to approach Art Ed faculty to collaborate. At the time, there was no way of knowing that the unexpected benefits would also be many. Nor did I realize that the partnership would involve a tremendous amount of extra work. But no matter. The work has also been tremendously fun and rewarding.

Approaching and Collaborating with Faculty

I happened to approach Professor John Crowe with my Family Day partnership idea at an opportune moment. Nearing the end of his career, John had been teaching Pre-Practicum I for many years and was feeling awfully stale. "I think I was desperate," he recalled in an interview ten months later. "So I think when you came my way to propose it that even though the time was really crunched, I jumped at it because I was really reaching some frustration." In fact, this was the last semester he would teach the course, succeeded the following year by professor Aimée DeBose.

John understood the proposal I was making through the lens of educational theory:

"We talk a lot about as one teaching model: posing challenges, problem solving model.... So (the Family Day project) had that sense for me as a teacher. It was a challenge..... It's like you, India, challenge me and my class to do this for Family Day.... It was engaging, it was real, and it really motivated me. I had a professor that used to say 'if you're not learning—meaning the teacher—they're not learning.' So, I was learning along the way and modeling that for them."

During the interview, John and I were both warmly surprised at how detailed and positive his memories were. "If this is sticking with me (ten months) later, it must have been really big. And it was! For me to be this clear—" he said, "I think it's a wonderful thing and a wonderful tradition that I hope continues!"
I asked John to recall what had appealed to him about the initial idea:

“It was in my mind that why am I here in this classroom and we’re role playing 3rd graders, or we’re role playing adults or high school kids, and it’s all so artificial, and here they are juniors and they haven’t interacted with real students, real folks!”

The realness of the project was an enhancement to the Pre-Prac 1 curriculum that was reflected in responses by both John and by Aimée Debose. The main course objective was to introduce students to a variety of theoretical models of teaching. Without the Family Day component, the course content could be dense, dry, and impractical. Students would try out the various teaching theories by writing hypothetical lesson plans that they would never teach. John and Aimée could tell stories from their own teaching experiences to enliven and contextualize the various models, and students would also conduct various observations of other teachers in practice, but they would never have the opportunity to teach themselves, which meant not being able to learn from their own strengths and weaknesses.

In contrast, the Family Day project took the course content out of the hypothetical realm and made it real. It offered students personal experiences to pin their theoretical understandings to and gave faculty a pertinent way to talk about theories throughout the course of the semester.

Adding Family Day to the mix also livened the course up tremendously, adding components of what John called urgency and drama:

“You know, the urgency, I can’t stress that enough really. Urgent curiosity, like let’s do! or let’s find out! or what about this in the moment? Well, why don’t we just do it! So if you talk about (my experience) as an instructor, it’s that urgency that’s provided (by Family Day) that I find really motivating...to teach and plan about. That really worked for me, and for (students), I think. I’m sure it wouldn’t work for everybody.”
And in fact, he was right. In contrast, Aimée found the urgency of the short timeline to be challenging. Because the Family Day assignment was planned around an inflexible exhibition schedule, Aimée had to adapt her curriculum to fit it, which is one of the few things she says she would change about the project if she could. In her written reflection after the event, she said:

“The timeline...limited my flexibility in scheduling course content.... The time deadlines and predetermined time frame prevented some more in depth discussions of material which might have helped clarify content (for students) if we had addressed it earlier in the semester.”

But for John, having to work around the short, fixed exhibition schedule was a benefit because it put students in touch with the kind of “nimbleness” that will be required of them as teachers:

“We have to be nimble as teachers.... That condensed time frame, it was really how real things can happen.... In this profession, whether they’re museum educators or whatever, they’ve got to go with whatever comes their way! Like, how do you make it work? You just have to be flexible and just go with the flow. We can plan all we want on paper, but it’s just different in the real world.”

In addition to the differences John and Aimée felt about the timeframe, there were also significant differences in how they preferred to negotiate the planning and teaching process. From my perspective, they were equally willing, hard working, fun, and brilliant in their own ways as collaborators, but differences in personality, levels of experience, work habits, and learning styles meant that I needed to be flexible, responding to each partnership distinctly.

With Aimée, the planning process began much earlier and was much more involved. We met over the summer to discuss the possibility of continuing the Family Day/Pre-Prac 1 project during the fall semester. For Aimée, everything was new.
only was it her first time teaching the course, it was also her first semester as a professor. For eight years, she had been teaching elementary art classes. Having graduated from MassArt with a Master of Science in Art Education (MSAE), Aimee had strong disciplinary understandings as well as cultural understandings of the Art Ed department and of MassArt as an institution. But she had a lot to wrap her head around as she developed her curriculum for Pre-Prac 1, so committing to Family Day required a good deal of courage and faith.

Aimee was not the only one new to her position. Since the previous Family Day collaboration with John Crowe’s class, my boss had retired and I had been promoted to the full time position of Curator of Education. So, much like Aimee, I had a solid background but was just finding my way as a leader and manager, training new staff and developing new partnerships, such as this.

My preliminary meeting with Aimee functioned as a way for us to share information and get to know each other professionally. I oriented her about Family Day as an event, about how the collaboration with PP1 had worked the previous semester and about the fall exhibitions. With me, Aimee she shared what she knew so far about her course objectives.

It became clear very quickly that we would work together smoothly. Aimee and I are both out-loud thinkers and share a delight in deep and thorough conversation. We met for over two hours, setting the tone for many rich and lengthy meetings in the coming weeks and months, during which we would support and challenge one another intellectually, personally, and professionally as we found our way through failures and successes.
The way in which Aimée and I collaborated stood in stark contrast to my collaboration with John. Though both partnerships shared a tone of freshness and curiosity and a foundation of mutual support and respect, with John, the pacing was different and ultimately our roles overlapped less. John preferred planning and corresponding to be quick and concise. In fact, our entire planning process consisted of a couple of emails, my written proposal for the assignment, and a phone conversation. John explains:

"I need very little direction, and if someone's encouraging like you were...that give and take was wonderful, but I don't need too much of it. I mean I'm open to it and your feedback, but I'd rather be doing than talking or planning... Frankly, if I had to sit down like this or like (you're doing with) Aimée, I wouldn't be that interested. I'd like want to kill myself."

Partnering with two different professors in the same capacity, I came to understand that my role required me to become adaptable to different individual needs and styles. Over the course of two semesters, I needed to engage & persist and stretch & explore as a museum educator, developing my own disposition to partner effectively. Each partnership and unique working process had its own benefits for me, which seemed serendipitously aligned with what I needed at each given point in time.

**Co-teaching Pre-Practicum I and Family Day with Aimée Debose**

Aimée's Pre-Prac 1 class met every Monday for three hours at a time.

**Class Session 1**

On the first day of class, Aimée taught without me. Her overview and objectives for the course and for the Family Day assignment were as follows:

**Pre-Practicum I**

*COURSE OVERVIEW:*
This course will focus on HOW and WHAT to teach. We approach this discussion assuming, based on Jon Saphier’s work, that it is necessary for teachers to have a range of teaching strategies – a teaching repertoire – to draw upon and match to a variety of student needs and situations. We will reflect on the connections between theory and practice based on our own observations and experiences.

We will be considering the content of what we teach. Rich, multi-layered content must be appropriate to age and context, allowing students with a variety of learning styles and experiences to engage in meaningful ways. Learning is exciting and meaningful when solutions are unpredictable, investigated, cultivated, and constructed in a community of inquiry.

PP1 COURSE OBJECTIVES:

As a student and developing teacher, you will:

1. Make meaningful connections between theories and practice through observation hours, readings, class discussion, and Family Day activity design.
2. Design lesson plans that show a clear through-line using a variety of teaching models.
3. Compare and contrast select models of teaching and teaching/learning philosophies.
4. Begin to articulate a personal philosophy of being a reflective practitioner.

Family Day Assignment

OVERVIEW: Family Day is an exciting way to invite the community to interact with artwork in meaningful ways through a variety of activities, which we will design. Some visitors will do just one activity while others might participate in all of them. Visitors of all ages will come to the Bakalar & Paine Galleries and participate between 11am and 4pm on Saturday, October 23, 2010.

GOALS:

Visitors will make meaningful connections with artworks and with one another.

OBJECTIVE:

Art Ed students will practically apply theory to practice by writing a lesson plan for an interactive gallery activity and implementing it on Family Day.

Class Session 2

On the second day of class, still teaching without me, Aimée gave an overview of the models of teaching and structured discussion around readings and the question what makes a good objective?
During class 3, Aimée and I co-taught. In about 60 minutes, I introduced Family Day in depth, sharing its history and goals, projecting images, and passing around examples of artworks and activities from past Family Days to get students excited and give them a sense of what was possible, what might work well and what wouldn’t.

It was important to introduce students to the diversity and complex individuality of the visitors they would encounter on Family Day. As college students and as artists, these students were each entrenched to some degree in an insular culture of like-minded people. Expanding their thinking to include the idea that visitors to a free-choice learning environment such as a gallery or museum come from many different backgrounds and bring with them a multitude of experiences, biases, goals, and behaviors was critical to helping students design activities with the right balance of structure and flexibility.

After the Family Day introduction, we walked over to the Galleries and spent about 30 minutes exploring the exhibitions. I gave a brief spoken overview of each and handed out printed resources, including information on artists, artworks, and themes, suggestions for further research in books and on the internet, and contact information for people who could support them in deepening their understanding. For example, for *Graphic Intervention*, the contacts included faculty curator Liz Resnick, who could speak with them about the practice, form, and content of graphic design, and some folks at the Whittier Street Health Clinic, who could offer further resources and training on AIDS awareness. Aimée and I were careful to make the distinction that, on Family Day, we would all be approaching this challenging subject matter as art educators and not as health educators.
Graphic Intervention was fully installed and open to the public when we visited during class 3, but our preparatory crew was still in the midst of installing the William Kentridge exhibitions. This meant that Art Ed students got a glimpse of the work being done by fellow students alongside staff and hired contractors to make our exhibitions happen. I hoped this behind-the-scenes exposure would feel exciting for students and that it would deepen their understanding of the museum profession and expose them to the possibility of working with us.

Back in the PP1 classroom, students spent the remainder of the class brainstorming ideas for their Family Day activities in small groups, which Aimee had already assigned. Aimee and I floated around giving light input and answering questions as needed.

Before the next class, Aimee asked student groups to write up preliminary proposals for their Family Day activity and email them to the whole class and to each of us to read ahead of time. This was a joint decision that Aimee and I had made in planning, but we agreed that she should take authority in giving assignments as their professor. My role meandered the territories of guest speaker, client, and co-professor; I addressed students as a professional from a related but distinct field, “hiring” them for a specific job with stringent expectations, and teaching them content and supporting / challenging them to grow as learners. In my partnership with John, because our planning process had been less enmeshed, there was even greater differentiation in our roles, with me acting as co-professor to a lesser degree.
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Class Session 4

In class 4, time was split between group critique of Family Day activity proposals and a discussion with guest speaker Jessica Hamlin, Director of Education & Public Programs for Art21. Jessica would be on campus all day leading talks in various courses and participating that evening in a panel discussion following the preview screening of Art21’s first hour-long documentary. The film, *William Kentridge: Anything is Possible*, dovetailed beautifully with the concurrent *William Kentridge* exhibitions in the Bakalar & Paine Galleries and was a wonderful resource for Art Ed students to inform their Family Day activity design. Jessica’s presence on campus also elevated our thinking about teaching from the contemporary. According to Aimée’s later reflections:

“There was a nice connection between the Art21 resource and the Kentridge show.... A big discussion that we have in the course (is) how and why do we teach using contemporary art? The emphasis on play in Kentridge’s work (and in the film) also led to an important process vs. product discussion as we consider what is emphasized in (different forms of) art education.”

During the next segment of the class, each group presented an overview of their proposed Family Day activity and we all gave feedback. Student groups demonstrated a great range in preparedness and ability to think through important details and anticipate challenges and solutions, which was based on their range in experience.

This critique was the first point of assessment for Aimée and me, alerting us about who needed more support and guidance. We realized that several out-of-class meetings with student groups would be necessary.

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14 The different forms of art education that Aimée mentions are, specifically, Museum, Classroom, and Community Art Education. These are the three branches that the Art Education department at MassArt focuses on.
For me, this posed a challenge that I had not had to navigate before. Availing myself to help students problem solve meant finding extra time in my schedule, which was already packed with other gallery education commitments, including but not limited to the back-end event planning details for Family Day. But since the quality of students’ product put the visitor experience and the professionalism of the Galleries at stake, I believed it was critical to provide feedback that took these perspectives into account, so I found as much time as I could to carefully communicate with students in person, through email, and often through Aimée. From my perspective, Aimée was a patient and willing partner. We were able to find many ways to support one another through the process, especially relying on conversation, making last-minute and on-the-fly adjustments, and both sharing and delegating responsibilities between us.

Already, some challenging group dynamics were beginning to surface for students, which they negotiated with varying degrees of aptitude. Several students were frustrated by the quality or consistency of their teammates’ contributions. Under the pressure of the deadline and with the possibility of public failure imminent, they took their projects very seriously, often seeking extra help from us. Ultimately, this pressure seemed mostly to take a healthy form, but drawing students’ attention to the motivation and learning derived from that healthy pressure would likely have been helpful.

John reflected later that if he were to do the Family Day project all over again, he would prepare students up front for some of the tensions they might face because of their differences:

“I would just foreground more that there are many ways of organizing and planning, and just how can we do this? The tensions—so that’s one thing I would
frame: that we do the best we can, and you’re going to come upon points of frustration and that may lead to tension in your group, and how do you work that out collaboratively?”

So, drawing students’ attention to the fact that they were learning through these challenges might have helped ease their frustration.

Students were also frustrated by the conflicting feedback they sometimes received from Aimée and I as leaders. This alerted us that we could find better ways to streamline and present our input. But exposure to multiple and conflicting opinions is also a reality of the professional realm. Had we highlighted this point, our critiques may have been more palatable to students.

A week off

Because Columbus Day fell on a Monday between class 4 and class 5, students had two weeks to work together on their activities before presenting them again to the class. During this time, we also assigned them several articles to read, which I had provided. These covered a range of topic questions relevant to Family Day, such as Why do visitors come to museums? How can objects be used to teach? How is teaching in museums and galleries distinct from teaching in classrooms? What is a good guiding question? and How do I talk to children about their art?15 Students reported that they

15 Art Ed: PP1 Readings
found these readings to be invaluable and refreshing in contrast to the dense, theoretical material they had so far been covering.

**Class Session 5**

By class 5, students had refined their lesson plans, incorporated feedback, and tried out the activities themselves. They arrived at class ready to present activity plans complete with prototypes and budgets detailing the materials they planned to use. This was the last class before the Family Day event, so we spent most of three hours ironing out details, with students mostly working together in their groups. The relationships and cultures that had been created between individuals, within small groups, and as a whole class were palpable. Some dynamics were excited and cohesive while others seemed tense and challenged. Across the board, there was an air of extreme busyness and anticipation.

We took about 30 minutes to visit the Galleries for a demonstration in guided conversation, which I led. I introduced Visual Thinking Strategies as one simple method of guiding an object-based conversation, commented on its limitations and some possible variations, and then let students try it out themselves. They quickly reported that it was much harder than it originally seemed and that they would like to practice more. I would love to have spent a full hour or more on this training but our tight schedule didn’t allow it.

**The day before Family Day**

On the day before Family Day when students came to my office to drop off their materials, their attitudes had for the most part fully shifted to excited anticipation and a collective team spirit was noticeable. They had completed the challenging and creative
process of planning and preparing their activities. Now it was time to put them to the test on Family Day.

**Family Day Activities**

1. Community Conversation Quilt in *Graphic Intervention*
2. What’s Your Statement? in *Graphic Intervention*
3. The Divided Self in *William Kentridge*
4. Stamp a Series in *William Kentridge*
Community Conversation Quilt Activity
Visitors who participated in this activity were invited to choose a patterned square of paper with a word prompt on it, choose an artwork in the gallery to inspire them, and write or draw a response to the exhibition involving their thoughts or feelings about the AIDS epidemic. Then, they were asked to add their square to the Community Conversation Quilt.
Community Conversation Quilt Activity
What’s Your Statement? Activity
After looking around the Graphic Intervention exhibition for inspiration, visitors at this station were invited to design a postcard with a meaningful message of their own.
What's Your Statement? Activity
The Divided Self Activity
Inspired by William Kentridge’s interest in Nikolai Gogol’s short story *The Nose*, this activity asked visitors to imagine what they would do if they could be in two places at one time. How would the self that was left behind feel? Where would the wandering part go on its adventure? Visitors could write or collage a response.
The Divided Self Activity
Stamp a Series Activity

After looking at William Kentridge’s Typewriter Series, visitors at this station were invited to investigate similarity and difference by trying out a simple stamped series of their own.
Stamp a Series Activity
FINDINGS

Benefits of Family Day for students

For students, Family Day was a time of accelerated learning, reflection, and spot-modification. For many it was their first time teaching multiple ages, their first time teaching in a gallery setting, or their first time teaching at all. After five weeks of studying theory and stretching & exploring, envisioning, and developing craft through their lesson plans, they finally had a chance to put their work into practice.

Many groups quickly found that what they had prepared needed instant modification. Some found that the questions they had prepared failed to engage visitors conceptually or were phrased in a way that visitors couldn’t understand or relate to. Some found that their activities presupposed skills that visitors didn’t have, sometimes as simple as cutting. In response to this obstacle, one student busied herself on the spot with the modification of cutting shapes that young visitors could arrange creatively rather than cutting themselves. So, students had to “think on their feet,” making rapid, ongoing modifications throughout the day.

Within their groups, students naturally fell into different roles based on their skills, knowledge, inclinations, and alertness to what was needed at any given moment. For example, one person might be a welcomer and instruction giver while another helped visitors develop craft. Many students commented later on the unexpected challenge of negotiating talking with children and adults simultaneously or of finding a way to quickly and gracefully switch their tone of conversation from one age to another.

During and after Family Day, students were able to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses. They identified problems with their teaching strategies or
Case Studies

Case 3: Art Education and Family Day

gaps in their skill set that they could either fix on the spot or store away to think about later. This increased their inclination to learn what they were lacking and in some cases helped them to envision their future, thinking about where and who they would like to teach as professionals. One student realized on Family Day that she really prefers working with high school age kids and adults to working with young children, which was a great surprise to her. Many students realized that they could picture themselves teaching in museums or galleries when their vision had originally been limited to classrooms. Others came to understand that, wherever they teach, museums and galleries can be a resource to them as art teachers.

Benefits of Family Day for faculty

Family Day offered an unparalleled opportunity for Aimée to assess her students as teachers. As she floated around the galleries throughout the day, she observed every student teacher in action and made careful notes, identifying which of her teachings they had been able to integrate so far into their teaching. Assessing students’ level of understanding on Family Day enabled Aimée to adapt and fine-tune her curriculum plan for the remaining weeks of the semester.

Ultimately, it was helpful to students, faculty, and the overall community dynamic of the class that throughout the entire Family Day project, students were able to demonstrate different strengths at different times. A couple of non-matriculated students were interested in teaching but weren’t artists like the rest of the Art Ed students, so during planning they left their partners to handle material prep while they took care of the budget or wrote up the lesson plan. Some students were excellent at leading their own small group in activity planning but lacked confidence in working
with visitors on Family Day. One of John’s students was disorganized, disinterested and unreliable during the planning process, causing rifts within his group, but quickly redeemed himself on Family Day by showing his charm with the visitors. John recalls:

“(He) came through at the last minute and was one of the best on his feet, like just outrageous. And to the folks who had been complaining about him all the time, I said, you know he really came through in an important way. And you see how strong he was, stronger than most folks in the class. Just how comfortable he was. The give and take with folks coming in who were strangers. He really gained stature and respect in that class through this. He had a chance to really shine in the way he’s able to and it helped turn the dynamics of the class.”

Setting the tone for a healthy class dynamic was another noted benefit of the Family Day process, according to John:

“There was this bonding that happened early in the class that really supported learning and community building in the class. Later on that was so clear.... And then just as a whole that they pulled it off—I think there was some kind of confidence and some—they were so proud. And I was proud of them too, obviously. We were beaming, I swear, for weeks! And that really lasted.”

Having pulled it off was exciting, creating a collective spark of energy that lit up the class throughout the duration of the semester. Plus, the intimate experience of supporting one another through teamwork and exposing strengths and weaknesses built an atmosphere of safe interpersonal learning. From the perspective of a senior faculty member like John, who had years of experience behind him, this was clear:

“I really think that to learn we have to feel psychologically safe, and I think they felt psychologically safe with one another and that they could really go out on a limb with the presentations they did in groups or as single folks as the class progressed. They had a team behind them.”
Benefits of Family Day for visitors and students

Repeat Family Day visitors who had come to the event before the added collaboration with Art Ed noticed a marked improvement in the overall energy and quality of the event. Our attendance doubled. Without Pre-Prac I involvement, we had never topped 100 visitors; during the spring semester of John Crowe’s class, we had 200 visitors and with Aimée’s class, the numbers were up to 250. This may have been due to the sheer momentum of the event catching on over time, or to improved marketing efforts on the part of gallery staff, but I also think that the students attracted more visitors. There is something intrinsically interesting about student learning, and visitors are apparently inclined to come out to support and observe it. Also, students had helped to spread the word by inviting their own friends and families, which was lovely because it nuanced the age range and added an emotional note to the day through the visibility of established interpersonal connections.

Not only were visitors engaged by the fact that the event leaders were students, they were also interested in the fact that these particular students were artists. This unique exposure to artists deepened and enlivened the art gallery experience for visitors by extending the range of what was exhibited to include something personal, dynamic and real. Even though these artists weren’t the ones whose work was on view, their presence and conversation still brought forth the notion of process in a room full of product.

Publicly inhabiting the dual roles of artist teacher and artist professional was a benefit of Family Day for students as well. It was a chance for them to deepen their sense of identity and to try out or polish the way they spoke with various types of
people about their artistic practice and about what artists do in general. This helped them to solidify their own understandings through expression.

Including Art Ed students in the Family Day process also meant that visitors could benefit from the variety in activities. The fact that activities had been planned by many individuals, many hands, and many minds meant that visitors were more likely to find something that engaged them personally. This was a great contrast to what we had been able to offer previously when we had just a couple of museum educators planning and designing the whole event. Students not only came up with ideas we could never have come up with ourselves, they also came up with ideas that challenged our preconceptions about what were good activities and what was good teaching. Museum educators and Art Ed faculty alike were surprised to find visitors delighting in activities we personally found boring or unfocused.

**Benefits to me as the museum educator**

I sat in the privileged position of benefitting personally from every benefit to visitors, students, and faculty. Since the umbrella of my Family Day objectives and my mission at large covered all of these folks, the Family Day/PP1 project was incredibly rewarding, enabling me to accomplish my dual goals of outreach and in-reach simultaneously.

**Outcomes**

As a result of the first Family Day collaboration with John Crowe, large-scale curriculum revisions were made within the Art Education department. Though he is no longer teaching Pre-Prac I, John is still teaching a sophomore course that he has since
revised to include a practical element of teaching in the community at Dorchester Academy:

“(Family Day) was a tipping point in getting me out (into the community). I get dramatic, like, ok I’m not even teaching at Massart! We’re not even going to be on this campus! It really confirmed what I was thinking, so much so that we made the proposal that spring and now this (new curriculum) is happening.

In the sophomore program we’re doing now, (the Art Ed students) really work with students and realize the challenges, the empathy, the kind of really thinking on your feet skills that are needed. They’ve had to take buses out to these neighborhoods they’re unfamiliar with and they’re the only white folks on the bus, and they’ve had to stand up and be counted and work these boys and girls clubs and design an MLK mural, 3 of them with maybe a dozen high school students at Dorchester Academy. So when they get to Aimée and to Family Day, they won’t be as green!”

John also guessed that in the future, the ripple effect will enhance the quality of teaching in the Saturday Studios program, which is the practical component of the Pre-Practicum II course in which Art Ed students teach various types of art to 4th – 12th graders over the course of eight Saturdays.

Input from gallery staff and the influence of gallery education initiatives have also woven into ongoing conversations within the Art Ed department about the overall form of the Art Education major. For many years, students have had to choose a track – Museum Education, Community Art Education, or Classroom Art Education – which declares the environment the student plans to teach in. Each track involves its own set of graduation requirements.

But as professional and economic climates change, boundaries are breaking down between different types of education. Either by choice or necessity, artist teachers increasingly face careers that are a patchwork of various projects and positions. Recognizing this, MassArt’s Art Education department is now involved in
discussions about how best to equip students with the flexibility they will need as professionals. One possibility is doing away with the track structure altogether and instead embedding theory and practice for the museum, community, and classroom contexts within each and every course.

Another important outcome of the Family Day project was my own increased understanding that, while hugely rewarding and well worth the effort, the demands of the Family Day collaboration greatly increased the workload on both gallery education and on our faculty partners. This necessitated handling the project with compassionate attention and means that moving forward with the partnership, we must continue to define our roles, develop our work plans, and allocate resources for increased support.
Discussion

The three case studies I conducted at MassArt, presented in the previous sections, are three very different examples of gallery use by faculty and students at an art college. Each case reveals its own set of challenges and benefits and points to future possibilities. My hope is that these examples may also be useful to others in similar contexts.

In case 1, in which I observed a gallery visit initiated and led by a faculty member in the liberal studies department, I indicate possible enhancements that could be made with just a light touch by gallery staff. Case 1 presented the concept that museum educators at arts colleges could help faculty who teach liberal arts courses to deepen their disciplinary understanding of studio art in order to enhance student learning in their own domain. In the case of Written Communication, by emphasizing disciplinary parallels and the ways that writing skills transfer to the domain of art making, Ricco Siosocco could have increased students’ inclination to write and alertness to relevant writing opportunities beyond his class. Regardless of the debate around the purpose of writing for an artist, which I discussed in Case 1, this would surely serve the students. Although Ricco mentioned parallels of writing and art making this in his comments to me, indicating that he likely does emphasize the relationship of the disciplines in the classroom, he missed the opportunity to do so in the gallery.

Another substantial way arts college museum educators can serve faculty and, by extension, students is by empowering faculty to enhance studio critiques. In case 2, I collaborated with a faculty member to plan to lead a single gallery visit that would meet her objectives for students. There were many benefits to this collaboration for the students, professor Nona Hershey, and for me. Analyzing what we did to make them
Discussion

happen revealed how intricately and sensitively a museum educator must behave in working with art faculty and students, and also alerted me to the possibility of the future service I could provide to MassArt faculty by developing a workshop or another type of professional development opportunity that uses gallery teaching techniques to enhance studio critiques.

As mentioned in Case Study 2, during the gallery visit, Nona was influenced by the methods I used to engage her students in conversation about artworks. This was a skill she had personally found challenging in her studio critiques and was therefore inclined to learn more from me.

A hallmark of the studio art classroom, critiques can be hugely beneficial to the creative process, helping makers to identify and solve problems, generate ideas, reflect on intent and meaning, and tap into the viewer’s experience, alerting artists to what they have and have not yet achieved. This feedback can increase inclination to engage & persist, stretch & explore, envision, and develop craft, driving artists forward to do and try more.

But students often undervalue the critique process until after they graduate and find themselves lacking a supportive and critical community, and faculty frequently report that their critiques lack energy and substance. In our planning conversation, Nona mentioned that students are often “guarded or careful” in critiques. When students don’t say enough or aren’t rigorous with each other, faculty must adapt and find solutions. It is their responsibility to create an atmosphere in which students feel safe, interested, and challenged enough to engage. Just as museum educators do when generating conversation about artworks in the gallery, faculty must build a
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psychologically comfortable environment, set up clear expectations, and slow down the process so that students can identify and develop viewing and reflecting skills one at a time.

My guess is that this charge can be challenging to studio art faculty for two reasons that are both rooted in faculty members’ high level of disciplinary mastery. First, they may take their own level of skill and the complexities of their disciplinary mastery for granted and therefore not realize that they need to break the process down into simple parts in order to draw students into conversation. Let’s take Nona as an example. To be a senior-level artist professor like Nona requires mastery not only of the technical and conceptual skills necessary to complete her own artwork; it also involves master-level observation, interpretation, and articulation of the work of others. But Nona may be unaware of just how fluently she moves from one skill to another. In the gallery, she demonstrated the ability to read an image and express a sophisticated interpretation in seconds, synthesizing observation, interpretation, and expression almost simultaneously. But for most of us, it takes more time. We need to slow down and process step by step, even if we are fairly proficient visually or have mastery in related disciplines. For students, naming the parts of the process can be useful in understanding just how much they’re learning, thus increasing inclination and alertness to learn more.

Secondly, studio art faculty may be challenged at fostering rich critiques because they are torn between the roles of what I will term “model artist” and facilitator. As model artists, professors perform what it is to be a professional artist. They expose students to their own highly developed dispositions, revealing mastery of technique,
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observation, expression, and reflection. They model daring, playfulness and curiosity. They engage in sophisticated conversation, emphasizing knowledge of art history and contemporary practice. They manifest well-established networks of colleagues and peers. In other words, model artists demonstrate dexterity at each of the Studio Habits of Mind, inspiring students and compelling them forward by example. Their role, as model artist, is to challenge.

The role of facilitator is different. Facilitators make things easier. Understanding the inherent stressfulness of the new—a key element of both learning and creativity—the facilitator must seek out and eliminate sources of unease and pressure. Providing orientation, setting up clear expectations, demonstrating active listening, and managing social dynamics are some of the methods facilitators use to create a psychologically safe environment in which learning becomes possible. In the studio classroom or gallery, the facilitator’s job is to meet students right where they are and make it ok to be who they are, welcoming error and guessing, using humor, and inviting curiosity through exploration and inquiry. Like the model artist, the facilitator also models, but they must always begin simply and accessibly, elevating to higher levels of modeling only as individuals or groups reveal their readiness.

In their studio classrooms, art professors must constantly juggle the roles of model artist and facilitator. It is possible to do both simultaneously, and the very best teachers can role-shift gracefully. But during critiques, balancing roles seems to be particularly challenging.

Perhaps museum educators are in a position to help studio art faculty by offering training or assistance. In professional development workshops, we could model
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dispositions specific to museum education and identify tactics to help studio art faculty juggle their roles. Or, we could partner in leading critiques, taking over the role of facilitator so that professors can be free to fully inhabit the role of model artist.

Finally, in case 3, I partnered with faculty to lead a long-term student project that culminated in a community event in the Galleries. Case 3 yielded the idea that art college museum educators may be able to extend and enhance the curriculum through long-term collaborations and close ties with individual departments. Through multiple semesters of partnering with the Art Education department on Family Day, it became increasingly clear that students, faculty, the MassArt Galleries, and surrounding community members were able to benefit. There were also several challenges, but often they were positive challenges and served to alert us to possible improvements.

Beyond the positive effects in class and on the day of the event, we also found that the synergy created by extended contact between Art Education and Gallery Education had far-reaching repercussions that continue to reverberate in both departments. Art Education has continued to interrogate the methods they use to teach their students about education in the museum setting, and curriculum revisions have been suggested. Gallery education staff members have often been included in this discussion, which has lead to a broader interdepartmental conception of how we might scaffold student learning about the museum environment through repeat exposure to ideas and experiences in multiple courses.

By planting throughout the Art Ed curriculum practical teaching experiences in a variety of settings, learning is accelerated and there is an increase in students’ preparedness in subsequent courses. This enhances the overall quality of student
Discussion

Teaching coming out of MassArt, which improves our ability to meet the institutional goal of high quality service to the community.

The disposition of the museum educator

In my written analysis of the three case studies, I continually highlight my role because the museum educator is often the catalyst or conduit for gallery connections. For this reason, throughout the process of connecting art students and teachers to the Galleries, I needed to continually refine and elevate my disposition to perform multiple forms of connector role. This required special skills, behaviors, sensitivity, and willingness.

It is typical for museum educators to inhabit multiple forms of connector roles. But in an arts college context, because these connections involve artists and art practice, connector roles must be handled with great understanding of what artists might care about, want to learn, or be averse to. This means that the educator’s skill, inclination, and alertness must adapt to include a disciplinary understanding of studio art—the knowledge, methods, purposes and forms that are esteemed and emphasized within the discipline—and an understanding of the artist’s disposition and the unique culture that is created in an artistic community. Lacking this understanding means lacking the ability to connect with what matters most to artists.

In these three case studies, I have detailed some of the ways these connector roles can played out, including connecting individuals with ideas, faculty with students, students with community members, Galleries with parent institution, and Galleries with external community. Museum educators can also be a bridge between the status quo and future possibilities, which relates to their alertness to opportunity.
Discussion

Assessing my involvement in the case studies, the characteristics of my role can be generalized to three main qualities of action, including connecting, balancing, and filling in gaps. Each of these types of action required me to draw upon or develop the disposition to achieve them. If I didn’t possess the necessary skills, inclination, and alertness, at least I could be inclined and alert to the possibility of further developing skills and increasing my alertness.

For example, I engaged in connecting by contacting faculty and making suggestions. I connected them with ideas, artworks, and objects that were potentially relevant areas for them to focus with their class, and with opportunities for experiences that tied their course goals to gallery content. Doing this engaged the alertness component of my disposition, because I had to be aware of who might be interested in what, and of what that interest might be based on. For example, in Case 2, I was alert to the possibility that Nona would be interested to bring her class to the William Kentridge exhibitions because I knew she taught printmaking and that the exhibitions contained prints. Connecting her to the Galleries in this way also called upon my skills: active listening, communication, interpersonal perceptivity, and flexibility. I knew printmaking was generally relevant, but until I listened closely and made suggestions to Nona in our planning meeting, I wasn’t able to fine-tune the relevance to meet her learning goals and engage the interests of students. Inclination was also involved in making this connection, because I was invested in the mission of extending and enhancing curriculum ties to the Galleries.

Similar skills and alertness are involved in the educator’s work of balancing. When co-teaching and collaborating on projects, sensitivity to others needs, desires,
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strengths, and weaknesses needs to be coupled with an inclination to make the situation comfortable and keep energies in balance. This requires flexibility and willingness. With the Family Day project in Case 3, for example, I had to adapt my collaboration techniques when I began working with Aimée Debose because her needs and style were distinct from what I had adjusted to with John Crowe. Or, when leading the gallery visit with Nona in Case 2, I used sensitivity in gauging the balance of when it was best to take the lead, when I should let Nona lead, when I should let the conversation between students progress on its own, and when I should interject to draw attention back to the learning goals. This balancing involved skill, inclination, and alertness. So, my disposition to balance, as a part of my role as museum educator, was developed through these interactions.

Filling in gaps required skill, inclination, and alertness, as well. In order to perceive where gaps lie, close observation and careful listening is necessary. This happened throughout the 3 cases in many small and large-scale ways. For example, during the printmaking visit, asking students what they knew already about William Kentridge alerted me to what more I might fill in. Having used my skill to do the necessary research, I was prepared with information, but it was important not to overwhelm students with information that was irrelevant or uninteresting since curiosity can be easily shut down. So, instead of lecturing, I was inclined to use more engaging presentation skills. In this way, I could fill in gaps with the knowledge they were actually interested to absorb.

A more large-scale example of filling in gaps comes from the Art Ed / Family Day collaboration. Before the collaboration, there was apparently gap in “realness” in the
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Pre-Prac 1 course, both in the form of experiential learning and in regard to course readings, which students had commented were dense and dry. In order to fill this gap, I first needed to become alert to its existence, which I did through conversation with faculty, research about the curriculum, and questioning students. Documentary and conversational research with faculty and students in the Art Ed department put me in touch with the gap—the absence of “realness”—and I was able to help fill it by encouraging involvement with Family Day, suggesting relevant readings, and offering orientation and training in gallery education techniques, which, though stated as an important component of the Art Education major, I found to be lacking.

Understanding the necessary components of my disposition enables me to do good work as a museum educator at an arts college; alertness to possibility, absence, and interest is a key component of being able to connect individuals with opportunities. The passionate inclination to do so and the skill of careful delivery are equally important. When working with artists and those who teach artists, my job becomes to win trust and to demonstrate the value added to their courses and experiences by virtue of my expertise in gallery teaching.

But winning artists trust and demonstrating value added to art courses doesn’t necessarily come easily, for what business does someone who is not a working artist have trying to teach artists about art?

Sadly, when I began my work at MassArt, I was as easy for me to fall into the trap of thinking this way as I have found it to be for others, including art students, professors, and other museum practitioners I’ve talked to and whose publications I have read. For this reason, in order to do the important work of supporting artists to make meaningful
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use of exhibitions, it becomes extremely important to differentiate the dispositions of artists and artist teachers from those of museum teachers, and also to differentiate the disciplines of studio art and art education from the discipline of museum education. Because—as I established in the literature review—there is a widespread perception that art courses already make sufficient use of museums and art teachers already provide high quality learning experiences for their students in the gallery context, museum educators who share my interest in furthering support for artists in the gallery will need to negotiate relationships with artists and artist teachers with incredible diplomacy and finesse. In my case studies, I found it helpful to let them teach me, to be flexible and do a lot of listening. What I offered, I tried to offer with the lightest touch. Within my disposition to perform the multiple forms of connector roles I have listed, I needed to embed an ever-developing understanding of the disciplines of art making, the dispositions of artists, and the unique culture of the artist at MassArt in particular.

The culture of the artist

At MassArt, there is institution-wide support, for artistic pursuit and identity. Just walking through the hallways it is palpable. Student art is everywhere—a picnic table coated in blossoms; pennies in a trail around the campus; at the bottom of a stairway, a conceptual piece revealed simply through a label that says “Walking Down the Stairs, 2010, Appropriated Reality.” Art installation is encouraged at MassArt, as, of course, is art creation. Time, space, and materials are dedicated to artistic pursuit above all else.

16 Artwork by Ben Aron, Studio for Interrelated Media (SIM) department
Discussion

Beyond the student experience, MassArt supports artistic identity and creativity for its employees, which adds to the campus-wide culture of the artist. Staff are entitled to free classes each semester and given opportunities to exhibit their work in yearly exhibitions, or to sell it in the campus store, MassArt Made. Faculty are honored with bi-annual exhibitions in the professional galleries. Even members of the Facilities and Maintenance crew identify themselves as artists. Within the MassArt community, whether one is a student, faculty member, or staff member in Administration and Finance, it is generally assumed that artistic practice factors into one's core priorities in some way. I am continually asked what kind of artwork I make, which is a common question around MassArt. I generally answer sheepishly that I used to take lots of photographs before I got so busy with the work of researching, discussing, and advocating for the artwork of others.

Not only is the culture of the artist supported institutionally at MassArt, it is also propagated through the strong visual and behavioral identities of many individuals within the MassArt community, which can also be a repetition of what plays out in their artistic practice. Differentiation is key for many artists, both in artwork and in identity. Since the commercial art world highly values the new, artists often place themselves on the edge of their comfort zone, continually challenging themselves to work towards something groundbreaking and different. Differentiating from what came before, pushing boundaries, and concerning themselves with uniqueness, therefore, becomes critical, and seems to take place in artistic practice as well as flowing into artistic identity. Artists have to embrace the idea of difference, often asserting not only that their work is different from other work, but also that they are different in the world.
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This phenomenon is highly visible at MassArt through the personal expression of dress, hair styling, and adornment. Many members of the MassArt community stand out visually, with colorfully dyed hair, intricate and wild tattoos, or counter-culture dress. Others present themselves more subtly or conservatively, but often still with great concern for aesthetics. Within a four-block radius of MassArt, there are at least five other colleges, but it is often said in the neighborhood that MassArt students are easiest to spot.

So MassArt is unique in that, as a community, we highly value individuality, differentiation, and visual impact, which is evident in the products we produce and in the ways we present ourselves as individuals. It also manifests in our behaviors and opinions, and the ways we spend our time.

When I first began at MassArt, I did not yet identify with this community. I was aware of the visual differentiation, but the subtleties of artistic identity regarding commitment to artistic practice took longer for me to understand. As I began to work more closely with MassArt students, I noticed that they constantly challenged my expectations. They seemed to be different in their skills, abilities, inclinations, and often in ways that were hard for me to predict. They had strengths that surprised me and weaknesses that baffled me. Their priorities were clearly unique, but I was entirely sure yet just how.

Because I wanted to know if others shared my observations about the uniqueness of MassArt students and to pinpoint specific ways in which they tend to be unique, I asked several faculty members if they might comment on the student body from their experience. I found several overlapping observations and about the students’
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abilities and interests, and the faculty I questioned also shared some ways that they
often adapt to accommodate for the unique needs and preferences of their students.

According to Aimee DeBose, who responded specifically about Art Education
students,

“MassArt students are unique in that they are truly artists and teachers in an
artist community, which influences them as students, artists, and educators.
Being in a community where the arts are emphasized and valued provides
opportunities for great dialog between art education majors and others. This is
a rich base and perspective that they bring out into the teaching field.”

Because Aimée understands the uniqueness of her students, their priorities,
preferences, and what they have to offer, she adapts her teaching style to connect with
them in relevant ways and to meet their needs as learners:

“I integrate discussions about teaching from contemporary art to help students
develop an understanding of how their artist selves and teachers selves are
located in their professions. I also assign visual responses to course content and
ask students to both visually and verbally communicate their thinking.

I also feel that it is important to help them imagine working in a non-artist
setting after graduating. How will they find community? Advocate for their
programs? And engage with the school and public communities about art
education and art?”

These comments make it clear that MassArt students are privileged and protected by a
community that supports and challenges them.

Ricco Siosocco’s comments offer an interesting comparison between MassArt
students and students at other schools. Because Ricco teaches writing at several
different colleges every semester, his conception of what is unique about MassArt
students is clear, and he has learned to make appropriate adaptations:

“MassArt students seem to value discussion and creativity more than my writing
students at other colleges. For example, MassArt students thrive when asked to
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present a visual aspect to class presentations... (they) thrive when asked to find visual metaphors for the writing process, or to analyze a commercial or YouTube video.

Ricco also highlights a distinction in the level of intrinsic motivation he finds in MassArt students:

My students at other colleges are more conservative and hew more closely to my expectations as a teacher while MassArt students, for the most part, are less concerned with grades or meeting teacher expectations than truly learning for the sake of learning.”

In addition to Ricco, several other professors I questioned touched on the idea that MassArt students tend to be independently motivated to learn and do their work. This likely has to do, in part, with the fact that most MassArt students come from low income families, receive scholarship aid, and work to support themselves throughout their college career. But it is also likely related to the habits of mind they develop through their courses and artistic practice—in particular, the habit to engage & persist—and also with way they are treated by faculty. When I spoke with Nona Hershey, she continually used the language “at this particular point in their career” to talk about what was important for her students. This reveals the idea that, as artists, these students have already entered their career. Because they are invested in specialty training, many are on a path that they take very seriously. According to Nona, “They do not take much for granted. They are fairly driven and excited to be in art school. Many of them love what they are doing. It’s not just school, it’s life.”

Not taking much for granted is likely linked both to what John Crowe called “the working class temperament” of MassArt students, and also to the fact that artistic practice requires an incredible allocation of time, space, and materials.
“They call MassArt students ‘scrappers,’” says John Crowe. “They scrape anything together, for the most part they’re really willing to work hard, physically work hard and think about and devote time, and the ideal is that they become self-motivated over time, they really find their own way of working to push forward.”

The habit of mind to engage & persist is evident in this comment. Since developing craft often takes a great deal of time and requires perseverance, artists quickly develop the habit of mind to engage & persist, which makes artists stand out as a community.

John also emphasized the habit of mind to stretch & explore when he expressed about MassArt students that:

“For the most part they realize there’s no single answer. They don’t expect you or me to tell them ‘this is how you do it... In my experience with liberal arts students, (MassArt students are) more willing to say ‘oh it could be done this way or this way or this way.’ I think that’s pretty foundational.”

Willingness to explore, fail and try again, and find unusual solutions is, according to John, “built-in” to the identity of MassArt students as artists.

In addition to the dispositions MassArt students have often strongly developed, John also spoke about some of their aversions.

“I think there’s less tolerance for traditional research and sit-down keyboard work. For the most part they’re really hands on learners I would say. And certainly there are variations in all of this, but for the most part there’s great resistance to critical studies, math, science, art history classes, anything... that takes them away from their studio and the hands on time, sometimes they’re really resentful of that.”

These ideas were echoed by Jane Marsching, a professor of the first year required courses in Studio Foundations: “They don’t want to be lectured to. They are super super busy. Or they perceive themselves to be super super busy.”

Because of the preferences, talents, and aversions that art students often share, faculty and museum educators alike need to adapt to find what works, and to provide
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support, especially as they face unique challenges at different points in their careers as artists. According to Jane Marsching:

“Many of these students were the big fish in the small pond in their high school with regard to art, so they perceive themselves to be the best artist in their high school, or as having a special talent. Whether or not they were counter culture and weird or not, that doesn’t matter. And then they got into MassArt, which they see as a very good school, so when they get here suddenly they’re just one of many. And in their minds, not necessarily the best. And that is a very challenging thing that they go through in their freshman year that may just be unique to art schools.”

Alertness to these types of challenges, as well as to art students’ unique strengths, enables faculty and museum educators to do good work as teachers. As John explains:

“In a true Constructivist manner, our professors guide (students) on their own paths to support them. So they’re choosing and the professors are in a supporting role, a true education role of expanding their frame of reference.

And I think it’s very personal here (at MassArt) because of that, and because of the nature of fine arts and the subjects that come up. I think the arts by its nature is about so much that it builds some kind of intimacy, or closeness that I feel like any creative endeavor taps into maybe more than other fields.”

Based on these conversations with faculty and on my own observations, case studies, and research into the existing literature, I now understand that the key to making connections between artists and exhibitions at an art school is the museum educator’s intimate and growing knowledge of the nature of the arts as a field and of the individuals who devote themselves to it.

Supporting artists to use contemporary art, museums and galleries as a resource

Since finding relevance to the way contemporary artists think and learn as students and faculty is the fundamental work of a museum educator at an arts college museum or gallery, faculty liaison positions become important. As noted by Laurel Bradley, faculty liaison positions have lately proliferated, largely at liberal arts schools, but these positions are necessary at any campus wishing to have a more porous
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relationship with its museum or gallery. Just as those practitioners at liberal arts
campus museums do, museum professionals who find themselves at art colleges can
courage interdisciplinary curiosity, pointing out the parallels between the
institutional practice of the creative campus and contemporary art practice.

In mentoring and training arts faculty, using established models such as the
faculty seminar and faculty liaisons may require extra finesse since, as I’ve mentioned,
working with artists is a nuanced and delicate pursuit requiring a fine-tuned disposition.

For example, museum educators may need to find clever solutions to take the
pressure off of faculty who feel they should already know how to teach in museums and
galleries. Adapting a model used by Cheryl Kerfeld from the DOE Joint Genome Institute
at UC Berkeley could be one way to proceed.

At the symposium Core Matters: Students, Faculty, Collections at Wellesley
College’s Davis Museum, Kerfeld presented on the power of using art and imagery to
teach observational skills in her course “Cells, Tissues, and Organs.” Among the benefits,
she said that art provided a safe way for her genetics students to develop observation
skills, explore biases, understand metaphors and limitations, and engage in meta-
cognition. Safe because, for these scientists, art was an unlikely realm where they were
free to explore with curiosity and without self-criticism. If asked to jump straight into
close observation of cell tissues, students might have felt inhibited, but interrogating
images of art was fun and uncomplicated. Once warmed up, they were able to transfer
these skills using cell tissues as the subject.
Discussion

Campus museums and galleries may need to find similar types of ingenuity in working with faculty from complementary disciplines, who may actually be intimidated to teach in the gallery because of its closeness to their own domain.

To address the issue of faculty who assume they are already proficient in museum pedagogy, we will need to find other solutions. Perhaps creating a forum for presenting successes to the campus community would help. Presentations by faculty members who have experienced improvement through contact with museums and galleries could inspire, challenge and empower others who may be more reluctant. Ricco Siosocco, Nona Hershey, Aimée DeBose, and John Crowe, the faculty members who I worked with in the following case studies, could surely have a positive influence on their peers.

Just as developing museum literacy is critical for art faculty, so too is it critical for art students. As students continue to establish themselves within an artistic community, visual and object literacy becomes increasingly important. This means critical viewership must be encouraged.

One way of achieving this is through the Tang’s *Many Different Heavens* model. In the supportive environment of a seminar, students were able to try out exhibition critique, curation and installation. As Marstine points out, learning best practice is fundamental to this kind of project.

While learning best practice may be useful to liberal arts students, to artists, who are very likely to interface with museums and galleries in some capacity during their professional careers, it is invaluable. Michael Zachary, an MFA graduate from MassArt who continues to work for the Bakalar & Paine Galleries (Curatorial Programs
Discussion

department) as a contract preparator, expresses the value of such pre-professional opportunities in this way:

"Working for Curatorial Programs taught me how to present my work professionally. I cannot stress enough how important that is for an artist. I know one gallerist who looks at the back of paintings before he looks at the front. If an artist doesn’t care enough about their own work to learn to attach hanging hardware correctly, why would he want to deal with them?

Knowing how to paint well simply isn't enough. You need to know how to hang. You need to know how to light a wall. You need to know how to pack and ship your work safely. If you want to be treated like a professional you have to be professional.
A lot of unseen work goes into even simple exhibitions. I think every artist should spend some time doing that work. It will make you appreciative of the people who will be doing it for you in the future, and it will help you make decisions that present your own work in the strongest possible way."

Zachary’s statements make it clear that relationships with campus museums and galleries can have a hugely positive impact on artists. Whether those relationships are established through course work or pre-professional training, they are certainly worth encouraging.

But if we want to encourage artists to learn in and from their campus museums and galleries, we will need support and resources to do it. This is a job that requires advocacy from museum educators, museum directors, and college presidents. In her speech on the Role of University Art Museums in the 21st Century, Princeton president and molecular biologist Shirley M. Tilghman revealed an exemplary understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities facing campus museums today, and a deep commitment to supporting their promise:

“While university presidents, especially molecular biologists, cannot be expected to be authorities on (museum practice), we do have an obligation to both understand and articulate the full potential of our art museums and to create a
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climate in which they can flourish.” (Tilghman).
In other words, if campus museums are to achieve the best, it must be with the full support of the institution behind them. This may require museum professionals to educate their leaders, as well as faculty and staff throughout the institution.
Conclusion
Conclusion

At the start of this study, my focus question asked what a museum educator would need to understand in order to provide high quality learning experiences that extend and enhance the curriculum at an art college. The answers revealed through my analysis highlight that curricular connections with the Galleries yielded many benefits to students, faculty, the college, and the community. My analysis also revealed that, in order to provide these opportunities, I needed to develop and fine-tune my own disposition and disciplinary understandings of the various departments I worked with. Moving forward in this context, I must continue to develop and fine-tune my disposition to work with artists and to understand the arts curriculum and culture.

I was also afforded the opportunity, through this project, to think broadly about my institution, where we stand now, where we’d like to end up in a few years, and what needs to happen in order to get us there. In this way, I was able to come up with big ideas that I think are hugely relevant to the MassArt community, and to begin to strategize steps towards achieving those goals. I now know what I will need to do in order to get to the next phase—one I truly believe will be a very exciting phase of expanding and deepening for MassArt.

At MassArt, we are in the midst of a capital campaign to make large-scale renovations to the Bakalar & Paine Galleries, with plans to become accredited as a museum. With this project underway, and with an institution-wide commitment to strong community relations that is paralleled only by our institution-wide commitment to excellence in art and design education, I believe MassArt is poised to engage in a creative campus initiative that weaves museum learning into the heart of the...
Conclude

curriculum. In so doing, I also believe that we can serve and engage our surrounding community.

To do so, we will need to build a strong support matrix. To understand the types of building blocks that will be necessary, we can look to model museums like the Tang and Hood, who have achieved great successes in campus-wide synergy around the arts. We will need a similar composition of resources to theirs: designated spaces for gallery learning, more staff positions and staff time, and lead-time for planning exhibitions and collaborating interdepartmentally. Each of these resources will require fixed funding and the work of allocating funds for the operating costs of programs will be ongoing.

I hope I have been able to show why it’s so fundamentally unique to work with artists at an art college, and to demonstrate the importance of this understanding for the fields of studio art and museum education. When I first came to MassArt, I understood just a little bit about the uniqueness of the context, of artists and artistic communities. I had spent years studying art history and art museums, but I had never really investigated artists. Now, four years into my work at MassArt, and having completed this study, my understanding has certainly grown by leaps and bounds. But it is also still developing. And I know my understanding will continue to develop as long as I’m in this role at MassArt.
References


