
This study examined two art museum and school partnerships in order to learn how partnerships enable an integration of goals, participants’ beliefs and values, and learning objectives. This study examined the partnerships through a social constructivist lens and used narrative analysis as way to interpret participants’ stories about collaboration. The research found three major themes among participants’ stories. Participants: a) valued good communication to establish relationships between partners, b) believed partnership offered students experiences that educated the whole person, and c) felt that students making meaning by interacting in the museum environment was an indicator of success. The study closes with discussion of the researchers’ own constructions as they developed throughout the study.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

As a graduate student in art museum education studies and a former elementary art teacher, I became increasingly interested in the potential opportunities facilitated through museum and school partnerships. My research interests and this study about art museum and school collaborations grew directly out of my experience as both an art teacher and a student of museum education. In order to establish the context for my study it is appropriate to address how my teaching and student experiences have shaped my personal beliefs about museum and school partnerships and my efforts as a researcher.

The past 7 years have given me the unique advantage of understanding how both schools and art museums function, who their audiences are, and their institutional goals for education. For 5 years I taught elementary art in a school district that encouraged interdisciplinary learning and valued the arts as an essential element to a child’s education. There I was part of an art museum and school collaboration witnessing both the positive impact it had on my students, as well as, how the practical factors, such as time, money, standardized testing, curriculum goals etc., affected how the district and its staff viewed and valued these types of partnerships.

When I first entered graduate school to study art museum education, my experience with art museum education was limited. The experience I did have was as an art teacher, not an insider. However, that has changed over the last two years. In this time, I have worked with three art museums, in a variety of positions, learning about the inner workings of an art museum.

In the summer of 2008, I interned in the education department of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. During my 3 months there, I worked on a variety of projects including
designing, budgeting and implementing a week long summer camp for children. I also spent time with each member of the education department learning about their roles and responsibilities. The museum believed it was important for interns to understand how each department within the museum worked together. Therefore, I also spent time learning in the conservation, marketing, development, technology, curatorial, and library departments. Some specific experiences include attending the development board’s fundraising meetings, having hands-on learning experience with marketing projects, discussing museum budgeting, observing the use of web 2.0 technology to produce visitor resources as well as cleaning and preserving the museum’s outdoor bronze sculpture collection. The Ringling has an excellent reputation for their school and community partnerships. The positive impact I witnessed these programs having on their community has left a lasting impression on me.

I have worked for the Amon Carter Museum as a volunteer for their community Family Fun Days which provide specially designed programs and activities that encourage families to learn about the collection together. I also worked for its education department surveying visitors about their experience in the museum. My responsibilities at the Amon Carter Museum allowed me to gain an insider’s understanding of how goals and knowledge of the museum’s audience are blended to create programming.

I currently work for the Sid Richardson Museum. I began working in their library and archives department and am now the current director of studio programs. My work there is much more behind the scenes than any of my other museum experiences. My library duties included organizing and preparing library materials and resources in order to serve the needs of museum employees and docents. That allowed me to learn how museum employees research in order to serve the museum’s goals and visitor’s needs. With the archives project, I learned about the
history and evolution of the museum. Through my work, I could see the various challenges and developments the museum has had over the last twenty years. In my current role, I have been preparing new curriculum for hands on studio driven activities that complement a school group’s docent-led tour in the museum’s gallery.

Working in art museums has given me a new perspective on museum and school partnerships that I did not have as an art teacher. I have a better understanding of how the museum staff works to integrate their goals as an institution housing authentic objects with that of the visitor’s needs. Now more than ever, with my new position, I have been forced to consider my own beliefs and values toward museum and school collaborations and how educators in collaborative efforts blend their belief systems to create programming. How museum educators integrate their own personal and institutional goals with that of the schools’ and classroom teachers’ educational goals is the heart of this study. As I see it, art museums are interested in the relationship between objects and visitors. Education departments work to enhance the interaction between these two points. When considering the visitors’ needs, museum staff often seeks to understand school districts’ curriculum goals as a way to better serve them. A common factor in my experiences with museum and school partnerships has been this idea of integrating personal and professional beliefs, or goals. As a former art teacher, I witnessed an integration of school curriculum and museum collections during the partnership I was involved in. While working with museums, I have witnessed educators and museum staff integrating each other’s educational goals in the hopes of creating deeper connections and learning among students. In my opinion, it is this blending of goals between museums and schools that make for successful partnerships. I believe this atmosphere of mutual respect and invested partners creates a more positive and meaningful learning environment. I believe partnerships enable rich learning for
students, but as a researcher I wanted to know how the partners work together to make that happen.

Statement of the Problem and Research Intent

The study of museum and school collaborations is nothing new in itself, but because art museums have the potential to provide meaningful learning experiences and are willing to partner with schools in the effort to educate students, I believe, as others such as Hein (1998), Berry (1998), Hooper-Greenhill (1994), Caston (1989), and Hirzy (1996) just to name a few, that this topic is worth further exploration in order for new ways of understanding partnerships that allow for best practices to emerge. For example, while museum and school partnerships may be at an all time high, showing great signs of successful and mutual achievement, research warns against becoming too comfortable and discontinuing the quest for how learning can take place within the museum setting. Hein (1998) says, “learning in the museum and understanding visitor’s learning has become a matter of survival for museums” in order to justify their existence and accommodate the visitor (p. 12). Hein (1998) goes on to say, “staff should never underestimate the value of wonder, exploration, expanding the mind, providing new, cognitively dissonant (intellectually shocking), and aesthetic experiences. Museums can do this well and these are an integral part of learning” (p. 153). With all the possibilities that museums can provide, there is no question in my mind that museum education has not reached its peak potential.

Research conducted through the North Texas Institute for Educators in the Visual Arts (NTIEVA) also demonstrates a need for further study in museum and school partnerships. As part of a special division, NTIEVA formed the National Center for Art Museum/School Collaborations (NCAMSC). The purpose for this multi-year project was to serve “as a
clearinghouse for information about successful museum/school programs and practices by conducting research, maintaining a database of information, and making its information accessible through print and electronic networks” (Berry, 1998, p. 10). As part of the project, focus groups, consisting of museum educators, school teachers and administrators, were interviewed about their beliefs and attitudes toward museum and school partnerships (Berry, 1998). The participants were asked to discuss what each institution could do for the other in regards to improving their partnerships. Part of the results showed that teachers would like more museum resources such as

…workshops, reading lists related to museum collections, reduced-rate memberships, and social events. Every group expressed the need for help with transportation costs to bring their students to the museum and requested advocacy materials and services to help validate art education and museum visits for administrators and parents. (Berry, 1998, p. 11)

Indeed, throughout the center’s research reports, issues surrounding resources surfaced frequently (Berry, 1998). These findings indicate resources have significant impact on museum and school partnerships. Further research into resources, especially new types, is both valid and needed in the field.

The center’s research did not only address resources, but was also interested in what factors created successful partnerships (Berry, 1998). Over 600 museum educators were surveyed and asked “to discuss their most successful collaborative school programs” (Berry, 1998, p. 12). Survey questions addressed several aspects including, “conception and management, collaborators, audiences, formats and locations, marketing, evaluation and program content” (Berry, 1998, p. 12). The survey found that mutual interest between schools and
museums, multiple visits to the museum and thorough evaluation plans were considered indicators of good partnership practice. According to Berry (1998) the NCAMSC’s findings are meant to “spark ideas for forming new partnerships and to offer guidance and suggestions for improving existing ones” (p. 14).

What was not fully addressed in the center’s research was a deeper exploration of how partnerships are defined and how a partnership evolves over a period of time. As a researcher, one of my questions is related to how collaboration is defined among its participants and how experience with partnership affects the collaboration. For example, do participants with more complex understandings of partnership feel their efforts are more successful? How can the length of a partnership help or hinder collaboration?

Research such as Hein’s (1998) and Berry’s (1998) indicates there are potentially new ways of envisioning and researching museum and school partnerships. The way we, as educators and institutions, envision student programs and develop curriculum has a lot to do with our beliefs and attitudes toward education, in this case art and museum education. This is demonstrated by current research (Caston, 1989; Erickson, 2004; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Mayer, 2005; Vallance, 2004) on factors that influence art educators and museum educators as they develop programming and curricula. Therefore, it was meaningful to develop a study that would examine personal values and continue the research started at NTIEVA, with Berry’s (1998) work in order to discover how beliefs define collaboration and what methods are used to integrate museum and school goals. It was my hope that by studying the educators’ methods and values in practice, I could better understand the benefits and possibilities these partnerships provide and continue to create discussion within the museum education community about the potential of these programs.
In order to research values and goals, four questions of inquiry were developed to guide an ethnographic study of the situation. The questions this research study explored are:

- What are classroom teachers’ and museum educators’ beliefs toward museum and school partnerships? How do they value these types of collaboration?
- How do partnerships enable an integration of goals, values, and learning objectives for museums and schools, especially in a climate of standardized testing?
- What new museum resources and tools can be utilized to support a teacher’s educational efforts?
- How does the process of developing/defining a partnership, including years involved, affect the collaboration?
CHAPTER 2

SETTING THE SCENE

Research Setting

To study my research questions and explore the concept of collaboration within museum and school partnerships, I chose to study two local museum and school partnerships. To focus the study even further, I narrowed my participants to those individuals who closely collaborate together. The interaction between the individuals who plan, develop, and evaluate museum programs became the core focus of this study. The following will document my research settings and participants by first explaining how partnerships were chosen. And then later, I will discuss the individual participants and the process of research.

Research for this study was conducted at the Amon Carter Museum and the Sid Richardson Museum, both in Fort Worth, Texas. Because I was an art teacher and am now pursuing a career in museum education, I saw the value in exploring both sides of the partnership, a school and an art museum. I wanted this study to honor and promote both school teachers and museum educators in their efforts toward collaboration. To do this it was important to seek out art museum and school partnerships that focused on best practices in the field of museum education and school collaborations. In order to know what the best practices were in the field of museum education and then choose exemplary museums to study, it was necessary to have an understanding of the history of museum education and its current status as well as current trends and needs in schools.

Art Museum Education Then and Now

When researching, I found that due to the increasing stakes involved in standards of achievement, public school teachers are under greater pressure to meet today’s school curriculum
According to the Texas Education Agency (2004),

Texas students continue to be held to ever-increasing accountability standards through more rigorous curriculum and graduation requirements, and implementation of a new, tougher statewide assessment test, including the provision that third-grade students must pass the test, along with their coursework, to be promoted. (para. 17)

This standardized assessment test is known as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and is based on specific learning objectives or standards outlined by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (Texas Education Agency, 2008). Currently, Texas mandates that grade 3 students who do not pass the grade 3 TAKS in reading will not be promoted to the next grade level… As of the 2004-2005 school year, grade 5 students were required to pass the TAKS in reading and math to be promoted to sixth grade. Beginning in 2007-2008, grade 8 students will be required to pass the grade 8 TAKS to be promoted to ninth grade. (Great Schools Staff, 2006, para. 4)

With requirements such as these and similar ones in other states, it is no surprise that many teachers are looking for support to achieve their objectives and that museum and school partnerships are being forged as a way to supplement their educational efforts (Hirzy, 1996).

With this information, I began to consider how this trend towards increasingly higher standards of public school education affects museum education and what implications it might have on future museum and school partnerships. Since standards for schools shape their goals for student learning, I felt it would be important to consider beliefs towards school standards in my thesis research.
As I researched further into the history of museum education, I found that for many years museums have been concerned with school objectives and their ability to complement, support, and enhance school learning. In 1983, the National Commission for Excellence in Education published a report detailing the current state of education in the United States. The paramount report was entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The commission was shocked to find at nearly every level, academic performance was poorer than it had been just 30 years prior and when compared internationally, Americans were falling short of what other countries were scholastically (National Commission for Excellence in Education, 1983). As part of their findings, the commission recommended that

…schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations, for academic performance and student conduct, and that 4-year colleges and universities raise their requirements for admission. This will help students do their best educationally with challenging materials in an environment that supports learning and authentic accomplishment. (National Commission for Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 27)

According to Toppo (2008), *A Nation at Risk* “kick-started decades of tough talk about public schools and reforms that culminated in 2002’s No Child Left Behind, the Bush administration’s law that pushes schools to improve students’ basic skills or face even tougher sanctions” (para. 3). Many educators, such as Laura Chapman (2005) are concerned acts like No Child Left Behind have forced classroom teachers to focus primarily on preparing students for standardized tests. Furthermore, these standardized examinations do not test the arts as a discipline and as a result may convey that the arts are not important to the development of students’ education (Chapman, 2005). This made me wonder how the pressure to prepare
students for standardized exams affects classroom teachers’ attitude towards the arts and field trips to art museums and how museums will approach teachers in relationship to the challenges they face in this current climate of testing.

As standards for schools were becoming tougher, art museums became more interested in defining their educational role in society (American Association of Museums 1969, 1984, 1992; Newsom, B.Y., & Silver, A.Z. 1978). A year after *A Nation at Risk* was published, the American Association of Museums released *Museums for a New Century*. This report was the result of the Commission on Museums for a New Century’s efforts to “study and clarify the role of museums in American society, their obligations to preserve and interpret our culture and natural heritage, and their responsibilities to an ever broadening audience” (AAM, 1984, p. 11). It was evident that the country’s call for education reformation impacted the report. The document devoted a whole chapter to learning in the museum, noting that

The current reform movement forces a reassessment of the realistic limits of formal education. In museums, too, the meaning of the learning experience, the relation of museums to schools and the mechanism for education in the museum setting are all worth careful attention. (American Association of Museums, 1984, p. 26)

The report goes on to say that while museums have always held an educational role in American society, “museums have yet to realize their full potential,” and further research about how people learn in museums, new ways of educating in museums, and better ways of partnering with schools were needed (American Association of Museums, 1984, p. 59). *Museums for a New Century* was followed by reports such as AAM’s *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museum* (1992) which further defined the organization’s beliefs about museums’ educational role and “restated the profession’s commitment to education” (Hein,
According to Berry (1998), *Excellence and Equity* “urges museums to collaborate with a wide range of organizations, and specifically to forge broad-based partnerships with school systems and the private sector to address educational issues and improve public education (pp. 8-9). In 1996, the Institute of Museum Services published *True Need True Partners: Museums and Schools Transforming Education* (Hirzy, 1996). This report gave specific examples of museum and school partnerships demonstrating the various ways museums and schools were working together to address education issues such as cooperative learning, integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum, the creation of new teaching resources, and community partnerships (Hirzy, 1996). *True Needs True Partners* also included guidelines for starting partnerships between school and museums (Hirzy, 1996). These various research efforts helped focus the field of museum education and gave it a clear direction for the future.


> In order to maximize their potential to be educative, museums need first to attend to visitors’ practical needs; degree of comfort influences the value of the museum experience. Comfort includes orientation, providing amenities, making the museum’s agenda clear, and always maximizing the possibility that the intended interactions between the content of the museum and the visitor be as positive as possible. (p. 153)

The importance for museum educators to address the visitor’s specific needs and to be good liaisons between the visitor and the museum certainly has implications in regard to public school teachers and students. After I researched the history of museum education and its connection to student education, two questions arose. What were museum educators currently doing in regard to museum and school partnerships? How do such partnerships fulfill the needs of school
visitors? I wanted to study partnerships that had an understanding of the evolution of museum education and that had goals to support student learning in an effort to help classroom teachers. Having had experience with the Sid Richardson Museum and the Amon Carter Museum through school related partnerships as an art teacher and as a graduate student, these two museums stood out in my mind as institutions that supported student learning and encouraged partnerships with local schools whether that be public, private, elementary school or college. It was a purposeful sampling. But before choosing them as my research sites, I wanted to learn more about current trends in museum and school collaborations.

After looking into the evolution of museum education, I began to research current best practices in the field. I found that museums offer the unique opportunity to experience authentic objects (Caston, 1989). In many ways, it is these authentic objects that make learning in a museum like no other learning. Caston (1989) notes that

Works of art and artifacts present a variety of human reactions to and interactions with the world and with other human beings. Presented in an interdisciplinary and humanistic manner, these objects invite the viewer to explore, participate in, and gain deeper understanding of the human experience. (p. 90)

Museums have found a variety of ways for their visitors to learn and interact with authentic objects in a multi-disciplinary fashion including

- Story-telling in galleries using paintings, drama using characters related to the collections, art-making and scientific experimental workshops, writing poetry as a response to objects and reviewing classification systems, developing fashion shows based on costume collections, measuring and recording buildings inside and outside, mapping
sites and grounds, talking and listening to museum staff, visiting museum stores or laboratories. (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. 21)

It seems only natural that schools would want to partner with art museums as a way for their students to experience this unique environment and build upon what they are learning in the classroom. There are thousands of art museums in the United States and countless museum/school partnerships that support teachers in reaching their educational goals. Examining a few types of collaboration and current partnerships that I researched will allow for an overview of common practices.

_Interdisciplinary learning._ As noted earlier, art museums are an ideal setting to integrate curriculum because art and art museums are inherently multi-disciplinary, or interdisciplinary¹ (Berry, 1995; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999). Both *Museums for a New Century* and *True Needs True Partners* recommend that museums pay attention to the specific curriculum of their school partners in order to develop supportive programming (American Association of Museums, 1984; Hirzy, 1996). At the Art Institute of Chicago, educator, Robert Eskridge (2003) describes programming saying

> In order to justify the time and expense of museum field trips, school districts nationwide have demanded that what students learn in the galleries be relevant to formal curricula. In response, Art Institute docents work to stay abreast of academic goals and standards, and to design their tours and other programs accordingly. (p. 84)

In the past decade, school programming at the Art Institute has included language arts-based components that combined writing and storytelling with traditional tours of the artworks

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¹ For the purpose of this thesis, the term interdisciplinary will refer to an integrated curriculum designed around more holistic views or big ideas that encourage students to make deeper connections about life, the world, and how they view themselves in it. This is opposed to a multidisciplinary curriculum which looks to find multi or many discipline connections within one theme (Beane, 1997; Stewart & Walker, 2005).
Another example of a partnership that integrated curriculum is one that existed between the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and a local elementary school. Educators from all three institutions worked to develop an integrated science and arts curriculum about rivers which allowed students to study rivers in class, and explore “river ecosystems through the Museum of Natural History and artists’ representations of rivers through the Museum of Art” (Hirzy, 1996, p.20).

While I was teaching elementary art in Hurst-Euless-Bedford Independent School District (ISD), my school participated in a district wide partnership with the Amon Carter Museum. Our district’s fine arts director worked with the education department at the Amon Carter to bring every fifth grader in our district to the museum as a way to connect the arts to the student’s classroom studies. The Amon Carter Museum designed a tour for our fifth grade students using their collection and the social studies/language arts objectives for that grade level. The tour included artworks that featured themes the students were studying in social studies, questioning strategies based on the TEKS’ objectives, and a creative writing activity. I believe including these elements was an important factor. If the museum had not approached our district using the TEKS as a draw and using language the administrators could understand, I do not know if our district would have agreed to the partnership. When researching further, I was pleased to find that museums are doing more than just developing tours that address curriculum goals.

Multiple visit programs. To extend educational possibilities, many museums now offer school programming that includes multiple site visits. Instead of visiting the museum only once, students receive a more developed experience through repeat visits allowing more time and material to be explored. The hope is that more exposure leads to more understanding. For example, in their article “Exploring the Potential of Museum Multiple-Visit Programs,” Adams,
Luke and Witmer (2000) showcase a partnership between the National Gallery of Art and local fifth and sixth graders in which students visit the museum 7 times during the year. According to Adams, Luke and Witmer (2000), “Museum educators and teachers frequently observe that multiple visits can have a profound and lasting impact on students, enhancing their abilities to respond to and discuss works of art while supporting education standards and classroom work” (p. 47). The opportunity for students to digest information and construct meaning about their experiences over a period time is a valuable aspect of multiple visit programs that the typical, one time field trip cannot offer. Museum educators are also providing support to their school partners through the development of valuable resources that can be used in the classroom.

Resources for teachers, students and classrooms. Expanding beyond the field trip experience, resources of all sorts are being published by art museums in order to supplement and continue the museum learning experience. According to Zeller (1987), in the late eighties museums began providing slide packages, laminated reproductions, videos, lesson plans, and information booklets all based on the school’s needs. Zeller (1987) says these materials were not only designed as extensions of the museum experience but to help teachers who are not trained in the arts feel more comfortable with the material. This trend of providing resources still exists today but as technology advances, resources are available in different forms. For example, the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art provides lesson plans and images online that teachers can download and use in their classroom if the school cannot visit the museum (John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2008). The Getty’s website also offers a variety of resources including online games for kids, an online community for teachers and lesson plans that download in Word format which can be adapted by the classroom teacher as needed (J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008).
Outreach partnerships. Another valuable resource that many museums provide is outreach programs for those schools that cannot visit the museum in person. Eskridge (2003) says:

Not all of the museum’s school programming takes place within its own walls, however. Early twentieth-century extension programs involved museum educators traveling around the city armed with fine-art reproductions, and updated versions of this approach continue to succeed today. (p. 85)

With outreach programs, educators are bringing objects, images, and activities to students in the classroom who might not otherwise ever experience an art museum. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s “Ready, Met, Go”, the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art’s “Renaissance Kids,” and the Dallas Museum of Art’s “Go Van Gogh” are all examples of these types of programs. As in the case of the Ringling’s “Renaissance Kids,” some outreach programs cater to lower socio/economic schools and provide their services free of charge. Others combine school visits with site visits creating a unique community relationship between institutions. Either way, these types of programs provide a great service for classroom educators and demonstrate the museums of this country’s commitment to school partnerships.

Professional development opportunities for teachers. Finally, I found that many museum educators provide professional development opportunities for teachers to visit the museum and learn about how they can use it as a resource in their classroom, as well as offer a selection of teacher workshops in relationship to exhibition programming to learn new content and integrate it into their curricula. Recently, there has been discussion within the art education field about the quality of pre-service training and its affect on fine arts curriculums. In his article, “Educating
the Whole Person: Arts in the Curriculum,” Eisner (1987) cautioned readers against the possible consequences of poor teacher training saying

To neglect the contributions of the arts in education, either through inadequate time, resources, or poorly trained teachers is to deny children access to one of the most stunning aspects of their culture and one of the most potent means for developing their minds. (p. 40)

Eisner (1987) continues saying, “Without professionally competent and artistically educated teachers, no arts curriculum is likely to be effective” (p. 40). To address pre-service training issues, it has become more common for universities to partner with local museums. These partnerships provide projects that teach future educators and graduate students how to use the art museum in their classroom as part of an interdisciplinary curriculum. An example of this is the program described in Barry and Villeneuve’s (1998) article, “Veni, Vidi, Vici: Interdisciplinary Learning in the Art Museum” where a group of future high school teachers partnered with the Spencer Museum of Art to explore how the collection could be incorporated into various content areas such as “health, social studies, and specific foreign languages” (p. 19).

Kalin, Grauer, Baird and Meszaros (2007) describe another type of partnership between the University of British Columbia (UBC), the Vancouver Art Gallery and the UBC Museum of Anthropology in which students participated in courses taught within the museum environment as a way to “use museum and gallery settings as sites to test ideas, critique educational programmes, and advance new approaches for teachers to use museums in more creative and integrated ways while expanding theoretical knowledge and interpretive repertoires” (p. 200). Partnerships like this one help break down barriers teachers might have towards museum collaborations due to comfort levels or inexperience.
As I researched museums’ efforts to provide professional development opportunities, I recalled my own personal experiences. As part of my undergraduate studies to become an art teacher, I had no formal training on using the art museum as an extension of my classroom. When I became a teacher, I was somewhat intimidated about taking my students to the museum or approaching museum educators about resources because of my lack of knowledge on the subject. This, as it turned out, was the consensus of my fellow art teachers and to correct the problem, we began attending teacher workshops at local museums. We were provided tours, lesson plans, digital images, posters, as well as hands on training that taught us how to incorporate the museum into our curriculum whether we could visit with our students or not. These workshops not only made me a better educator in the classroom but also significantly increased my comfort level art museums. As a teacher, I was pleased to find museums reaching out and willing to help us with our curriculum and partner as a way to become better educators.

After researching and reflecting upon my own experiences with art museum and school collaborative interactions, I compared these current practices with those at the Amon Carter Museum and the Sid Richardson Museum. I found that both institutions had similar programs to those I had researched, made efforts to stay up to date with what was happening in museum education through their own personal research, and had positive reviews for school partnerships from their community. I decided that these two institutions would allow me to study my research questions with the knowledge that what I would find there would be successful examples of collaboration. In order to explore the role that time and experience with collaboration played, it was necessary to observe more than one partnership. While other local museums had similar collaborations, I eventually, through careful thought, chose a partnership at the Amon Carter Museum and one at the Sid Richardson museum because one was an
established partnership whose participants have collaborated for several years and the other was a fairly new partnership in its earlier stages of development. With the research sites determined, I now turned to deciding which participants would best serve in providing insight into my research questions.

Research Participants

The participating museums were the Sid Richardson Museum and the Amon Carter Museum. These venues were chosen based on convenience sampling because they provided settings, participants, and examples of partnerships ideal to this study’s questions as well as model what this researcher believed to be successful partnerships.\(^2\) The participants included the main partnership collaborators such as the museum educator and classroom teacher.\(^3\) The number of participants differed for each museum due to its size, but in both cases every effort to include those people who were most involved with the collaboration process was made. For example, the Amon Carter has a larger education department, therefore had more participants in this study.

Participants through the Sid Richardson Museum

The Sid Richardson Museum houses a permanent exhibit of artworks by Western artists Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell (Sid Richardson Museum, 2010). “The works, reflecting both the art and reality of the American West, are the legacy of the late oilman and philanthropist, Sid Williams Richardson, and were acquired by him from 1942 until his death in 1959” (Sid Richardson Museum, 2010).

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\(^2\) As mentioned earlier, it is my assumption that it is this blending of goals between museums and schools that make for successful partnerships and that an atmosphere of mutual respect for each institutions goals creates a more positive and meaningful learning environment. One of the goals for this study was to explore my beliefs about what makes for successful partnerships and determine whether these beliefs were accurate.

\(^3\) Students involved in these partnerships were observed as they interacted with docents, museum educators, and classroom teachers but they were not examined as primary participants and there were no observations of students in their classroom setting.
The director of education outreach at the Sid Richardson, Rebecca Martin, has experience in being both a classroom art teacher and museum educator; therefore, she has an understanding of a school’s goals and needs as well as that of a museum. At the time my research began, she had recently partnered with a local Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) school, the Alice Carlson Applied Learning Center (ACLC), to develop a museum and school partnership serving third grade students. ACLC is a specialized school focusing their curriculum on applied learning concepts that are based on John Dewey’s works. This school believes “applied learning helps students understand the connections between in-school learning and out-of-school problems” (ACLC, 2008, Applied Learning section, para. 2). Because this school incorporates authentic learning experiences, such as museum field trips, it correlated well with this thesis’s conceptual framework. After some preliminary research on the various partnerships the Sid Richardson Museum offered, it was decided that the partnership with the ACLC would be an appropriate partnership to study.

This partnership was 1 of 4 partnerships piloted in 2007 and targets 3rd graders. Students make 2 visits to the museum to engage in 2 different themed tours and there is an optional family day trip for the third visit. The partnership’s goal was to blend two of the museum’s tours and Fort Worth Independent School District’s third grade curriculum. The 1st tour is called “examining ecosystems”. Students visit the museum and look at paintings to discuss aspects of Native Americans life and the American West in the 19th century. The students then visit the Fort Worth Botanical Gardens which gives them an opportunity to compare the environments depicted in the museum’s paintings and the botanical garden’s plant life. The 2nd visit entitled, “days of the pony express” features topics such as the Pony Express, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and the Gold Rush of 1849. The artworks featured on this tour complement the
students’ social studies curriculum by visually depicting the themed topics. This partnership also represented a newer collaboration, less than 2 years in practice, and therefore provided considerations on the process of developing a partnership. Along with Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Mary Burke, director of gallery programs and tours at the Sid Richardson Museum and all three 3rd grade teachers at the ACLC participated in this study which provided a balanced representation. It was originally hoped to include the ACLC’s art teacher as part of the study, but, due to scheduling complications, she was unable to participate. However, Mrs. Martin was able to provide information regarding the ACLC’s art teacher’s role within the partnership.

Participants through the Amon Carter Museum

The Amon Carter Museum was chosen for the second site of the study. “The Amon Carter Museum was established through the generosity of Amon G. Carter Sr. (1879–1955) to house his collection of paintings and sculpture by Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell” and its mission is “to collect, preserve, and exhibit the finest examples of American art; and to serve an educational role through exhibitions, publications, and programs devoted to the study of American art” (Amon Carter Museum, 2010). Museum educators, Stacy Fuller, head of education, and Nora Christie-Puckett, former student, family, and adults program manager at the Amon Carter Museum, brought experience and insight to this study having both been museum educators at the museum for several years. As I mentioned earlier, I had experience with the museum’s educational programs while I was an art teacher in the Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD. After beginning my studies in museum education, I became interested in studying this partnership through the museum educator’s perspective and as my research became more developed toward the idea of integrating goals, it made sense to include this partnership in my study not only for personal reasons, but professional ones as well. The Amon Carter Museum has
collaborated with the Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD for over seven years under the direction of Mrs. Fuller and Mrs. Christie-Puckett. The former fine arts director contacted the Amon Carter Museum in 2002 wanting to create a partnership that would allow every 5th grade student in the school district to visit the museum and experience a tour that would tie into their social studies curriculum. The partnership has grown and while the partnership’s content goals have changed over the years, there is still always a connection between the collection and the students’ curriculum. For example, students have experienced tours based on social studies, science, and visual arts curriculum. Because of the length of time in practice, this partnership could provide a wealth of information for the study as it involved several collaborators including museum educators, gallery instructors, art teachers, and public school administrators. It also represented a partnership that has evolved over a significant period of time. In addition to Mrs. Fuller and Mrs. Christie-Puckett, participants included, the museum’s chief operations officer, Lori Eklund, two gallery instructors, Bridget Thomas and Erin Long, Mrs. Diane McClure, art teacher at Lakewood Elementary, and Mr. Mark Chandler, the director of visual and performing arts in Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD (H-E-B ISD).

Design of Study

As a researcher, I believe that knowledge is constructed through experiences and that the participants in my study interpret their situations through particular social or cultural contexts. Therefore, in order to study the participants’ knowledge, which in this case include their beliefs and attitudes toward partnership, I chose methods and tools that could effectively extract this knowledge. I chose to study my collaborators through an ethnographic research lens. Traditional ethnographic methods, such as observations and interviews, aim to reveal how the participants

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4 Mrs. Christie-Puckett has since left her position at the museum but was able to participate in this study before that time.
interpret their situation (Willis, 2007). In fact, an ethnography’s “key strength is its emphasis on understanding the perceptions and cultures of the people and organizations studied” (Troman, Jeffrey, & Walford, 2004, p. vii). Observations and interviews present verbal and visual descriptions, or narratives, about the participants. My role as a researcher was to collect these narratives and present them through my writings but at the same time explore my own constructions and interpretations as a way to come to an understanding of how partnerships are valued and developed.

The nature of this study revolved around two different kinds of educational institutions and the way they interacted with each other. Its primary goal was to explore how the participants viewed and valued their museum and school collaborations as a way to understand what elements, attitudes, etc., make for successful partnerships. In other words, it was more concerned with the reasoning behind certain behaviors, not just the behaviors themselves. Since the study wishes to present both the participants’ and the researcher’s point of view, I chose methods of research that not only addressed the participant’s interpretation, but the researcher’s as well. Ethnography was an appropriate methodology for this study because it goes beyond a descriptive case study, focusing on interpreting the meaning behind actions which support the constructivist paradigms I was interested in and will discuss further in chapter three (Chase, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Willis, 2007).

According to Creswell (2007), ethnographers study “the meanings of behavior, language and interaction of a culture-sharing group (p. 58). Wolcott (1999) and Geertz (1973) believe that an ethnography’s true goal is to search for meaning as a way to better understand the culture, not just provide documentation of observations. With ethnography, the researcher works to create a study that negotiates understanding through description, analysis, and interpretation of the group
studied (Creswell, 2007). I feel that I have spent time in both the culture of museums and the culture of schools. My time spent with these cultures has given me experience with how they function, but with this study I gained a deeper understanding how and why each function the way they do, particularly in their actions with each other.

Clifford (1998) points out that in the field of anthropology, the definition of culture has changed and evolved over the years, allowing the idea of culture to apply to many different contexts. In this study, schools and museums can be viewed as two separate cultures each having its own set of customs and beliefs. Partnerships between them can be viewed as an attempt to blend beliefs and customs in the hope of creating something meaningful. Since my goal for this study was to strengthen my own understanding of partnerships between museums and schools, an ethnographic approach provided me with the methods of collecting data, but also what Wolcott (1999) referred to as “a way of seeing” it as well (p. 65).

Methods of Data Collection

In this study I used traditional ethnographic research techniques including participant observation, interviewing and studying products of the culture which, in this case, are resources created by the museum for the student’s or teacher’s use. Wolcott (1994) refers to these three elements: experiencing, inquiring and examining as the “major modes through which qualitative researchers gather their data” (p. 10). According to Creswell (2007), “ethnography involves extended observations of the group, most often through participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people” (p. 68). In this study, the participants, museum educators and classroom teachers, were observed in two ways. Participant observation opportunities included planning meetings between the partners. By observing the planning process, I gained insight into the meanings behind curriculum choices and the way in
which participants worked together. I also observed student visits to the art museums which provided a conclusion to the study allowing me the opportunity to see how all the educators’ collaborative efforts came to fruition. By doing this type of field work, I could document the partnership in the context it was created and, as a result, gain a better understanding of the participants’ perceptions (Wiersma, 1991).

Interviews are an essential and core aspect of this study. Semi-structured, audio recorded interviews were conducted as part of this project. The interviews were designed for both single persons and focus groups. For example, it was appropriate to conduct a focus group interview with all three third grade teachers at the Alice Carlson Learning Center. This type of interview created a more comfortable environment for the participants and invited a more constructivist way of discussing the partnership.

By nature, interviews strive to capture and understand the meanings people attribute to their experiences (Chase, 2005). With a semi-structured, or “interview guide approach,” the interviewer begins with pre-determined topics or questions but allows for flexibility if the interview takes a different direction than originally intended; the interviewer can adjust or ask new questions based on the interviewee’s responses (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 208). This moderately structured approach allows the interview to capture not only the interviewer’s interests on a topic, but also an opportunity for the interviewee’s own values and interests to emerge. With this strategy, the researcher can explore the study’s original questions but he/she is also able to capture the interviewee’s directional changes and nuances. These seemingly subtle behaviors can add further meaning and understanding to the conversation. Because unexpected opportunities arose, casual interviews and personal communications were also documented through recordings and/or notation and were considered along with the pre-planned interviews.
Finally, conducting a review of related documents was an unobtrusive method of data collection that also provided insight to this study. Resources such as curriculum, pre and post visit activities and instructional technologies are the physical representations of the collaboration. They in themselves told part of the story about these partnerships. Therefore, resources used in the partnership were studied and questions addressing them were asked in the interviews.

As with any ethnographic study, time in the field is a consideration. As a researcher I spent a year in the field of museum and school partnerships observing participants, interviewing participants, and reviewing the partnerships’ related documents. While I only spent a year in this process, I would argue that my participants viewed me as being in the field much longer. Having been a student of art education in college, an art teacher for five years, and a museum education graduate student for two years, I believe that participants viewed me not as an outsider, but as someone wanting to become part of their culture. I believe that by having this background my research was benefited. This will be discussed further in chapters 5 and 6.

Continuing research into museum and school collaborations is both important to the field of museum education and my own personal development as a museum educator. By studying the collaboration process that occurs between key participants in a museum and school collaboration through ethnographic research, I could begin to understand ways of creating successful collaborations on my own while continuing to create discussion about best practices for collaboration in the field. This thesis study shares the story of these two institutions, the Amon Carter Museum and the Sid Richardson Museum, as they develop and continue to partner with two local schools in order to integrate personal and professional goals. It is also the story of my own self-reflections into my beliefs about museum and school partnerships before, during and
after this study. Chapter 3 explores how we, the participant and I, come to understand the concept of partnership and constructivist learning.
CHAPTER 3
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: CONSTRUCTIVISM

Introduction to Constructivism

As an educator, I adhere to constructivist theories of learning and have used constructivism to guide this study because it allowed me to approach my research in a more holistic way. Constructivism has guided the way I view the field of museum education, student learning in the museum, the direction of this study towards partnership, and the types of research questions I wanted to pursue. This chapter defines constructivism as it pertains to this study, explore how constructivist theories can be applied to learning within an art museum and most importantly, discuss how I believe constructivism exists within museum and school partnerships.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivism is a theory on learning that grew primarily out of scientist Jean Piaget’s and psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s separate efforts to understand how learning occurs (Fosnot, 1996; Pass, 2004). While their fields of expertise were very different, Piaget worked early on as a biologist studying snails as they adapted in their changing environment and Vygotsky was, from the beginning, interested in the psychological relationship between humans and society. They were both fundamentally interested in how knowledge was transferred (Pass, 2004). Both believed that knowledge was not independent of the learner, but rather constructed by individual’s mind through previous and current experiences (Fosnot, 1996; Glasersfeld, 1996). Today, constructivism is an umbrella term describing a wide variety of beliefs, and even among themselves, constructivists disagree on a universal definition, but at the core of constructivism still lies this idea that knowledge is something existing within the mind, constantly shifting and
changing, not something the learner passively absorbs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Larochelle, Bednarz & Garrison, 1998; Phillips, 2000; Willis, 2007).

While constructivism is considered a learning theory, not a theory on how to teach, it still has great implications toward the field of education (Fosnot, 2005). I agree with Fosnot (2005) in that constructivism has powerful implications for educators and their students because “a constructivist view of learning suggests an approach to teaching that gives learners the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experience through which they can search for patterns; raise questions; and model, interpret, and defend their strategies and ideas” (p. ix). Learning theories shape the way curriculum is written and what are considered to be best practices in the classroom (Pass, 2004). I believe in constructivism as a learning theory because I have personally witnessed students learning in a constructivist manner. But what draws me to constructivism the most is its recognition of the impact of social learning (Fosnot, 1996, 2005). As an art teacher, I saw my students reach new levels of understanding and move through, what Vygotsky referred to as “scaffolding” or stretching of the mind, to new heights by interacting with peers and adults (Dixon-Krauss, 1996; Fosnot, 1996; Pass 2004). To me it was essential for dialogue to happen not only internally but outwardly with others in order for a more meaningful learning to occur. Because of my classroom experience, I adhere more to Vygotsky’s constructivism, or what is commonly referred to as social constructivism. Vygotsky “was interested not only in the role of inner speech on the learning concepts but also on the role of the adult and the learners’ peers as they conversed, questioned, explained, and negotiated meaning” (Fosnot, 1996, p.20). Vygotsky did not believe that students learn on their own, instead he thought that interaction with more knowledgeable individuals was required to stimulate learning (Dixon-Krauss, 1996). He valued the social aspect of learning and so do I. It was only natural
that when I began to study museum education, my beliefs about constructivism would transfer to the museum setting. When designing this research study, I wanted to view my participants through a constructivist approach. To do this, I designed my research questions to explore how the participants perceived their roles within the museum and school partnership and the beliefs and values that had shaped their realities towards collaboration.

Constructivism in the Art Museum

Museums and school partnerships provide a unique opportunity for social and cultural exchanges as supported by constructivist theory. Not only can museums offer constructivist learning situations, such as free-choice learning where visitors are in control of how, when and where they want to learn, but they also provide an atmosphere of social learning (Falk & Dierking, 2002). Social constructivism emphasizes the social aspect of learning; not only do we construct knowledge and meaning based on our experiences, but the social interaction between a facilitator, peer, or object leads us through this series of constructions (Solomon, 2003). Solomon (2003) describes social constructivism as the social interaction between the teacher and student or the object and how the student drives the learning, “stretch(ing) the child above his present knowledge level toward a higher level” (p. 56). Art museums are unique from traditional classrooms, in that, they can offer interactions between students, teachers, and authentic objects all at the same time. Interacting with authentic objects can allow cultural and personal connections to be made, spur powerful discussions and lead to deeper understanding of a topic (Caston, 1989; Zeller, 1987). Wilson-McKay and Monteverde (2003) support social learning in the museum as well, saying the interaction between students, educators, and objects allows for a mingling of voices and by examining multiple perspectives, students can have a richer experience. Authentic objects can be used to stimulate social discussion or they may function
themselves similar to a peer, visual images, instead of language, convey thoughts and ideas. Because obtaining authentic objects for use in the classroom is not always feasible, museum and school partnerships are an excellent way for teachers to incorporate social learning and interaction with original works of art.

Constructivist methods support multiple interpretations, allowing students to explore ideas through personal choices and multiple paths, and build connections through a layering of experiences (Falk & Dierking, 2002; Hein, 1998). Partnerships between schools and museums support this idea of layering, or scaffolding, of knowledge by encouraging students to make connections through different venues (Solomon, 2003). For example, educators at the Sid Richardson Museum provide a variety of ways for students to connect, make meaning of, and react to their collection. One way that they do this is by establishing partnerships with schools in which students participate in pre-visit lessons that are provided and often taught by a museum educator that visits the school before the students come to the museum. After being introduced to the museum’s collection through a pre-visit activity, students then visit the museum going on a docent-led tour of the collection that provides inquiry-based discussion and interactive opportunities in the gallery such as acting out a painting, role playing, and even singing songs about the artworks. Next students are directed to the museum’s studio classroom where students create an original artwork based on their tour experience. Finally, post-visit activities are provided by the museum that allows students a chance to assimilate their entire museum experience. But constructivist theories do not only support student or visitors’ experience in the museum. I believe these theories can also apply to the museum and school collaborators themselves as they move through the process of developing partnerships.
Constructivism within Collaboration

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines the word *collaborate* as “to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor” (Collaboration, 2010). Merriam-Webster states *educating* is “to develop mentally, morally, or aesthetically especially by instruction” (Educate, 2010). Schools and art museums are both interested in education and as I mentioned earlier in this paper, it is no surprise with growing curriculum requirements that schools are looking to collaborate with museums in order to address or enhance what is expected to be taught. Museums and schools may make natural partners because of their similar goals in the pursuit of education, but just because they collaborate, does not necessarily mean they will be successful (Hirzy, 1996). While having a similar set of goals, the two types of institutions are still very different. Establishing good communication between the collaborators is essential to making the partnership work well (Hirzy, 1996). It was this idea of how participants communicate that became a key issue for me to explore in this study.

One might assume that because I have an interest in constructivism, this study would revolve around elementary age students learning in a constructivist manner within the museum. However, while that would be a valid idea to explore, my study focuses on the adults, both museum educators and school teachers, who create museum programming, not the children participating in the programming. This is not a study to see how constructivist curricula is written for gallery learning or museum classroom activities or even how students use the scaffolding process while discussing a work of art in the gallery. In this study, I wanted to observe if constructivist ideas and methods were evident within the social interaction museum educators and classroom teachers must have in order to collaborate within a museum and school partnership.
When reading about best practices in the field of museum education, I found that both Hirzy (1996) and Berry (1998) describe ways for museum and schools to collaborate that, while not directly labeled as such, suggest constructivist methods. This was not surprising to me primarily because of the social interaction that must occur for museum and schools to partner. Museum and school partnerships are social by nature because they involve collaboration between administrators, teachers, students, and museum educators. As educators work together, they build from one idea to the next blending their own ideas to construct new ones. Therefore, I think social constructivist theories not only support students’ potential for learning in the museum, but also the exchanging and shaping of knowledge that develops between museum educators and teachers as they move through the collaboration process of a partnership. I wanted to study the collaboration process between museum educators and classroom teachers because just as I believe constructivist ways of learning enrich students’ experiences, I think these types of partnership could lead to better programs for students. Because I see the value that social constructivism has on student learning, I firmly suggest that these theoretical ideas should be applied to the way we as educators interact, plan and work together. Just as students discussing an artwork might feed off of each other’s thoughts to create new and better interpretations, I affirm that constructivist interaction, or social interaction helps educators reach new heights of understanding. Even as adult educators, I believe we are always students of our field and that we should be constantly learning and perfecting our efforts to educate. And that is how the participants of this study were viewed, as students striving to get better and better at what they do in order to provide excellent educational programming. I would argue that collaboration between museum educators and classroom teachers, whether it be through planning meetings, post-visit evaluations, and/or co-writing resources, stretches educators to what Vygotsky terms the zone of
proximal development or the area between a person’s “present actual level of functioning (what a [someone] does without help or support) and his potential performance level (the level at which [someone] can perform with help and guidance)” (Dixon-Krauss, 1996, p.78).

Collaboration exposes participants to expertise they might not have and ideas they might not have thought, creating a wealth of possibilities for museum programs.

Although I believe collaboration is constructivist by nature, my beliefs about constructivism within a museum and school partnership are derived out of my experiences as a classroom teacher and as a museum education student. Therefore, it made sense for my thesis study to explore my assumptions about social constructivism and museum/school partnerships to see if my ideas were valid or could be enriched. By studying how museum and school partners participated and collaborated, I was able to test my theories and continue to construct my own understandings how best to create successful partnerships.

Constructivist Practices at the Sid Richardson Museum and the Amon Carter Museum

I was very pleased to find many instances of constructivist practices apparent as I studied my chosen participants. Both partnerships I studied felt communication was essential to making the collaboration between museum and school a success. While the museum educators never referred to their practices as purposely having constructivist roots, it was nevertheless evident in the way they chose to interact with their school partners and I found the same to be true from the school teachers’ side of the partnership.

The Amon Carter Museum education department works very collaboratively with each other as well as with their school partners. The Amon Carter’s partnership with Hurst Euless Bedford Independent School District (H.E.B. ISD) art teachers and 5th grade students is coming up on its 8th year in practice. While many things such as tour themes, artworks featured, and
written activities associated with the tour have changed over this time period, one key element has not. That key element is finding face-to-face time between partners at each school year’s end to discuss what worked well, what did not, and what could be done for the next year’s tours. I was able to attend one of these meetings and found Vygotsky’s ideas of social constructivism present in the way that the school teachers and museum educators talked and interacted. I watched that “scaffolding” process happen as art teachers would share ideas and museum educators would respond (Soloman, 2003). Together, through their discussion, they were able to come up with ideas that neither had considered before. For example, at one point in the conversation, one of the art teachers mentioned it might be nice to have pre-visit activities available on the museum’s website. While discussing this possibility, the director of education brought up the idea of a podcast or video that could be created and link to through the website. The idea of a podcast led to someone else to think of creating a possible distance learning opportunity. All participants liked the idea of a distance learning opportunity and at that point the person in charge of that technology was called into the meeting to further discuss the possibility. I fully believe that the ideas generated during this meeting were a direct product of the participants’ socially constructing meaning in regard to their needs, wants, and abilities within this partnership and that it took the participants interacting together to push their thinking to new levels.

Another type of social construction was evident at the Amon Carter Museum aside from their interaction with the school teachers. Ideas for tour curriculum at the Amon Carter Museum may be initiated between the youth and family programs manager and the H.E.B. ISD art

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5 Distance learning is popular term within museum education that refers to a digital technology that allows museums and schools to connect in real time via television screens or projectors where students can see and hear the museum educator at the museum and the museum educator can see and hear the students at their school (Amon Carter Museum, 2010).
teachers through planning and post-visit meetings, but those ideas are then taken to the entire education department team, including the gallery teachers, where they are discussed, reviewed and refined. The educators at the Amon Carter Museum believe by working as a team, they can provide the H.E.B ISD teachers and students with the best tour possible. In other words, they value discussing ideas and learning from each other. They are open to social interaction and value more voices developing the partnership instead of just one or two.

The Sid Richardson Museum partnership that I studied had similar interactions that the Amon Carter Museum partnership had. While they have a smaller education staff and the partnership is fairly new compared to one that exists at the Amon Carter, the emphasis on collaboration and communication between partners was just as evident. Their partnership evolved similarly where planning meetings, phone conversations, and emails between participants created opportunities for socially constructed meaning about what was working in the partnership and changes that could be made to make it better. For example, the director of education outreach created a pre-visit activity called “Passport: Investigating Community Connections” and has adapted the document over the period of the partnership based on suggestions from the third grade teachers with whom she collaborates. Her willingness to listen to the teachers’ suggestions and the third grade teachers’ willingness to share their curriculum needs with the museum’s educators creates constructivist learning opportunities in which both partners are creating shared meaning in the form of a document that is used within the partnership.

It is also significant to note that socially constructed interaction was happening not just between the museum education team members, the museum educators and school teachers, but between the H.E.B. ISD art teachers as a group and the third grade team at the Alice Carlson
Learning Center. The H.E.B. ISD art teachers meet regularly as a group throughout the year. While their meetings do not always focus on the museum partnership they participate within, they do find time to discuss amongst themselves what they think of the partnership and what ideas they might next present to the Amon Carter Museum educators at their joint meetings. While interviewing the third grade team in regard to their partnership with the Sid Richardson Museum, it was obvious that team members met regularly and discussed the partnership from their perspective thinking about what ways they can strengthen the students’ museum experience through classroom lessons and activities.

I was excited to find that constructivist theory was indeed evident in the partnerships that I chose to study. Since one of my study’s questions was concerned with how partners allow for an integration of goals, it certainly was inspiring to see how social constructivism, through conversations, can develop and indeed lead to new ideas with regard to each other’s goals. I believe, however, there could always be more face-to-face discussion time between partners. It is finding the time to make that happen that proves to be a challenge for the collaborators. This challenge is something for me to continue to consider as I begin to work as a museum educator myself. But this study focused on more than just how participants physically and mentally collaborate to integrate their goals. I was also interested in how my participants viewed and valued partnerships, what they think makes a partnership successful and what future hopes they have for these museum and school partnerships. In order to search for these beliefs, I chose narrative inquiry as a way to analyze my data.
CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVES AND NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narrative Inquiry

For a study of this nature focusing on a small number of participants in a very specific setting, narrative inquiry and analysis is a useful methodology because it allows the researcher to focus on fewer participants within one cultural setting more in depth rather than researching a global phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In this way narrative inquiry works well with an ethnographic study. Narrative inquiry began as the examination of the written word, but the definition of narrative has grown over the years allowing for a broader view of how human thought is expressed (Labov & Waletsky, 1966; Langellier, 1989; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 1993). Langellier (1989) states, “if narrative was at one time the province of literary study, the personal narrative as a communication phenomenon crosses disciplinary boundaries everywhere and every which way” (p.243). Now narrative inquiry often references oral histories and stories, including interviews, collected through the research process (Riessman, 1993). While researchers may disagree on specific definitions of what a narrative is, most do agree that a narrative tells a story and that the narrator tells a story to make a point or express meaning which in turn reveals their feelings (Labov, 2006; Mishler, 1986; Polanyi, 1985; Riessman, 1993). Chase (2005) says, “narrative is retrospective meaning making- the shaping or ordering of past experience” and that “when someone tells a story, he or she shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience and reality” (pp. 656, 657). If this is so, then narratives reveal what someone thinks about a particular topic or issue. According to Riessman (1993), the way we use language goes beyond a “technical device for establishing meaning” and that participants use language in interviews to verbalize their own meaning making choosing words that they feel will best convey their idea (p. 15).
Since I wanted to know what my participant’s beliefs about partnership were, I decided that the best way to structure my interviews would be to ask questions that drew out a narrative (see Appendix A for interview questions). Riessman (1993) says that interview questions, especially open-ended ones, draw out the story. The questions I asked my participants allowed them to weave a story about museum and school partnerships and the collaborations they were involved in. Through the interviews, observations of participants, and my review of the resources that participants created such as curriculum and pre- and post-visit activities, I was able to let my participants reveal their story of partnership and more importantly present what Labov (2006) refers to as a significant or “reportable” event which, in this study’s case, are the partnerships forged between these museums and schools and that, as we will see, are so deeply valued by the participants (p. 38).

While William Labov has proven to be a significant resource for my narrative research because of the work he has conducted in the field of narrative analysis (Labov, 2006; Lobov & Waletzky, 1966) and the way he treats narrative interviews in his analysis process, as a researcher, I became interested in something that Labov does not seem to address as much and that is the role of the interviewer and how their interaction with the participant can affect the narrative being told (Langellier, 1989). Langellier (1989) says “personal narrative as conversational interaction acknowledges how personal narratives occur in the ongoing stream of naturally-occurring talk” (p. 256). Because I took an ethnographic approach to my study, that is setting myself within the culture of museum and school partnerships, I was allowed to develop a relationship with my participants. I believe that because I wanted to learn from the museum participants to develop my understanding of partnerships, they viewed me not as an outsider but one who wanted to grow to be a member of their culture. Many of my interviews and
observations felt like conversations between trusted friends and as teaching moments. I also think my participants treated me this way because they saw me as a fellow teacher, a colleague. Not only did this benefit my study in that participants were willing to openly discuss all aspects of their partnerships, but it allowed a shared meaning making to happen that I was totally surprised by. Mishler (1986), Langellier (1989), and Polanyi (1985) discuss this phenomenon as conversational narrative, saying that the response interviewers give to an interviewee’s answers often lead the discussion in different directions or probe the interviewee more deeply and this interaction creates or constructs a new meaning for both persons. I could not help in several occasions but to step out of the interviewer role and discuss my study with the interviewee as I would a fellow colleague. For example, a participant might bring up something that came up in another interview. I would interject that this had come up before and we would discuss it further. We were making sense of the idea of partnerships together in many instances and it was a great feeling. Structuring my study under a narrative lens gave me access to my participants’ beliefs. Narrative analysis provided a way to sift through my data and find the meaning participants were trying to convey in relationship to me and my perspective.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is fairly new in the research community. Because the broad range of narrative definitions, Riessman (1993) says, “there are no standard set of procedures compared to some forms of qualitative analysis” (p. 54). I researched a variety of narrative inquirers and chose to use a combination of analysis techniques that enabled my understanding best. Labov and Waletzky’s (1966) model of narrative analysis proved useful in identifying the point or meaning that my participants were trying to convey. Langellier (1989) says “the purpose of
Labovian analysis is to relate the formal properties of the narrative to their functions” (p. 245).

Labov and Waletzky (1966) state that narratives have a framework which include an:

   a) orientation or clauses that “orient the listener in respect to person, place, time and
behavioral situation”, b) complication or main body of the narrative which in many cases
are a long series of events that lead up to the evaluation, c) evaluation or culminating
point or perspective of the narrator’s story, d) resolution or point, meaning or moral of
the story, and finally e) coda which brings the narrative back to the present. (pp. 32-39)

For example, in my interview with Rebecca Martin, director of education outreach at the Sid
Richardson Museum, she began telling me about the partnership with the Alice Carlson Learning
Center (ACLC) with an orientation statement saying

Well, it is one partnership out of four that are currently being piloted in the last two years
at our museum and all of those four partnerships have been developed for third graders.
Three of them are with the theme called “Art of Story: Defining Character” based on
“The Art of Story” which is a tour listed in our Educational Tour brochure. Those
students visit the Sid Richardson Museum one time and they also have materials and
resources available for pre-visit and post-visit activities. The project with Alice Carlson
Learning Center titled “Investigating Community Connections” is a multi-visit
partnership. On one side, the Fort Worth ISD administration – Michael Sorum, Mike
Ryan and Beverly Fletcher first approved the project and then the principal of the school,
Jeannie Robinson, the art teacher, Gennifer Best and the 3rd grade teachers, of course,
whose names you know have been direct participants. On the other side, the partnership
includes the education department at Sid Richardson Museum. As director of education
outreach, I write and evaluate the pre-visit and post-visit materials, coordinate the offsite
collaboration with the Forth Worth Botanic Garden for one of their two visits, assist with
establishing funding and logistics problem solving, and plan the family day event and
evaluations. I work with the director of gallery programs to discuss the thematic
connections with the artworks and she confirms the schedule requests with the third grade
team representative and the docents. She provides direction and training to the docents
for the tours. We all participate in the tours and family day. (Interview with Rebecca
Martin, director of education outreach, Sid Richardson Museum, May 19, 2009)

Her opening statement sets the scene for me to understand who this partnership is with, how long
it has been in practice, its themes and its participants. Next, Rebecca Martin provides a
complication statement or rather the main body of the narrative where she describes the
partnership saying

The Alice Carlson students visit the Sid Richardson Museum twice with their class, and
then they return voluntarily for the 3rd visit on the museum family day. The family day is
planned specifically for their school and grade level and that last event is really a lot of
fun. It has been a great focus point. Their first visit is called “Examining Ecosystems”
and the students visit the museum and look at paintings to discuss aspects of life for the
Native Americans in the 19th-century American West with the docents in the gallery.
Then they went to the Forth Worth Botanic Garden and they participated in a docent-led
tour of the Texas native boardwalk. There, they walk through a wooden natural trail to
observe and learn about the ecosystem that they see. (Interview with Rebecca Martin,
director of education outreach, Sid Richardson Museum, May 19, 2009)

She follows with an evaluation statement that hones in on the “why” behind the way the
partnership and students’ visits. She said,
It serves as an opportunity to compare the prairie environment commonly depicted in Sid Richardson Museum paintings with the real environment close at hand. This helps them begin to raise questions about the importance of the natural environment, living on the land, how artists have depicted it and why it was important to the artist to depict this. During their 2nd visit, “The Days of the Pony Express”, the students come and look at the paintings. They discuss and respond with the docents – who include the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the Pony Express and the Gold Rush of 1849 – as important topics related to their studies at school. So they're touchstones; the artworks themselves are touchstones and provide insight to important American history events and different means of transportation. (Interview with Rebecca Martin director of education outreach, Sid Richardson Museum, May 19, 2009)

Next she makes a resolution statement when discussing what she felt was the point of this partnership. Her resolution statement reveals her reasoning for working with the ACLC teachers to create an interdisciplinary tour experience. She said,

I learned that a museum and school partnership provides opportunities for students to have really significant and memorable off-site experiences. And as an art teacher in Forth Worth, 2001 to 2006, I found that planning art museum field trips worked best when they aligned with student's current curriculum or scope and sequence. They can make stronger connections that way. Most of all, I learned that a well-designed pre-visit and post-visit set of activities strengthened a powerful and meaningful learning connection for the students. (Interview with Rebecca Martin, director of education outreach, Sid Richardson Museum, May 19, 2009)
Finally, she brings our discussion back to her present beliefs on museum and school partnerships saying

So I see museum-school partnerships as a kind of organic process. They have the potential to evolve and if they can be adjusted to what museums provide so richly on one hand and what students need on the other, then it's a good marriage, if you will...of both sides. I see museum-school partnerships as valuable opportunities for authentic learning...when an inquiry-based approach is used and is coupled with thoughtful activities. It encourages students to look deeply and evolve their ideas, and I think it can encourage them to ask questions and have lasting and memorable experiences. (Interview with Rebecca Martin, director of education outreach, Sid Richardson Museum, May 19, 2009)

The example I show here with Ms. Martin’s interview is similar to the other interviews I conducted and analyzed. Labov’s (1966, 2006) methods helped me pin point my participants’ beliefs and the ways in which they value partnership through the stories they told. But I also looked to Gee (1985), Langellier (1989) Milshler (1986), Polanyi (1985) and Riessman (1993), for ways to address not just what was said, but how it was said, what was not said, as well as the shared meaning making that was happening as I interacted with the interviewee. When reviewing my interviews, I was struck by the enthusiasm that was evident when the participants talked about museum and school collaborations. I felt that the emotion being displayed had to be significant and evidence of the value the educators place on collaborations such as these. Riessman (1993) says

Narrators indicate the terms on which they request to be interpreted by the styles of telling they choose. Something said in a whisper, after a long pause has a different import
than the same words said loudly, without a pause. Tellers use elongated vowels, emphasis, pitch, repetition, and other devices, to indicate what is important. (pp. 19-20)

There were instances in every interview I conducted that gave evidence to this. One example would be from the interview I conducted with Stacy Fuller, the director of education at the Amon Carter Museum. I asked all my participants what some of their favorite moments within the partnership were. Using Labov and Waletzky’s (1966) analysis methods, favorite moments often revealed the ways in which my participants valued museum and school partnerships. In reference to her favorite moments with museum and school partnerships Stacy discusses her location of her office and while she doesn’t often get a chance to physically see students while they are in the museum, she can hear them through her office walls. She said of those moments

That joy (said with emphasis) that comes from having children in your building and in bringing this amazing (said with emphasis and slower, lower tone) collection to these children and so that’s…pause… just knowing that they are here (said slower and in lower tone) even though I don’t get to always interact with them, but seeing the little traces of them… (Interview with Stacy Fuller August, 2009)

Stacy’s emphasis on certain words such as “joy”, “amazing”, in reference to the collection, and “just knowing they are here” reveal how much she values providing children with the opportunity to interact with authentic objects.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I did not distance myself as an interviewer and often my interviews felt more like conversations rather than questions that require a response. Langellier (1989) explains,

Conversation is conceived as a sequential accomplishment of participants organized by turn-taking, where interactants form a system of relationships rather distinct speaker-
listener roles. Thus, a personal narrative is *mutually* constructed by participants according to shared knowledge and interaction rules. (p. 256)

I felt as a researcher that the conversations happening during my interviews were worth addressing. Mishler (1986) strongly emphasizes the importance of considering the interviewer’s role when analyzing data, noting that

> Within the perspective developed here, with interviews conceptualized as jointly produced discourses, certain questions take on particular significance and require analysis. For example, what is the role of the interviewer in how a respondent’s story is told, how is it constructed and developed, and what it means? In particular, how do an interviewer’s questions, assessments, silences, and responses enter into a story’s production? (p. 96)

Mishler (1986) goes on to suggest that the best way to analyze the interviewer’s role is for him or her to be honest about their interaction and report it in the study’s findings. Riessman (1993) says, “by talking and listening, we essentially produce a narrative together. The story we weave becomes theirs, mine and ours” (p. 10). One example of this type of interaction happened when I conducted one of my last interviews with two of the Amon Carter Museum’s gallery teachers.

Gallery teachers are responsible for providing students with their actual tour experience through the museums. They also work closely with the education department and school teachers to help develop the tour curriculum. The two gallery teachers I interviewed have both been working with this particular partnership since its beginning in 2002. In talking about the evolution of the partnership this conversation surfaced
Female Speaker 1: And last year we sat down with the teachers (H.E.B. ISD art teachers) with Nora, and the teachers said okay we don’t want to do this, we do want to do this but we want to do something else.

Female Speaker 2: And I think they’ve gotten more comfortable just as we’ve gotten more comfortable saying, hey, how about this, they’ve gotten more comfortable saying you know what—

Female Speaker 1: We are tired of that.

Female Speaker 2: We are tired of that, that really doesn’t work or the writing in this place was kind of flat, the writing prompt was flat and we would like to see you do more modern work rather than…so I mean they’ve really started to, I feel, kind of guide things.

Katherine: It’s interesting that you brought up them becoming more comfortable with you because this came up in another interview I did that I had never thought of before. This idea of building the relationships and over time may matter more than evolving the curriculum which is something I had thought of, but never in depth and this person felt like that was where things really got better and it’s also interesting.

Female Speaker 1: How ‘bout that!

Katherine: I know I just had like a wow moment because when I started and I probably shouldn’t be telling you this for validity reasons, because I am supposed to just ask the questions and not really elaborate so I don’t sway your answers but it was really interesting to me because I thought surely practice makes perfect so the more that you rework the tour script, or the more you rework the curriculum or the more you do this and she was like, I don’t really think that it evolves that way. I think it happens, you know as you get more comfortable with the institution and they get more comfortable with us then
we feel like things are really happening and so it was something that was interesting and when you guys, even when you just said that they started bringing you in to collaborate more, Nora obviously felt more comfortable giving you more responsibility and having that, it’s just interesting to me that—

Female Speaker 1: We’ve done this for 7 years, I mean there are individual teachers that I’m familiar with now and look forward to seeing every year but also you get that sense of here is how this school district runs and here’s what we can expect from their students and we’d always been pleased with what the HEB kids bring us but we know what their teachers are asking of them and we know we can expect those same things from them, that same level of critical thinking and questioning…I don’t know how to say that well but we have individual familiarity and institutional familiarity after 7 years. (Interview with Bridget Thomas and Erin Long, Amon Carter Museum, June 10, 2009)

This interview excerpt demonstrates the kind of conversational interaction that happened sometimes when I would be conducting an interview. In the end, I am glad that I was able to talk freely with my participants because I believe that had I not interjected, certain important points might not have been brought up. In this example, I interject to compare what the two gallery teachers were saying with another interview I had conducted. I revealed my surprise to find building comfortable relationships between partners might be more significant to the development of the partnership than curriculum development or time. In response to my comment, one gallery teacher brought up a new point of view which was by becoming more comfortable with each other, the gallery teachers know what to expect from their H.E.B. ISD students, especially their ability to critically think. For me, the ability to construct new meaning
as a result of conversational narrative was important because it allowed me to learn more about collaboration than I might have it if I had just stayed with the scripted interview questions.

Limitations

The researcher’s role while doing narrative inquiry brings up the issue of limitations and validity for this study. Chase (2006) Langellier (1989) Milshler (1986), Polanyi (1985) and Riessman (1993; 2000) all acknowledge that narrative inquiry and narrative studies are not meant to represent everyone, therefore making generalized statements or suggestions based on a narrative study’s findings would not be appropriate. Nevertheless, while findings cannot be applied to everyone, this study’s report may create ideas and questions for others that would lead them to new levels of knowledge and application in their own museum and school partnerships.

In order to present as accurate representation of the narratives studied, participant checks were provided so that participants could make sure their voice was being represented the way they intended it to be. When the study was completed, each participant received a copy of chapters 4 and 5 so they might see their interviews as they were used in context. Participants were encouraged to contact me with questions or concerns and material was negotiated so that what is read in the study accurately reflects their perspective and my perspective blended together to make our story. Another limitation is that this study represents a partial view of these museums’ museum and school partnerships. Both museums have multiple museum and school programs, however, even by looking at a partial view, I could still learn the partners’ beliefs and values toward the concept of collaboration. Finally, another approach to validity was to address my role as researcher, how I interacted within this study and the constructions I had during the process. These items are further addressed in chapter 6.
After extensively looking at my research data under a narrative lens, I was ready to present my findings as they related to my original research questions presented in chapter 1 of this paper. The next chapter reports my findings.
CHAPTER 5
DATA ANALYSIS: STORIES ABOUT PARTNERSHIP

I began this study with the following questions:

• What are classroom teachers’ and museum educators’ beliefs toward museum and school partnerships? How do they value these types of collaboration?

• How do partnerships enable an integration of goals, values and learning objectives for museums and schools, especially in a climate of standardized testing?

• What new museum resources and tools can be utilized to support teacher’s educational efforts?

• How does the process of developing/defining a partnership, including years involved, affect the collaboration?

Using Labov and Waletzsky’s (1966) methods for narrative analysis, I particularly focused on the evaluative and resolution statements to find the point or meaning that participants were trying to convey through their stories. I felt that by considering the point of the story, I would discover the values and beliefs of my participants. Using this method, I located similar themes in my participants’ stories. Following Langellier’s (1989), Mishler’s (1986), and Riessman’s (1993) suggestion to pay close attention to the way things were said, I was also able to find statements of emphasis within the narratives that further supported the analysis of the stories told.

Examining these common themes helped to answer this study’s research questions and forced me to explore my own thinking on museum and school partnerships.

There were 3 main areas or themes that surfaced: a) the importance of communication between collaborators to successfully integrate goals, b) both museum educators and school teachers felt museum and school partnerships were valuable in the way they impact students’
educational and social experiences, and c) in discussing favorite moments, almost all participants discussed moments when children seemed to be making meaning in enthusiastic ways and to participants this was an indicator of a successful program. This chapter presents these themes and how they relate to my original research questions.

Importance of Communication within the Partnership

When I formed my research questions, I was curious about how time shaped or changed a partnership. That is why I chose to research 2 partnerships that had been in practice for varying lengths of time. I assumed that more time would lead to more successful partnerships because practice surely makes perfect. While time was a factor, it turned out that it was for a completely different reason than I thought. Most participants expressed the importance of communication to develop and maintain a partnership. This first came up in an interview I had with Diane McClure, a Hurst Euless Bedford Independent School District (H.E.B. ISD) art teacher. When I asked about how years in a partnership effected it, she compared the H.E.B. partnership, which involves 18 elementary art teachers, museum educators, administrators, etc., to a smaller partnership she had with Mary Burke, the director of gallery programs at the Sid Richardson Museum, years ago and with whom she had also gone to graduate school. Diane noted,

Well I don’t think this partnership (with the Amon Carter) has necessarily changed that much other than people within the museum and people within the school district change and so you have different input all the time. I think what really impacts the partnership most are the personalities involved. Some people are very, very collaborative and other people are less collaborative. So, I think it’s mostly your personalities, and the amount of time you spend together. Mary and I, having been (Marcus) fellows together, were almost like sisters. We just couldn’t wait to get together once a month or so and have a meal and
just run these exciting ideas past each other and that (experience with Mary) helped fuel a lot of the later stuff that I’ve done with other partnerships. If I have a great idea I do feel very free to call them (Amon Carter) up and say I have this or I want to do this and can we make this work --and they have always in the past been wonderful to do everything they can to make it work. But we only have that 1 meeting a year and in a single meeting, we are don’t really have as much opportunity for that kind of excitement building and that kind of piggy backing. And so I think that amount of communication is huge. And I don’t know how you change that other than if you had more formal meetings or informal meetings or you set up teachers’ District Art Days on which you have, maybe, lunch with the museum educators a couple of times a year and you just set up situations where people could develop that kind of camaraderie. (Interview with Diane McClure, H.E.B. ISD Art, May 20, 2009)

This idea of camaraderie, comfortableness, and friendship-like relationships continued to come up as being an indicator of successful partnership. Director of gallery programs at the Sid Richardson Museum, Mary Burke spoke to the challenge of partnering and how important it is to communicate to know each other’s needs. She said

From the museum’s standpoint, knowing what teachers want and need is extremely important and will help you provide a resource for them that best fits their needs. From a strictly logistical standpoint, working in these relationships has opened up my eyes. Not ever having been in the classroom, except for student teaching, I was not aware of the great demands that are put on a teacher. I read an article somewhere once in which a teacher said, “That field trip is one hour of my entire school year.” So, the amount of time and energy that the museum is putting on that one hour versus time and energy a teacher
can put on that one hour is obviously very different. I think part of the challenge in these relationships is knowing the system that each other operates in. (Interview with Mary Burke, director of gallery programs at the Sid Richardson Museum, May 19, 2009)

It seemed as I continued to interview participants that what helped define the partnership and keep it going was this vested interested in getting to know each other’s point of view for a joint cause. When I asked Nora Christie-Puckett, former student, family, and adult programs manager at the Amon Carter Museum, how working together defines the partnership she expressed,

I think we've been really fortunate to have…you know, for example the Laurie Gowlands and the Pam Stephens, she was involved and…I'm forgetting her name…Diane McClure. Yeah, and they all have different ways of doing it, of steering me in a different direction and that's been really, you know, they're vested in a collection and they're vested in that program and they've just been really good….they're…particularly Laurie and Diane. They're the two that when I feel like asking okay tell me how this program went, I always hear back from them and it always includes constructive criticism and suggestions on tweaks and they always include some positives as well. I just really value their opinion and just to feel very fortunate to have worked with them. (Interview with Nora Christie-Puckett, former student, family and adult programs manager at the Amon Carter Museum, April 28, 2009)

And later in reference to her favorite moments with this partnership, Nora said,

I can't think of a specific incident, but I can tell you that it's been a favorite program for me just because of the vested interest from all sides and the willingness to try different things and just share openly and honestly so it's just one that has been really cool to work
with. (Interview with Nora Christie-Puckett, former student, family, and adult programs manager at the Amon Carter Museum, April 28, 2009)

As I mentioned earlier, when I interviewed the gallery teachers at the Amon Carter, they too brought up the significance of being comfortable with your fellow collaborators. Participants felt that being comfortable with each other led to the sharing of ideas and constructive criticism. Being able to tell each other what you really think and what your needs are allowed for better tours to be written. The challenge, of course, is how to make time for each other to build trust in order to form this kind of relationship. Face-to-face meetings were suggested by all participants as the best way to communicate as well as the importance of having designated leaders on both sides of the partnership to facilitate communication.

I believe the participants in this study suggested more face-to-face meetings because spending more time with each other creates the opportunity for meaningful dialogue. As Hirzy (1996) explains,

Dialogue is more than conversation or information sharing. In dialogue, the goal is to inquire, learn, offer thoughts, discover shared vision and common meaning, and explore how to think together. Through dialogue we can pave the way to genuine problem solving and teamwork. (p. 57)

Hirzy (1996), recommends devoting time to developing relationships between participants so that they feel comfortable in communicating their true feelings with each other.

How Participants Value Museum and School Partnerships

As I listened to the stories my participants told about partnership, many began by describing the partnership, how it formed, who it was with, what their goals were and what their partners’ goals were. At first glance, it appeared that partners’ goals were generally derived from
the institution in which they worked and the institution’s goals. For example, partnership goals were a blend of the art museums’ educational goals towards serving and public audience, specifically in relating the collections to the schools’ curriculum goals. In researching other museum and school partnerships, I found this idea of blending goals to define the partnership a common practice (Berry, 1998; Eskridge, 2003; Hirzy, 1996). Liu (2007) notes

Each museum and school has to work out an appropriate way to build a partnership based on each organization’s strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and core competencies. Art museums and schools can and should be partners by sharing resources, risks, and rewards. (p.135)

There was evidence of this blending of institutional goals. Teachers were pleased that their curriculum was being considered in the development of the student’s tour experience. For example, Kristine Gillmer, a teacher from the Alice Carlson Learning Center said

And you know what, according to the parents who have gone on the field trip with us, they will say that that’s the best fieldtrip that I’ve been on because they also recognize that this is what’s being covered, what their kids are learning in class and they are amazed at what the kids can talk about, while at the museum, and on the bus ride home. So I appreciate that this ties in with the TEKS that the kids have to, that they are accounted for. (Interview with ACLC teacher, Kristene Gillmer, May 13, 2009)

Overall goals are important to the development of the partnership and the implementation of programming (Hirzy, 1996). Because of this I assumed when asked about what value these types of partnership have, participants would connect the value back to the goal noting that when goals were met, they valued the partnership. For example, I thought the teachers would say that they valued these partnerships because they re-enforce what the students are learning in school. But
when asked what their beliefs about museum and school partnerships were and what value these
types of collaborations have, participants’ answers were much broader and student-centered,
versus institutional-centered. In fact, Ms. Gillmer was the only participant who brought up the
TEKS without being prompted to do so. Repeatedly participants’ stories led back to the impact
they think museum and school partnerships have on children in more global ways. The following
are excerpts from their interviews. A 3rd grade teacher Pam Hulsey recalled,

I think as a school we all really recognize that learning is more than just what you have
learned in a book. And that to be a well rounded person, we use the term “life long
learner”. We want the kids to feel comfortable in their skin as an artist and as a musician.
And to look at how all those things (in a museum) document society… so when they
offered us that opportunity we were like cool social studies and in art so you see how the
two could be related. (Interview with ACLC 3rd grade teacher, Pamela Hulsey, May 13,
2009)

Ms. Hulsey is describing serving students through interdisciplinary learning and learning with
authentic objects. These theories were discussed in chapter 2 and 3, but here we can see evidence
of their value to the participants.

The former student, family and adult programs manager at the Amon Carter Museum, Nora
Christie-Puckett also noted,

And so if you can get the kids in the door then you're starting. But then, more than that…
I think throughout the program, thinking about the links that we have made and just really
generating an excitement- “this is a place for me” or "Oh, I really like that work of art" or
you know, really hoping that they walk away with the sense of this the place for me and I
can make meaning or I can…you know, it's not foreign…it's not a foreign language. You
know, you look at some of the sophisticated illustrations in a children's book and you think, they make sense of that, why is the painting on the wall that much more intimidating and, you then ask, is it the context? Is it the building? Is it guard? I don't know the answers to these questions, but somehow I'm trying to break that down. Because these objects they have so many stories to tell and just a key to...learning about your history, your country's history as in our case you know, in another museum’s case, it could be different cultures or...you know, it's finding those commonalities and getting a sense of self in a larger context, too. But then also, you know, they're large like that, the images, but then they're small in that it’s a person that sat down and thought this through and created it and you can see their hand in it and...I don't know...so...just communicating that wonder...you know, why it's important. (Interview with Nora Christie-Puckett, former student, family and adult programs manager at the Amon Carter Museum, April 28, 2009)

Mrs. Christie-Puckett re-enforces this value of focusing on larger themes beyond curriculum goals to encompass bigger ideas such as who am I and how do I fit within my culture and other cultures.

An art teacher, Diane McClure from H.E.B ISD believed

I think that we benefit by the kids being able to see the actual original art. You can look at prints and things, but you don’t really see the brush strokes, you don’t see the actual size, and things like that. (Interview with Diane McClure, H.E.B. ISD art teacher, May 20, 2009)

The H.E.B ISD fine arts director Mark Chandler said,
I think as you’re aware we are facing an ever increasing population of students out there where their parents are not involved in going to museums, and where the kids are not able to go on their own. So I think that if we don’t provide this opportunity for them they’re likely not to ever get a chance to go and see, first of all, the wonderful art work or go to Bass Hall and then hear those wonderful performances. But in the process of doing that we’re also teaching them more than just going into the museum and looking at art work. We’re also teaching them how to be well behaved, how to address the appropriate behavior in a museum, and how to respect each other. They have to go through there together and be together without having issues among themselves. So I think that it is a very strong and necessary component of what we do and the value that I place on it, it is just right up there with the actual classroom education itself. I think it’s a very important part of, integral part of what we do and I hope that we’re able to continue it for a long, long time. (Interview with Mark Chandler, H.E.B. ISD fine arts director, May 22, 2009)

Mr. Chandler points out that preparing children for the world goes beyond learning in the classroom and that museum and school partnerships provide opportunities to learn things the classroom cannot necessarily teach. He specifically speaks to how learning is social—that students learn in relationship to their surroundings and with each other. They learn about content as well as being a part of a larger community that requires respect and sharing.

The director of education outreach Rebecca Martin at the Sid Richardson Museum said

I learned that a museum and school partnership provides opportunities for students to have really significant and memorable off-site experiences. It encourages students to look deeply and evolve their ideas, and I think it can encourage them to ask questions and
have lasting and memorable experiences basically. (Interview with Rebecca Martin, director of education outreach at the Sid Richardson Museum, May 19, 2009)

These are just some of the sample answers from the interviews I collected. While each answer is a little bit different, the common thread is that participants believed museum and school partnerships provided an opportunity for students they might not otherwise have. Exposure to a new environment and just having the chance to make sense of it was important to the participants. Instead of the partnerships’ value being linked to the specific partnership goals, participants, across the board, were more interested in how these collaboration relate to larger themes and the human experience. As discussed previously, the history of museum education demonstrates that they have increasingly wanted to partner with schools in order to support the country’s overall efforts to improve education. The government and the museum community acknowledged that schools were failing and that a more holistic approach to education, including utilizing community resources such as museums, would better prepare students for the future (National Commission for Excellence in Education, 1983; AAM 1984, 1992). The interviews I conducted demonstrate that museum educators and school teachers still value museum and school partnerships for their ability to broaden students’ education experiences.

Indicators of Success

A final theme that emerged among my data came from an interview question that’s purpose was to prompt participants to tell stories about their favorite moments. I chose this question because I believed discussing favorite moments would connect back to the participants’ beliefs and values towards partnership. When asked if they had any favorite moments during the course of this museum and school partnership, almost all participants described an intangible moment that happened when children interacted with an original work of art and the excitement
that it produced in them. This moment of enthusiasm is not something that can necessarily be tested or well documented, yet each participant felt the moment was a mark of success. They believed students were making meaning.

As director of education outreach, Rebecca Martin stated, “and it, you know, for me, the level at which students can have "ah-ha" moments and find excitement from what they see, conceive, is so rich and so wonderful” (Interview with Rebecca Martin, director of education outreach, Sid Richardson Museum, May 19, 2009). According to Hein (1998), studying museum learning is very different than studying learning in schools because museum visits are often few and far between, information is presented differently, and goals or outcomes may not always be clear as they are in school curriculum. However, Hein (1998), also shares that research confirms,

One of the marvels of museums is that the brief encounters visitors have with exhibitions do appear to lead to learning, do result in some change in the visitor that is often remembered with pleasure and can influence future behavior. (p. 136)

In discussing the challenges of documenting learning in the museum, Falk and Dierking (1992) note, “One manifestation of confusion is the misguided notion that learning is primarily the acquisition of new ideas, facts, or information, rather than the consolidation and slow, incremental growth of existing ideas and information” (p. 98). I believe that the intangible moments of enthusiasm in student expression that my participants described is evidence of what Falk and Dierking (1992) propose. For example, when talking about the value of learning with authentic objects and favorite moments, Erin Long, a gallery teacher noticed the museum environment brought out the openness of exploring concepts and thoughts together in a non-threatening way. She said,
and to be in this rare and fun place, this is a safe kind of place, the younger children don’t mind throwing stuff out there. If they are wrong that’s okay. For some kids also, you can ask them what do you think this is, what do you think is outside that box, or outside that frame and they can just choose. (Interview with Erin Long, gallery teacher, Amon Carter Museum, June 10, 2009)

Furthermore, another participant described,

Just to see the look on their face when they actually see that piece of art work and they can appreciate it for the historical value that it has, but that is just, it’s real, it’s not just something that’s in the text book. And just to see their faces, I mean the kids really seem to appreciate. I’ve not see one student go through there and act like they were bored. (Interview with Mark Chandler, director of fine arts H.E.B. ISD, May 22, 2009)

The former student, family, and adult programs manager said

But every year, you know, every tour has those moments where you just see it happening and the kids are making…meaning and they are excited. You know, maybe they turn a corner and they see a work of art that was on their pre-visit and, I mean, those are moments of success for me…Really, you know, they seem small and momentary, transitory I guess, but that's a measure of success. (Interview with Nora Christie-Puckett, former student, family, and adult programs manager at the Amon Carter Museum, April 28, 2009)

Here was another instance in this study where I was impacted by not just what the participants were saying but the way they were saying it. When participants talked about the way students experience the museum they got excited. I could tell it brought them great joy to see students enjoying the museum and making meaning. In the end that meaning making is what really
mattered. Collaboration between museums and schools provides an opportunity for learning in a different way and all participants felt that opportunity was worth working together to make happen.

Themes within Participant Observations and Museum Created Resources

The bulk of this study’s data came from the interviews that I collected. But it is important to note that the observations I made of participants interacting and the review of materials museums created to extend the student’s museum experience were an important part of the partnerships’ story, triangulating the data. This study would not have been complete without considering them. Observing the participants allowed me to witness firsthand the way collaborators work with each and in many ways it was a physical example of beliefs in practice. For example, both the H.E.B. ISD art teachers and the Amon Carter Museum educators said that being able to share ideas and constructive criticism with each other was important to the success of the partnership. I observed planning meetings between them where they put those beliefs into practice sharing their thoughts and working together to improve the partnership.

Both the Amon Carter Museum and the Sid Richardson Museum create pre- and post visit activities for the classroom teachers to use with their students at school. These activities are designed to prepare students for their trip to the museum and provide opportunities for students to extend or react to their visit in various ways through writing and drawing. I found that in both partnerships the pre- and post- visit materials had changed over the years based on teacher feedback and theme changes. The documents themselves take a considerable amount of time to prepare and go through many levels of review before they are given to the teachers. This, to me, is a testament of the museum educators’ dedication to the partnership and evidence of the value they think it has. Their willingness to continually work to improve resources and listen to
teachers’ needs demonstrates their collaborative effort and that shared meaning making I
described earlier in “Chapter Three: Constructivism”. On the flip side, through interviewing the
school teachers, I learned that they do indeed use the pre- and post- visit materials and appreciate
the museums’ efforts to create something customized just for them. Their use of the materials
demonstrates their commitment to the partnership and the value they think it has.

Future Museum Resources and Materials

Originally when I designed this study, I was curious about the resources and materials art
museums were creating for their partners and I wanted to know what new resources participants
thought could be created. But when I asked participants about this, the conversation often turned
away from new resources and focused on what was being provided. I believe this was because
participants were satisfied with what was already created and more interested in working to
improve those materials. I also think that, as discussed earlier, partnership needs can change
from year to year and so maybe participants do not spend time thinking about what could be
when they do not know the dynamic of this year’s program yet. However, two ideas for new
resources and materials did come up. In my observation of a planning meeting between H-E-B
ISD art teachers and the Amon Carter Museum educators, the idea of creating a podcast or
adding a distance learning component was discussed. Secondly, in my interview with Diane
McClure, she suggested, “little interactive things would be very, very helpful… the opportunity
to develop an interactive museum experience for the kids and to be able to play with those
objects that you cannot touch in the real museum” (Interview with Diane McClure, H-E-B ISD
art teacher, May 20, 2009). While I think both ideas are worth exploring, there was not enough
evidence of these requests in my data to present a definitive conclusion on the topic. But I think
they are worth considering in my own practice as a museum educator.
Through this research process, I was able to gain insight into how museum educators and school teachers collaborate together to form partnerships. Using narrative inquiry I was able to learn some of the stories of their partnership and understand how they viewed and valued collaboration between these two types of institutions. This study re-enforced the literature that I read in preparation for this study. For example, Berry’s (1998) study found that both school teachers and museum educators were interested in meeting face-to-face to plan the partnership, they valued museum created resources such as pre and post visit materials, and they recognized the importance of communicating needs in order to blend their goals. However, this study extends beyond studies, such as Berry’s (1998), by considering these findings under a social constructivist lens and by considering how participants spoke about their collaborations instead of only what was said. This adds a new perspective to the study of museum and school collaborations. What I learned from the participants was especially meaningful to me, as someone new the museum education field, because as they told me their stories, I began to consider my own. For me it was natural to consider what my participants were saying to my own beliefs. My participants, without knowing it, have helped shape my story of being a museum educator and it is that aspect of this study that the next chapter will examine.
CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS: MY CONSTRUCTIONS AS A RESEARCHER

This study of museum and school partnerships grew out of my interest to learn from what I believed to be successful examples of collaboration. It was my hope that by researching these programs I would be able to share with others findings that might help them in the planning of their own partnerships. I wanted to promote these programs and, in a way, honor their efforts. But throughout this experience, it was impossible for me to remain a neutral, distant reporter of facts. I am not sure how any researcher can discuss a study’s implications without being reflexive. How could I write about this study’s potential uses in the field of museum education without considering its uses in my life? In researching qualitative methods, I was pleased to find that it is no longer expected for the researcher to remain separate from the study (Creswell, 2007). Reflexivity is now common and acceptable in qualitative research. Creswell (2007) defines reflexivity saying “the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences, that he or she brings to a qualitative research study” (p. 243). In considering the implications of my findings, I was constantly thinking of how this related to my own beliefs, values and experiences as a museum educator. In order to personally benefit from this study, it was essential that I compared the study’s findings with my own thoughts. Throughout this experience, I was often very surprised at how different my own reasoning was from that of the participants’. Because this study was designed to understand museum and school partnerships, as well as enhance my own understanding of the field of museum education in general, it is appropriate to explore my constructions and how they changed over the process of this research study. This chapter will discuss the implications of the data and the themes that surfaced during analysis as they relate to my own thinking towards museum and school partnerships.
My Perspectives as a Student and Teacher

From the beginning of my report, I felt it was important to be upfront about my own beliefs. Being a former art teacher and now a student of museum education, I have certain experiences that shape my understanding about museum and school partnership. This information was presented in chapter one as a way to set the stage for my study’s design. But I will reiterate again here. I believe in the positive affects art education can have on students, the value of learning from authentic objects such as those found in art museums, and in the possibility for constructivist thinking and interaction within art museums. All that said, I came to this study a believer in museum and school partnerships. Being a believer already, I wanted to study how partnerships developed not whether or not they worked. Since I already believe partnerships work to enhance student learning, I wanted to learn how collaboration happened and what more could be done to improve these types of programs. What became interesting is how some of the perspectives I brought to the study as teacher and student were changed when I began “seeing” as a researcher.

My Perspectives as a Researcher

When I began my research there were certain things that I assumed I would find. I was surprised several times to find my assumptions were incorrect and often my findings raised new questions. As a researcher, I had to open my mind beyond my own experiences as a teacher and student and view what I thought about museum and school partnerships through the eyes of my participants. Their responses to my questions led me to think in new ways and consider elements of partnership that I had not before. For organizational purposes, I will explore my constructions as a researcher through the three main themes that surfaced during my data analysis. The themes, which were presented in chapter five were: a) the importance of communication between
collaborators to successfully integrate goals, b) both museum educators and school teachers felt museum and school partnerships were valuable in the way that they impact students’ educational and social experiences, and c) in discussing favorite moments during a partnership, almost all participants described moments when children seemed to be making meaning in enthusiastic ways and found this to be an indicator of success.

Communication within Museum and School Partnerships

My data showed that communication between partners was essential to the success of the partnership. Communication was an element I had considered important but had not thought it would stand out as a defining factor. I assumed that communication was a given factor. That it was a simple task and that both museum educators and school teachers would know its importance and work to be good communicators. I was much more concerned with time involved in a partnership. I believed that years of partnering together would lead to success because I believed that practice surely would make perfect. I thought that over time, everyone involved in the partnership would “know the drill” so to speak and with experience would come the ease of performing the task. I think this belief came from being a teacher. As a teacher, I witnessed veteran teachers that had been teaching for ten years or more. These veterans taught exceptional lessons and when asked how they did it, they would say that their practice emerged out of experience. They would say that the more they taught, the more they learned and that experience builds confidence and knowledge. I thought this philosophy would transfer to the museum and school partnership setting. Therefore, I was quite surprised to find that participants in this study did not focus on time but communication as something that helped define the partnership.

As my interviews and time spent in the field progressed, I mulled this concept of communication over and began to see my participants’ point of view. I realized that my practice
makes perfect theory only works well if the people and dynamics involved remain constant. For example, a math teacher knows that he/she is required to teach the same set of skills each year to a different set of students. While the students may change, their developmental level remains similar. The stability of the situation, same skill, same teacher, same student developmental level, allows the math teacher to find methods that work well and use them year after year. But in museum and school partnerships, stability is often rare. As my participants pointed out the people involved in museum and school partnerships can change from year to year. Schools might request the museum focus on new themes different from the previous tour year. Museums may be featuring a special exhibition and new tour curriculum must be written to support the tours. So in general, while the age group might stay the same, everything else in the museum and school partnership has a possibility of changing. The participants felt that in this ever changing environment, communication between partners is the element that keeps the partnership working smoothly. After spending time studying museum and school partnerships, I began to agree with my participants. Good communication is vital to knowing what each partner needs.

Communication is a factor throughout the partnership process. From the beginning of the year where ideas for the visit are discussed, to the planning of the actual visit, and then finally evaluating the program after the visit has occurred, communication is necessary. Participants talked about times that communication was working well and times when they felt their suggestions were not being heard or their efforts to meet with partners were not being returned. In considering the challenge of communication, I began to wonder what could be done to improve communication between museum and school partners. How do we become better communicators?
In light of what my study showed regarding the importance of good communication among partners, I think it is important for me as a new museum educator to look inward and find how I can become a better communicator. According to Mayer (2007),

Partners join together as they talk with each other. For a relationship of mutual trust and respect to occur almost immediately, which it must do to the limited time educators and visitors have with each other, the educator must project sincere interest in the visitor. Such qualities as empathy, patience, and appreciation are needed. (p. 192)

Perhaps the best way to learn how to be a better partner and communicator will be to continue to study and observe veteran museum educators. The relationships I have established with my participants are something I hope to continue. I think there is still so much more to learn from them and others in the field. The concept of communication within partnership is something I will take from this study and research further. This was an unexpected outcome, but one I am thankful to have found.

Values of Museum and School Partnerships

Data analysis for this study found that partners valued museum and school partnerships for their potential affect on children’s educational and social experiences. This was another research area that I was surprised by. As I mentioned in chapter 2, to prepare for this study I researched school curriculum and standards being taught. I found that standardized testing, such as TAKS testing in Texas, has a tremendous impact on what and how teachers teach (Texas Education Agency, 2008; Toppo, 2008). Having taught in a public school myself, I knew of the challenges teachers faced in preparing their students for standardized test and the effect that testing has had on off-site visits or field trips. Many teachers have to justify their reasoning for visiting off-site institutions by presenting to their administration how these trips enhance the
state curriculum (Eskridge, 2003). Knowing all this, I expected my participants to bring up standardized testing during our interviews and how it affected the partnership. In designing my interview questions, I assumed that when answering the question about how they value museum and school partnerships that participants would connect their value back to meeting the schools’ curriculum needs. I was once again surprised to find that this was not the case. Curriculum did play a role in the planning of the partnerships’ goals, but overall, participants felt museum and school partnerships were valuable because they provided an experience that students might not have otherwise. Partners valued that students learned from authentic objects. That is not to say that curriculum was not important to partners. Curriculum was very important and in fact, most of the communication that happened between partners related to negotiating the schools’ curriculum needs with the museums’ goals to create a joint curriculum for the tours. But when reflecting on the overall values, partners seemed to feel that when all was said and done, there was this richer reasoning behind collaboration that comes back to the visitor and the artwork. This idea of experiencing works of art brings me to the last major theme found in this study: students interacting with original works of art and the meaningful connections that are made.

Defining Successful Moments

In chapter 5, I described how almost all participants, when asked about favorite or successful moments in the partnership, described these intangible moments when students appeared to be making meaning while exploring an original artwork. I certainly can relate to what my participants were saying. As an art teacher, I witnessed those moments when a student’s eyes light up with thought, or a meaningful discussion is stimulating, or a child’s answer is so profound that you wonder why you never thought that about the artwork. But in analyzing my data, I began to wonder, how do we define something so intangible as this? How do we measure
learning that happens when students engage with art? How do we measure the excitement, sadness, or anger that a child expresses when talking about an artwork? We, as educators, know meaning making is happening in the brain based on the reactions students have, but it is a very hard phenomenon to explain unless you have experienced it. As a researcher, I began to wonder how I could I convey these findings in my study and have readers from outside of the field believe me. What could I say to convince the non-believers that yes, taking students to the art museums is vitally important to their educational experience? I think the first step is to understand that learning in the museum environment is very different than learning in traditional school settings and therefore it cannot be measured in traditional ways (Hein, 1998; Falk & Dierking, 1992, 2000; Villeneuve, 2007). Research by Falk and Dierking (1992; 2000) and Luke and Adams (2007) suggest students in the museum learn in a variety of areas including content, aesthetic awareness, social interaction and skills, and global themes. In studying children’s learning outcomes, Luke and Adams (2007) say that when children reflect upon their museum experiences, they often describe personal and emotional connections and that “there are clearly a range of complex and overlapping outcomes that result from the art museum experience” (p. 37). Falk and Dierking (2000) say, “Individuals may learn specific concepts and ideas, or they may not- but invariable they will learn something” and that

> Everyone in the process needs to understand and respect that, in the end, what individuals learn depends upon their prior knowledge, experience and interest; what they actually see, do, and talk and think about during the experience; and equally important, what happens subsequently in their lives that relates to these initial experiences. (p. 153)

This is probably why, as traditional educators, we can see our students getting excited as they interact with an artwork and we feel this is meaningful, but we cannot necessary pinpoint what
causes it or how to repeatedly reproduce the stimulating experience that began the student thinking. However, research on learning in museums is beginning to address this saying that “learning potential is linked to levels of satisfactions” and that creating experiences, or opportunities, for learning in the museum are not necessarily successful or unsuccessful based on museum educator’s ability to create repeat performances (Gorman, 2007, p. 208). This is also true if we consider the learning that happens within socially constructed settings as discussed in chapter three. Both the participants and I have witnessed what some call these “wow” moments when students express strong emotions in reaction to an artwork or group of works. Quantifying these moments is difficult because as Falk and Dierking (1992) say

> Museum visitors do not catalogue visual memories of objects and labels in academic, conceptual schemes, but assimilate events and observations in mental categories of personal significance and character, determined by events in their lives before and after the museum visit. (p. 123)

In other words, the museum experience is different for everyone. It is important for us as educators and researchers to acknowledge this and let it be enough that there is the potential for significant meaning making to occur on the student’s part and as the result of museum and school partnerships. This type of learning is unique to museums. Museum and school partnerships offer experiences that other institutions cannot. If we take these beliefs and accept their principles, what then do we do with this knowledge?

For me, as new museum educator, I can take this knowledge and use it to support and promote these types of partnership. I may have to work very hard to blend schools’ curriculum needs with museum goals. I may have to work hard to establish good communication and relationships. But I will know that my efforts provide students with the opportunity to learn not
only about specific content themes, but also the chance to explore and grow in the human/object experience.

Final Thoughts on My Constructions as a Researcher

Being a believer in constructivism, this study was an excellent opportunity to see how my original perspectives as a student of museum education and former art teacher shaped my thinking and how stepping into the shoes of a researcher re-constructed my thinking towards museum and school partnerships. Things that I thought were vitally important to partnership turned out to be minor, logistical issues. Things that I never thought of before were revealed. I am most thankful for these. How can we ever move past the place we are in our thinking if we never open our mind to new possibilities and learn from others? This study has grown me considerably in the way I think about museum and school partnership and I do believe I will be a better museum educator for it. Much like teaching, the best way to know how to do something is by learning from others about what works and what does not. I am thankful for the opportunity and the impact it has made on my life. But what implications does a study like this have towards the field of museum education? The final chapter will explore this as it recaptures the major ideas presented in this report.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This research thesis grew out of my interests in museum education and my background as an art teacher involved with a museum and school partnership. It began with idea of researching the partners who collaborate to make partnerships happen and learn from their experiences. To do this, four questions were established:

- What are classroom teachers’ and museum educators’ beliefs toward museum and school partnerships? How do they value these types of collaboration?
- How do partnerships enable an integration of goals, values and learning objectives for museums and schools, especially in a climate of standardized testing?
- What new museum resources and tools can be utilized to support teacher’s educational efforts?
- How does the process of developing/defining a partnership, including years involved, affect the collaboration?

As a researcher, I decided the best way to explore my research questions was to take an ethnographic approach setting myself within the culture of the partnerships for approximately one year. While in the setting I conducted interviews with the partnerships’ participants, observed their interactions with each other, and studied the materials and documents that were created as part of the partnership. I asked questions that allowed participants to narrate the story of their partnerships. In analyzing their stories for common themes, I began to examine my own story as a new museum educator and the impact this study would have on me. It is my hope that this thesis told the story of these partnerships as well as the story of my interaction with them. I openly admit that this research mostly reflects my view of the partnerships and that it would have
been too lengthy and general to explore each participant’s viewpoint in full. But I have made an
effort to accurately represent my participants as much as possible by directly quoting their
thoughts, providing participant checks to gain their approval over the way their participation was
being used in the report, and validating their ideas through a triangulation of themes. This study
found three common themes worthy of exploration and further research. They were a) the
importance of communication between collaborators to successfully integrate goals, b) the value
of museum and school partnerships to students’ educational and social experiences, and c)
intangible student learning or meaning making in the art museum. Chapter 6 explores this
study’s findings as they related to my life and future in the field of museum education, but in
closing I would like to explore some implications this study could have on the field of museum
education as a whole.

I agree with Chase (2005), Creswell (2007), and Riessman (1993) that qualitative
research such as I conducted cannot be everything to everyone. I do not believe we can take the
findings of my study and apply them to every museum and school partnership that exists. This
study represents two partnerships studied within a specific time frame in a specific context.
However, just because this study represents a narrow point of view does not mean it cannot be
helpful to other museum educators or those thinking of creating a partnership between two
education institutions. To explain, I would like to return to the idea of constructivism and the
implications it has on the learner. Constructivism says that knowledge does not exist outside the
brain but that we as learners construct our own meaning based on previous, current, and future
experiences (Fosnot, 2005). Vygotsky, who was a social constructivist, valued the role that social
interaction with peers, facilitators, and objects had towards an individual’s learning and
development; he felt that social interaction, conversations, other’s ideas, etc., allow individuals
through a scaffolding process to negotiate understanding (Pass, 2004; Soloman, 2003). In closing, I would like to consider the major themes this study found and consider their implications through a social constructivist lens.

Communication within Museum and School Partnerships

In this study participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of good communication and in my mind good communication requires the partner to listen and interpret what the other is saying. But crucial to the interpretive process is one’s realization that, as people, we have multiple realities and as museum and school partners we must create a shared reality (Fosnot, 2005). We must be willing to admit that within the partnership there will be a variety of viewpoints and therefore, a variety of ways to solve problems and make plans. I believe the partnerships I studied were partially successful because of their willingness to be open-minded and try different ideas that were suggested. This open-mindedness allowed the programs to grow in ways they might not have had if there had not been an open exchange of thoughts. I think the communication aspect of this study implies a commitment to constructivist practices within museum partnerships can benefit the collaboration efforts that are required of the museum and school partnerships.

Learning Outside of the Classroom

Being a believer in social constructivism and the art museum’s unique ability to be an environment for free-choice learning, I was pleased that this study re-enforced my beliefs. Participants believed that museum and school partnerships go beyond what can be taught in the school classroom, providing students with a more holistic type of learning experience. This was the 2nd major theme to surface among my data. I found what Falk and Dierking (1992; 2000; 2002), Hein (1998) and many others have found to be significant about learning in the museum
environment to be embraced by the partners. Museums provide a social setting for learning that speaks to the whole person and not just the academic. For those of us aware of constructivist theory, this study’s findings may not be anything surprising. But for those who might not be familiar with constructivism, I hope that this study would inspire you to learn more about social learning theories and the ways you might consider them in your own practice.

Student Meaning Making and Assessment

A final consideration for this study connects my 3rd major theme with assessment. Participants described intangible moments where they witnessed students making meaning through their interactions with each other and the artworks. I discuss in chapters 5 and 6 that these intangible moments are often hard to document or reproduce because of the ways that we learn and experience art museums. But if we consider these intangible moments indicative of a program’s success, then as museum educators, we might be asked to clarify our findings in formal assessments. If formal assessments are necessary, then I would suggest turning to constructivist learning in the museum literature such as Hein’s (1998), Falk and Dierking’s (1992; 2000) and Fosnot’s (2005) to support meaning making and build these into our assessment measures. Learning, and the assessment of learning, needs to go beyond fact to include the affective and social.

As I said in chapter 3, I believe constructivist principles apply to everyone, including educators. So while this thesis study may not apply to everyone’s situation directly, it is my wish that as you, the reader, explore my thoughts and those of the participants’ on museum and school partnerships, and question and reflect on your own experiences with partnership with others through conversation. I would hope that in considering my views, you would be forced to consider your own views, including possible limitations. I believe that all educators have a
common goal of sharing what we know with others and that studies like this one provide an
opportunity for us to consider how we can do our jobs better. It is my hope that this paper would
be, not the conclusion of something, but the beginning of dialogue amongst museum educators
and others in field. That we would continue to learn from the past, discuss the present, and plan
for the future of our field by communicating our experiences to each other. It has been a pleasure
to work on this project with so many experienced educators and my thanks go out to all those
who have helped make this study a realization.
APPENDIX

INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT
Interview Instrument

This interview format was used will all participants.

Questions:

1. Can you please describe the partnership between your school/museum and the museum/school?

2. What are your beliefs about museum and school partnership? What value do you think these types of partnership have?

3. What are the goals you have as an educator? What would you say are the goals of your museum/school?

4. What would you say are your specific goals for this museum and school partnership? Are they related to your goals as an educator or your institutions goals?

5. Can you describe how you and the museum educator/school teacher work together? Has working together helped to define the partnership? In what ways?

6. Can you describe a particular incidence in which you felt the partnership was having success?

7. Can you describe a particular incidence in which you felt the partnership was not meeting your needs?

8. What resources or supplemental tools are used as part of this partnership?

9. How are these resources or tools used?

10. How are these resources useful?

11. How would you like to see these resources expanded or developed to further support student learning? What other resources do you think could be used to compliment what is already being implemented?
12. How did this partnership first develop?

13. How has the partnership changed over the course of time?

14. In what ways has time and experience affected this museum and school partnership?

15. Can you tell me about any favorite moments you had during the course of this museum and school partnership?

16. What hopes do you have for this partnership in the future?
REFERENCES


