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The Portable Art Gallery: Facilitating Student Autonomy and Ownership through Exhibiting Artwork

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The Portable Art Gallery: Facilitating Student Autonomy and Ownership

Through Exhibiting Artwork

Jethro D. Gillespie

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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Dr. Mark Graham
Dr. Sharon Gray

Department of Visual Arts
Brigham Young University
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ABSTRACT

The Portable Art Gallery: Fostering Student Autonomy and Ownership
Through Exhibiting Artwork

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Master of Arts

In an attempt to help a class of high school AP Studio Art students find a more authentic sense of autonomy and ownership with their own art projects, the author has constructed a portable art gallery space designated for the exhibition of student artwork. Through a theoretical framework of post-structuralism, as well as a hybrid methodological approach, including tenets of both action research and grounded theory, he was able to explore how de-centralizing traditional, pedagogical notions of power in the classroom and utilizing contemporary art education practices affected AP Studio Art students’ experience in the art classroom. By placing an emphasis on student exhibitions, the author was able to foster an environment of greater student autonomy and meaningful art making in the classroom.

Keywords: post-structuralism, action research, grounded theory, student autonomy, ownership, exhibition
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Problem

In my experience as both a junior high and high school visual art teacher in Utah, I have noticed a significant problem with my teaching practice. I often harbor idealized expectations that my students will use their time in my classes to create meaningful, wonderful artworks that will transform and expand the way they think, behave, and, ultimately, change their lives for the better. The reality that I have encountered, however, is quite different from my idealized expectations. The relationship between students and their art projects in my classes often appears to be disconnected, inconsequential, or weak. Many of my students have mundane, and even frustrating experiences when they are given a task to create art projects in my classes. As a teacher, I perceive that many students see the art projects we do in class as nothing more than a mere score, and, as soon as the art project is returned to the student, the students usually do not have a space to place, store, or exhibit the work. Many of these scored artworks end up in a folder somewhere, stuffed under a bed, or often in the trash. How could I get students to make meaningful artworks in my class?

I surmised this problem had two parts, 1) my hegemonic teaching practices and 2) inadequate exhibition spaces for students. The first part of this problem for me as a teacher has to do with fostering an effective sense of student ownership and autonomy in the classroom. In the past, I have often employed more of a traditional, hierarchical model of teaching that relates to the way power is structured, asserted, and maintained
in my classroom. Many of the students in my classes did not feel any sense of authentic ownership over their art projects, because the projects have been, like in many of their other classes, directed from a top-down pedagogical model.

Admittedly, I have harbored some hegemonic tendencies in my teaching practices and curriculum that I had thought would be necessary in order to create success in my art classroom. I, the teacher, will have invented a chore for them to do, I will have given them time to work on that chore, and then I will have given them a score that relates to what I think they deserve. The perception, organization, and traditional structure of power within the classroom are significant problems that relate to my own pedagogical styles, which I will address in greater detail in my theoretical framework.

The second part of this problem has to do with a lack of adequate exhibition space for student artworks. In my four years of experience at each of the two schools in which I have taught, the first, a 55-year-old junior high and the second, a new high school, neither had an art gallery or other space designated specifically for students to display their artwork. So far in my teaching career, I have made attempts to utilize shared public space in the school to display student work, such as in the hallways, on the bleachers in the gym, or on the theatre classroom walls. But typically, the outcomes have not been very effective in strengthening students’ relationships with their artworks and helping them to find significant or lasting value in making artwork.
The Portable Art Gallery

To address the two problems listed above, my own hegemonic teaching practices, which did not allow for student ownership of their art projects, and inadequate exhibition spaces for student artwork, I created a space that is designated specifically for the exhibition of student artwork, which will be referred to throughout the rest of this study as the portable art gallery. I essentially created an eight-foot cube from plywood and lightweight boards that can be assembled with bolts and taken apart in sections. This allows the gallery to be stored in a relatively small space and also allows it to be
portable so that it can be moved to a variety of sites. The ceiling pieces of the gallery have track lights adhered to them, the interior walls have been painted gray, and the exterior walls have been painted black with chalkboard paint, to give students the option to draw on the outside with chalk if they choose. These characteristics were taken into consideration in order to offer students a place of possibility for students to use it as they exhibited their own art shows. See figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2. The portable art gallery assembled at the beginning of the study.

The school I work for opened in 2009 in a suburban and rural community. Most of the students that go to this school would be considered to have middle to upper class...
socio-economic status. My study is focused specifically with the students from my high school AP Studio Art class. This AP Studio Art class was the first class of its kind offered at this high school, due to its brief existence. Most of the students in the class had little experience with a studio art class.

I communicated to the students in my AP Studio Art from the beginning of the semester that in class my two main goals as their AP Studio Art teacher were, first, that we could collectively create an environment that would allow for meaningful interactions and experiences as we explored material and conceptual possibilities through visual art. The second goal was to help them build a strong visual arts portfolio in preparation to take the AP exam for Studio art at the end of the school year. Part of the AP Studio Art exam requires students to produce a related body of 12 artworks called a Concentration. I have tried to dovetail this AP exam requirement with the portable art gallery by having the students exhibit the artwork from their Concentration in the context of a solo or collaborative art show. Each student was in charge of designing their show, which included curatorial decisions about how to exhibit their individual work, making promotional posters for their show, and organizing an opening reception.

Initial Hypotheses

Before I started this project with my students, I hoped that the construction and use of the portable art gallery would help me to work on the problems outlined above. I hypothesized certain things about the having a gallery space. For example, I thought that a more concentrated focus on student exhibition would help students change the way they think about making art in school. If students knew that there is a space
specifically designated for their artwork to be exhibited, I hoped that they would conceive and execute their art projects from different, more productive perspectives. I hoped that the perception of artworks made in school would transform them from being a mere scored assignment to having lasting value as meaningful artworks that could be exhibited in this portable gallery. I hoped that having a space specifically constructed for student artwork would help students feel more autonomy and ownership over their projects. I hoped that this unique space would facilitate generative ideas and concepts from the students, and open possibilities for students to experiment with more contemporary forms of artworks, such as performances, interactive works or installations. I hoped that by having a gallery at their disposal, the students would also be exposed to different curatorial considerations when designing their own shows. I also hoped that the presence of the gallery in and around our school would enhance and expand the visual arts program in our surrounding community by giving our students more exposure to the public, as well as giving the local community opportunities to become more involved in participating with the visual arts.

Most importantly, I hoped that my students would be able to have more meaningful experiences through creating art in the classroom, and consequently, be able to increase the strength and scope of their individual portfolios as they feel empowered to claim autonomy and feel a sense of ownership for their own art projects that they exhibit in the portable art gallery.

While the above early hypotheses I predicted at the outset of this study might appear noble and optimistic, I have found the interaction the students in my AP Studio
Art class with the portable art gallery produced complex, diverse, and remarkable results. Instead of trying to focus on each of the numerous hypotheses above, this study is ultimately about how the students and I were able to use the gallery as a platform in order to address the original problems stated above.

**Creating an environment**

Educational theorists Jennifer Killeen, Gary Evans, and Sheila Danko (2003), discuss the importance of inviting students to help in the creation of their own environment and space, and the consequences that can occur from such an invitation:

> By building a child’s environmental competence, the participant feels as though he or she has created a unique space—one in which the child has ownership over. (Killeen et. al, p. 253)

Photographer and artist Harry Callahan (cited in Traub, 2006) discusses his feelings about the process of teaching art. He states, “I still don’t think you can teach anyone to be creative. All you can do is give them an environment” (p. 208). The students’ environment is crucial to their ability to create meaningful artworks, and made even more important when students share in the construction of that environment.

**Places of possibility**

At the outset of this study, I hoped that the creation of this gallery would serve as a physical environment which would serve the students as a place of possibility for their artworks and art shows. What I did not understand at the beginning of the study was the significance and depth of the phrase *places of possibility*. As art education scholars Olivia Gude (2004), Daniel Barney (2009), and Juan Carlos Castro (2008) use this
phrase in their respective studies, I found that it became much more than simply a way to talk about a physical space or environment. Places of possibility in the context of art education becomes about the teacher structuring constraints that enable students to develop their own understandings as they engage in authentic artistic inquiries.

For the AP Studio Art students and myself, a place of possibility became intertwined with not only the artworks produced in the class, but also with the process of producing artworks, the discussions that influenced the students’ ideas and concepts, and ultimately the entire culture that was created in the class. The place of possibility became more than a plywood box. It became a complex, organic and relational environment in which students could develop their own voice. The portable art gallery became a platform, which allowed students to develop a more authentic sense of autonomy and ownership for their art projects than was previously available in the course. It also became a framework for a less autocratic teaching style.

Throughout this study, I discuss my experiences with the portable gallery in the first person. The reason I have chosen to do this relates to my own theoretical framework of post-structuralism, as well as my own chosen methodology, which I elaborate further in Chapters 2 and 3. As part of relating this study in first person, I have included the following autobiographical narrative to illustrate my personal connection with a constructed space from my own adolescence that resulted in a real sense of personal ownership:
The Fort: A Personal Narrative

In the 1990s, my teenage friends and I built a fort in the orchard between our houses. The fort started out as a few palettes and scrap pieces of wood haphazardly nailed together that eventually took the form of both a physical shelter and a social haven for the ideas and ambitions that emerged from the minds of strange little boys. The space that we had created, which was known by all of us as simply the fort, was not mandated by anyone else. It was our idea; it was up to us to think it up, to carry it out, and then to fix what didn’t work.

After the first summer, our parents wanted us to tear down our fort, due to its dubious aesthetic contribution to the immediate neighborhood. We resisted their petition, and ultimately struck the following deal with our parents: We would hook a chain from the fort to the tractor and try to drag it to the back of the lot, where it will be much less visible and out of the way. If the fort were to crumble during the transition, we willfully agreed to tear it down and throw away the remnants. But if the fort survived the move, we would get to keep it.

Fortunately for us, and to our parents’ dismay, the fort did in fact survive the tractor chain move (see Figure 1.3). Little did our parents realize, this was only the beginning of the fort’s existence on their property. Every summer for the next six years, we spent our time gathering materials to make the fort bigger, stronger, and with a more established presence. Almost every year, we found discarded carpet from around the neighborhood and added it onto the previous year’s layer of carpet. We were always on the lookout for boards, nails, scraps of fiberglass, and metal. By the time I was a senior
in high school, the fort was a split-level habitat with a wrap-around deck. It had a porch on the outside and a couch on the inside. We created hook ups for electricity, so that we could watch movies and play video games. We had cheap sodas stuffed in every possible nook and cranny. We started introducing to the fort stuffed animals and odd plastic toys from thrift stores, neighborhood yard sales, and our sisters’ bedrooms.

We found ourselves enchanted by the fort and drawn to the salient freedom it offered us. We, four young boys, had created a place that was uniquely and perfectly ours. The fort became a base camp for summer night sleep-outs, it was a movie set backdrop for our various amateur cinematic endeavors, a place to practice shooting BB
guns, make traps for enemy intruders. The fort was our sanctuary that gave us a space to play night games and talk about girls and eat junk food and soda.

The fort was a place to experiment. My friends and I felt free to experiment with the exciting consequences of smoke bombs and firecrackers and the properties of dry ice. We even tried our hands with the practical, domestic domains of gardening and plumbing, although our experiment with an adjacent toilet did not last very long. More importantly, the fort housed a security for some of our innermost feelings and a space for relational confidence with each other. I felt that the confidentiality and safety we felt within the walls of the fort helped establish a long-lasting foundation of trust and brotherhood with my friends.

The experience I had with my fort as an adolescent was very influential in the way I have conceived, designed and carried out this study with the portable art gallery, and has been especially central in focusing on the relationship between student autonomy and exhibiting student artwork.

A Brief Outline of this Study

In Chapter 2, I will address my review of literature, specifically discussing the reasons for using a post-structuralist theoretical framework. I will talk about how this approach relates to the conceptual and philosophical underpinnings of my own pedagogical style, as well as the goals I have as an art teacher. I will specifically focus on the way I imagine a post-structuralist approach affects issues of power in my classroom. I will also discuss how this theoretical framework relates to contemporary art education theory, and discuss various examples of contemporary art practices that
relate to the portable art gallery. The literature I reviewed also addresses student ownership and autonomy, places of possibility, and the strengths associated with exhibiting student artwork.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss my chosen form of methodology for how I have carried out the study of the portable art gallery project. For my inquiry, I have taken methodological tenets of both action research and grounded theory to inform the way I gathered, coded, and analyzed the data from my study. I will discuss how I was able to incorporate elements of both of these methodologies into my study, as I also tried to carefully and reflexively position myself within the study as both a teacher of the classroom as well as the researcher.

In Chapter 4, I will address some of the specific findings I discovered in my research, including a detailed account of a three-day sequence in the A.P. Studio Art class in order to give a sense of the environment, routines, and overall feeling in which we worked. Chapter 4 also includes data related to students’ experience with their art shows in the portable art gallery. This data is derived from student interviews, student artist statements, observations that I have made in my personal reflective journal, as well as various photographs.

In Chapter 5, I draw some conclusions about the relationship between student autonomy and ownership and the students’ experience with the portable art gallery. I address some of the effects this study had on my students, as well as the affects it had on me as a teacher. I also discuss the consequences this project has had on the community and the visual arts culture at my relatively young school.
This study explored the problem of student ownership of their artwork and the quest for meaningful artistic expression through the creation of a portable art gallery in an AP Studio Art class. The art gallery created opportunities for students to create meaningful artwork, work collaboratively, and develop a sense of community within the classroom and the school community. It was also a catalyst for teaching practices that embraced post-structuralist notions of places of possibility and divergent outcomes.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is organized in two parts. I will build a theoretical framework in Part 1, primarily using a post-structuralist lens. I discuss how this approach relates to the conceptual underpinnings of the portable gallery project. I outline the reasons I have chosen to take a post-structuralist stance for this project, focusing especially on notions of power, as it is conceptualized in both structuralist and post-structuralist paradigms, and how these two paradigms influence this study. I will also discuss the effects such a theoretical framework has on my personal beliefs and pedagogical philosophies about student ownership and working collaboratively. I will also address some misconceptions concerning teaching art in school and how I have tried to address issues that move students beyond scored assignments towards more meaningful and interdisciplinary connections with their artworks in order to create new understandings.

Part 2 of this chapter will discuss a concept in art education known as school art styles, a term discussed first by Arthur Efland (1976) and also more recently by Olivia Gude (2009), which addresses the connections and disconnections between K-12 artistic creation and broader contemporary art discourses. I will present an argument for exhibiting student artwork with this concept in mind, drawing from two case studies that attend to contemporary art exhibition spaces and the issues that affect these spaces. These case studies highlight concepts related to this research study. I will also address ways in which contemporary art theory intersects with meaningful art making practices in the classroom, and how these ideas relate to the portable art gallery project.
Part One

It is important to note that, while there is no one single authoritative definition of post-structuralism, for this study, I will be utilizing interpretations from theorists who are influenced by the philosophers Foucault, Barthes, and Derrida. For example, educational post-structuralist and feminist scholar, Jennifer Elsden-Clifton (2005) describes this understanding of post-structuralism as a critical and opposing position to the traditional bearing of structuralism, especially regarding aspects of power. I find myself as an artist/teacher operating within a very traditional and structural school system, meanwhile striving for a more post-structuralist paradigm in the way I position myself as a teacher with my students. For example, point 2 listed under policy IIA, regarding the use of appropriate instructional materials in the faculty handbook of the district for which I work states "concepts that are contrary to the mainstream of the values of the community we serve are to be considered suspect…" The traditional top-down hegemony implemented by my district, school, and local community illustrates a sense of the environment in which I teach: a very structuralist one which does not seem to encourage teachers or students to challenge accepted norms of the surrounding mainstream.

The tension that occurs between structuralism and post-structuralism greatly informs the theoretical framework for my study. This tension also influences many of the practical and immediate concerns I must navigate in my position as an artist/teacher.
Structuralist views of power

The following is a brief explanation that addresses the structuralist perspective of power as it contrasts with my chosen theoretical framework. Fennell (2002), for example, argues that traditional notions about structuralism conventionally assert, among other things, that all truth and meaning can be constructed and reconstructed within a fixed system of interrelated parts and fosters a hierarchal, top-down model of power relations. Post-structuralist scholar Cherryholmes (1988) defines structuralism as “A systematic way of thinking about whole processes and institutions whereby each part of a system defines and is defined by other parts” (p. 13). Structuralist views of power are exemplified by rigidity, close adherence to rules and procedures, dominance and legalism. This theoretical view sometimes employs the idiom the means justify the ends, which Fennell (2002) argues is “often used to justify manipulative, exploitive, abusive and coercive behaviors” (p. 96).

Post-structuralist views of power

Post-structuralism challenges and reacts to the traditions of structuralism, by critically deconstructing socially and culturally constructed assumptions that structuralists may hold as tenets of absolute truth. Power is a key concept in post-structuralism which I have found to be a key issue in my own teaching practices in this study. Much of what has been written by post-structuralist thinkers about power stems from the ideas of Michel Foucault, who asserts, among many other things, that power is disciplinary, relational and traditionally founded on systems of dominance and control. His extensive studies about the history of madness (1961), punishment (1977), and
sexuality (1984) examine and deconstruct many of the relational influences in which power affects societies, cultures and individuals.

Chris Weedon (1987), a feminist post-structuralist scholar, shows that language, meaning, subjectivity and power, tie post-structuralist viewpoints together. In discussing power specifically in a post-structuralist theoretical framework, she notes “Power is a relation. It inheres in difference and is a dynamic of control, compliance, and lack of control between discourses and the subjects constituted by discourses who are their agents” (p. 110). This idea illustrates the relational nature of power as defined in a post-structuralist paradigm. This perspective of power as something dealing with different discourses and subjects frequently manifests itself through the relational dynamic between teacher and student.

Barthes (1968), a philosopher and one of the main advocates of post-structuralism in the 1960’s, wrote a seminal article entitled The Death of the Author, in which he challenges the traditional continuity of power between the words author and authority. In the article, he outlines the metaphorical death of the author as an authentic source of meaning for a text. This basic idea of challenging claims about authority or truth when encountering a concept or idea manifests a core ideological tenet associated with post-structuralism that de-centralizes the source of power in a given situation. As a teacher, this idea of de-centralizing power in the classroom diminishes the traditional, structuralist role of the teacher, or author, as the source of all knowledge, in order to empower students by allowing them to have a stronger voice in what takes place in the classroom.
Educational scholar Seth Kriesberg (1992) indicates that the English word *power* is derived from the Latin word, *posse*, which means *to be able*. Kriesberg further notes “being able to assert oneself to fulfill one’s desires does not mean that the only way to do so is to impose one’s will on others. Instead, it can mean being able to do or accomplish something or implement something” (as quoted in Fennell, 2002, p. 99).

In a related way, I would also submit the ability to recognize and interpret the English translation of the word *posse* in my study to mean a group of students who are gathered together to collaboratively investigate the possibilities of a collective exhibition space through artistic inquiry. Incorporating these interpretations of *posse*, I was able to more effectively de-centralize the traditional models of classroom power by giving up my own power as a teacher in order for the students to develop their own voice in what happened in conceptualizing and designing their own art projects, as well as with decisions related to the portable art gallery space.

Along with the word *power*, I feel that other English words are very important to this project as seen through the lens of post-structuralism, such as *share, exhibit, reconnect, create, explore, re-imagine, examine and remember*. These words serve as empowering signifiers for students that have situated them in a position to make decisions about their own art projects. As I frequently utilized these terms in my vocabulary with students, I feel like I was in a better position myself, as the teacher, to encourage them to create a sense of ownership in the portable gallery project.
**Student ownership and autonomy**

Approaching the portable gallery project through a lens of post-structuralism situates me as an art teacher with the opportunity to work with students differently as they create and exhibit their artwork. As art education scholar Barbara Andrews (2010) suggests, when students choose directions for artmaking and study/research, they begin to view the teacher as one who guides, not dictates, their artistic path. When students can feel in control of their artistic methods and processes, it can be empowering to them. If students feel a sense of empowerment in a class, it can increase their sense of student ownership and autonomy with their own art projects.

Art educator Eliza Pitri (2006) questions the position of teacher in the popular, contemporary educational approach to child-centered learning, saying that “curriculum does not have to be labeled as either child-centered or teacher-directed, but can be thought of as child-originated and teacher-framed” (p. 40).

Post-structuralism suits my approach to teaching art as I expect to introduce and present concepts and ideas that may challenge the students’ perceptions, as well as my own, about what we consider to be absolute truth in our lives. I try not to be afraid to let students witness me, as a teacher or an adult, talk about an idea that is new to me or discuss how something that I have encountered may have changed my perception of something. I think this type of modeling as I teach also helps the students to feel empowered to question or re-imagine things in their own lives.

One reason for this post-structuralist aim is to invite students in the classroom to closely examine their own beliefs, environment and culture so that they can better
understand where they come from and what they value and why they might value it.

Scholar Becky Ropers-Huilman (2001) discusses the effects of teaching and learning through a post-structuralist lens by emphasizing the notion that valued knowledge shifts with context and culture, which I believe to be very influential as a philosophical factor in my own teaching practice. It is within the relational and lateral movements among the de-centralized power structure of my A.P. studio art class that I have tried to foster a post-structuralist arrangement that will not only allow for exchanges of power, but also ideas among students and within the dynamics of the class.

**Working collaboratively**

Steven Johnson (2010), a contemporary writer and scholar, in his book *Where Good Ideas Come From*, introduces the concept that often, good ideas are the result of someone’s long and *slow hunch*. He states that often, these hunches take years to develop, but also discusses the valuable nature of an environment that allows for the collision of these hunches from different people. People can borrow and combine ideas, which sometimes allows a good idea to form as something larger than the sum of its parts. I will share specific examples in Chapter 4 how different students in my A.P. Studio Art class were able to play with a collaborative slow hunch idea in the execution of some of their projects.

As I sought to create an environment that welcomed student collaboration, I hoped to increase a greater sense of student ownership and autonomy in my A.P. studio art class. I believe this has helped create the intersection of many different ideas
that have ultimately lead to greater student ownership, as well as notions about students working collaboratively and democratically together. Art education scholar Juan Carlos Castro (2007) talks about structuring an atmosphere of democracy when teaching art in a collaborative setting:

On one hand it is important to teach the values of democracy and of treating each other with respect and dignity. On the other, it is equally imperative that educators ensure that their teaching of such ideas is not undermined by a curricular structure and pedagogical approach that creates its own systems of oppression. (p. 16)

Castro notes a familiar situation with my position as a teacher in a very traditional, structuralist school setting, yet trying to realize some of my own post-structuralist ambitions as an art teacher. There are certain structured power limitations under which I must function and be able to maintain my job as a teacher. Yet as I strive for a more post-structuralist approach in the way I deal with power in the classroom, I have found some freedoms and rewarding experiences. As I describe in Chapter 4, I experimented with non-traditional methods of de-centralizing traditional notions of power in my A.P. classroom by trying to foster spaces for students to develop their own voice in the classroom.

Misconceptions about teaching art

In my profession as a secondary art teacher, I am often confronted with the challenge to defend the purpose of art education in schools. I understand the perception of many people that art is a frivolous, superfluous, expensive or just unnecessary
discipline in K-12 education. As an artist/teacher, my main goal is not to have all of my students major in art when they enter college. I realize that the majority of students I have in my classes will not become professional artists when they leave my class. But I believe that when art is approached by students in a class in which they feel empowered to create projects that are personal and meaningful, the students will be much more likely to be engaged, pro-active, and excited about learning. These experiences in the art classroom will be influential and helpful as they develop 21st century learning skills that will assist them in whatever future careers they may have.

Personally I think that art, as a subject, has the potential to be one of the most effective ways to help students generate meaningful, creative and divergent solutions to problems they may encounter in their future careers.

Moving beyond assignments

To my dismay, students often ask me as their teacher, “What do you want me to do in order to get a score for this assignment?” This narrow student mindset, focused on points and grades, is as Neil Postman (1995) argues, largely a product of the traditional and culturally accepted model of education, which, in my current situation, is a very structural one. I believe this is one of the main reasons that students often do not feel empowered to take ownership of their own art projects. Student perceptions about what the teacher or other authority figure demands or imposes upon them often seems foreign, off-putting or irrelevant to them. A structuralist model of pedagogy, in which many students do not feel able to have critical experiences, calls for a needed shift of perspective both for my students and for me as their teacher.
Interdisciplinary connections

I hoped that my A.P. Studio art class could offer my students an environment that would create opportunities for potentially effective, lasting, and valuable educational experiences that could help them to contextualize and connect knowledge from other disciplines in their lives. Interdisciplinary education scholar Anja Kraus (2008) discusses the importance of integrating the arts into all aspects of education. She argues that “the ambiguous, open-ended and contingent aspects of individual experiences and competences can be tracked down and structured by a learning environment based on artworks” (p. 276).

When an art education is approached from an interdisciplinary perspective that aims to empower students to make connections about different aspects of their lives, the experiences students have in their art class can help them create meaningful understandings and new knowledge. This is in opposition to traditional methods of teaching art in schools, which often give students the impression that art class is simply an exercise in producing a specific, self-contained craft skill with no real connection to anything else in the world. Curator and art critic Tomasz Fudala (2007), discusses the comments of Arthur Zmijewski, a contemporary art critic and philosopher, who insists that the potential of art and artists as producers of knowledge in the public mainstream has barely been awakened:

Too often, Zmijewski opines, people who are unfamiliar with art feel excluded from it, while artists, in turn, are excluded from political discourse; … He calls for
artists to renounce their status as “idiot savants” and to embrace the notion that art is a discourse for the production of knowledge. (p. 300)

As Zmijewski positions art as a subject of such importance within a progressive, post-structuralist paradigm, it logically follows that the role and responsibility of the art teacher in a school becomes increasingly important, if not entirely crucial, to the development of authentic student voice as they seek to make coherent and contextualize their knowledge of different fields of study in the art classroom.

Through my chosen methodology, as I explain further in Chapter 3, I decided to focus on the intersections of power, student ownership and autonomy, and the manifestation of these intersections through a post-structuralist framework. As I was immersed in the process of using the portable art gallery with my students, I noticed the possibilities that arose through this lens of post-structuralism.

One focus of this study emerged and ultimately became about how students could use the environment of the portable art gallery that would foster the development of student ownership and autonomy. With an increased sense of ownership and autonomy over their own art projects, the students have been able to create divergent, meaningful art shows with the portable art gallery that have helped them examine and contextualize other aspects of their education as they created new understandings about their own world. I present evidence of this through some specific student examples in Chapter 4.
Part Two

In this section, I will first discuss school art styles. I will address various arguments for exhibiting student artwork. I talk about two case studies related to contemporary art exhibition spaces and the issues that surround these spaces, and how they relate to the portable art gallery project with my A.P. Studio Art students. I will also address ways in which contemporary art theory intersects with meaningful art making practices, and how all these ideas relate to this study.

School art styles

Olivia Gude (2009), an artist and contemporary art education scholar, has extensively addressed the need for new school art styles in K-12 schools. She suggests that many current K-12 education practices, which hide behind a notion of tradition in order to justify their existence in many schools’ art curricula, be omitted from the contemporary curriculum of art educators. She states that art projects based on rote exercises with predictable outcomes are not effective ways of teaching art. Gude’s identification of this fundamental shift in thought about the way art is taught in schools is refreshing and exciting to me as an artist/teacher as I am trying to move toward a post-structuralist approach in my art classes. In her 2004 article, Postmodern Principles, she talks about how often she witnesses the same K-12 art assignments being taught in classrooms, steeped in the canonical tradition of the elements and principles of art and design. She asserts that these exercises are almost never effective in teaching students to find meaning in the creation of their art projects:
I ponder the piles of exercises on line, shape, or color harmonies left behind by hundreds and hundreds of students each year. I wonder why what is still considered by many to be the appropriate organizing content for the foundations of 21st century art curriculum is but a shadow of what was modern, fresh, and inspirational 100 years ago. (p. 6)

In response to this tradition of art educators relying on outdated systems of art education, Gude suggests that art teachers focus on creating an art curriculum based on students’ meaning making by playing with methods, materials, and ideas (2009). When art education is approached from a position interested in creating meaningful art projects and new understandings, as Gude states, students are more likely to take ownership for their projects and learning with this dynamic, which underscores my own post-structuralist theoretical framework. By placing an emphasis on students exhibiting their art projects, my students have been able to develop a stronger sense of ownership and autonomy with their own art projects and shows.

This approach has entailed more than simply hanging their pieces in an exhibition space. The students were responsible for carefully considering how the main theme or concept of their work would best be presented using the portable art gallery as a platform from which to start. Usually, these decisions took place months in advance, since the students had been working on their individual projects since the beginning of the year. The students made many curatorial decisions about presenting their individual work, and they were also in charge of creating promotional materials for their own show, and planning and hosting a reception event to celebrate their work.
Student art exhibitions

In my teaching experience, I have found that exhibiting student artworks in the school results in many positive outcomes for my students, as well as for the class and school environment. Professor of art education in the University of Virginia, David Burton (2006) argues in his book *Exhibiting Student Art: The Essential Guide for Teachers*, “Exhibiting art completes the artistic cycle” (p. 6). In his research, Burton found many art teachers that he interviewed agreed about the positive impact they found in displaying student work. One high school art teacher interviewed by Burton, Carol Mohor, stated “the quality of [the students’] work increase[s] when students know I want to exhibit their work” (p. 6). Terry Barrett, an art education professor who specializes in contemporary art criticism, outlines some beneficial effects of student exhibitions:

When students successfully transfer what they have learned from mounting their own exhibitions to looking at exhibitions in private galleries and public museums, their school experiences with art will extend into positively altered, lifelong interactions in many art worlds, with their children, and with others throughout their lives. (Burton, p. xii)

Elizabeth Ashworth and Daniel Jarvis (2009), two Ontario-based art educators, worked on a seven-year project of exhibiting student and faculty artwork together. Ashworth and Jarvis documented the benefits of working collaboratively with students to execute this project. They noted nine proposed purposes and anticipated beneficial outcomes for taking on the project, which were formed within a university atmosphere
with undergraduate students. My situation will be in a high school setting, working with secondary students, but I find that Ashworth and Jarvis’s goals align very closely to my own post-structuralist goals for my classes, especially with regard to the portable gallery project. The nine purposes or goals are as follows (see Ashworth & Jarvis, 2009, pp. 84-86):

1. To give pre-service teachers, faculty, and support staff a chance to show their artwork.

2. Many students did not have exhibition experience, especially with hanging a show.

3. Such an experience would help students develop an art resume and learn to frame and price their work.

4. It would be a bridge between school life and real life.

5. It would be a good showcase for the artists while also being educational for colleagues, administration and the community.

6. It would nurture community/university relations.

7. It would help the local art gallery involved to achieve their mandate of showing a variety of quality work from various local artists.

8. An exhibition would serve to advertise the university to a wider community.

9. It would prepare pre-service teachers to curate shows for their own future students.

These proposed outcomes are very similar to the goals I had since the beginning of the portable art gallery project. In researching more contemporary examples of
collaborative exhibition spaces, I came across two specific examples that were each published online during the time of this study that relate to my students’ experience with the portable art gallery.

Two case studies about portable exhibition spaces

Case 1: Project Transfer

Wolfgang Weileder is an artist and professor of contemporary sculpture at Newcastle University who is concerned with the exploration and critical deconstruction of architecture, public spaces, and the interactions people share with the ubiquitous urban environment (see Weileder, 2010). In 2009, he undertook a three-month project entitled Project Transfer, involving the construction and de-construction of a full-scale replica of a local art gallery with the collaborative help of some of the university’s construction students (see Fig. 3).

Weileder’s project was documented by critical theorist Anna Goulding (2009). Goulding discusses the positive effects of Project Transfer as it provided training opportunities for the students, who simultaneously developed collaboration skills in the construction of the gallery, as well as an understanding of contemporary artistic practice and also began to take on ownership of the piece (p. 6).
While perhaps on a different scale, I find this project very similar in its purposes, complexity and outcome to the portable art gallery project. Weileder’s project involved taking a group of undergraduate construction students who, for the most part, were unfamiliar with the discourses of art, including historical and contemporary artistic practices. By constructing a temporary gallery structure in a public space, the collaborators were faced with the challenges similar to the ones I faced with my own students, such as, issues of rightful domain, practical struggles with construction, working with a shared public space, and working together collaboratively with a common goal.
As an art teacher, I think some of the outcomes from Wieleder's *Project Transfer* appear to echo many of the same goals I had at the outset of the portable gallery project. Similar to Wieleder’s aims to orchestrate and oversee *Project Transfer*, I aspired to create a physical space in which students would be involved in the tangible creation, maintenance, and execution of the portable art gallery. As I mentioned in the introduction, art education scholar Juan Carlos Castro (2007) discusses how teachers can set up conditions that will allow students to gain a greater sense of ownership over their art projects. Castro’s notion helps to decentralize the traditional power structures in the classroom by creating a space for possibility, which is what I have tried to do with the portable art gallery by allowing students to have authentic experiences with the creation of their own art shows.

**Case 2: Free-life center**

Leslie Miller (2010), an external relations director of art at Pacific Northwest College of Art, writes about Mark Warren Jacques and Seth Neefus, two Portland-based artists who have created a large-scale, freestanding installation crafted from salvaged and reclaimed building materials they call the *Free Life Center*. Miller says this portable, one-room transient structure “emanates the artists’ homespun aesthetic and their commitment to DIY craftsmanship. The construction is modular (built in easily movable sections), can be adapted to suit a variety of configurations, and fits into the duo’s 22 ft. tour truck” (Miller, p. 1).

The two artists, Jacques and Neefus, have travelled along the west coast, and are anticipating the continuation of their journey throughout the United States, setting up
their gallery space in various locations. Miller says that they aim to host community events, musical performances, workshops, drawing parties, and more within the walls of the Free Life Center. "Inspired by the community of free thinkers around them, they bring knowledge of creativity and simplicity to encourage others to share the "free life" with them" (as cited in Miller, 2010) see Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2. Free Life Center. (Retrieved from www.freelifecenter.com)
The Free Life Center also encompasses many traits analogous to the portable art gallery project that I tried to generate with my students. I especially appreciated the non-traditional, post-structuralist approach to Jaques and Neefus’ ambitious aims to share experiences with different people that involve the enjoyment of art produced by local individuals of the community. I would also note Miller’s observation about their “commitment to DIY craftsmanship” (Miller, p. 1), which I believe finds significance in the construction and re-assembly of the exhibition space. The aesthetics of DIY culture also vitally contributes to the role of developing ownership of the materials, project, and overall experience for these two artists. In a similar fashion, the DIY aesthetic sensibilities of the portable art gallery were a significant by-product of ownership that came from the hands-on experiences with the portable gallery, as my students would be involved and responsible for the transportation, upkeep, assembly, disassembly, and general maintenance of our inexpensive plywood structure.

**Contemporary art theory and meaningful art making practices**

In response to Olivia Gude’s assertion that art teachers ought to omit traditional, recipe-like art projects from their curriculum (2009, p. 3-4), I sought to introduce more meaningful, student-generated art projects in my curriculum. My hypothesis from the outset of this project was that by embodying contemporary theory and practices in the art curriculum, students would feel a desire to create meaningful artistic engagements and students would develop a stronger sense of accountability for their work.

Art education scholar and visual culture advocate, Kerry Freedman (2003), discusses the benefits of incorporating contemporary art education theory and
translating it into meaningful teaching practice. In talking about the influence and significant re-emergence of pragmatist and educational theorist John Dewey, Freedman asserts Dewey’s relevance to contemporary art education theory:

   Neopragmatism leads us to a social aesthetic that is dependent on education— not so that people can appreciate fine art, but so that they can gain access to the multiple meanings of visual culture...meaning is inherent to aesthetic experience, and in contemporary visual culture and aesthetic theory interested interpretations are not only expected, but promoted. Postmodern artists often reject formalistic uses of the elements and principles of design in favor of symbolic uses that suggest multiple and extended social meanings. (p. 41-42)

Freedman’s explanation of neo-pragmatism, as it relates to art education theory, ties together Gude’s perception of a new school art style, challenging the traditional, modernist assumptions about better ways to teach art in classrooms.

   By shifting the way I think about my own pedagogical styles, I have also been challenged to relinquish some element of control in the way I manage my classroom in order to allow for more student autonomy. This part of the shift has been admittedly difficult for me. In the past, I have maintained a tighter, more controlled environment that produced the illusion that things were easier for me as a teacher to direct. But this older model also produced more contrived, predictable student art projects.

   The more I focused on the ways that contemporary art education theories could be translated into practice in my classroom, I found that I became more aware and careful with the language I used with my students. I also became more aware of the way
I would describe my practice to others, both spoken and written. For example, when I would describe the portable art gallery project to colleagues, instead of using verbs such as *implement, employ, carry out* or *execute*, I became more acutely aware that those words implied a structuralist, hegemonic paradigm, which was opposite of what I was hoping to realize with the students. I became more careful to phrase my words in class to discuss the collaborative, emergent, and experimental aspects of the portable gallery project by using words that did not imply a top-down, controlling paradigm such as *experiment, create opportunities to, and play with*, to name a few. The attention I gave to my own language has made me much more aware of the way my teaching practice affects my students, and ultimately embraces what I believe to be a more authentic post-structuralist and student-centered paradigm in many aspects of my teaching.

Art Education scholars Juan Carlos Castro (2007), Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2003), and Daniel Barney (2009), discusses the idea of creating a curriculum with *enabling constraints*, which are not designed to constrain students with deterministic art outcomes, but rather act as places of possibility, in which students may explore, experiment, and play as they create divergent solutions to art making problems.

This method of creating places of possibility also allows students to seek divergent solutions is one of the strongest validations for why an art class can be empowering to students, as opposed to more traditional prescriptive methods of approaching art making with students (figure 2.3).
Art education scholar and professor Sydney Walker (2004), discusses strategies for creating more meaningful art curricula and art classrooms by starting with big ideas, and embracing authentic artmaking practices. One important notion Walker discusses is the idea of *delaying closure*, a term which allows for non-linear thinking in problem finding and problem solving by not focusing on immediate results, but rather favors exploration and experimentation of a theme or big idea. This concept allows students space for divergent and student-centered solutions in their journey to make meaningful art projects, which makes this shift in my pedagogical practice and classroom management a challenging, yet ultimately beneficial shift.

*Figure 2.3. How art class can embrace divergent solutions to problem solving, as opposed to other classes.*
There have been many practical reasons for this shift in my teaching practice, and, within this new pedagogical paradigm, I have been able to focus my research inquiry on the post-structuralist issues related to the relational movements of power in the classroom. I have included two brief case studies of artists who are utilizing contemporary art practices related not only to exhibition spaces but also the interaction and collaborative aspects because they share similar purposes and perspectives with the portable art gallery project I have used with my A.P. students. I have tried to document the transformation of my own engagement with contemporary art education theory, and I will discuss some specific examples of how this shift impacted my teaching practice through my students’ experiences in more depth in Chapter 4.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I will address the hybrid approach of methodologies that I have utilized in my study of the portable art gallery project. I used a combination of various tenets from both *action research* as well as *grounded theory* as my chosen methodology. In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss the tenets of *action research* that I utilize in my study, starting with a brief history of action research. I then focus specifically on two different types of action research, *practical* and *emancipatory*. I describe how these types of action research affected not only the way I studied and positioned myself with the portable art gallery project as a researcher, but also how these approaches to action research affected my pedagogical practices as the teacher of these students. I will also outline the cyclical action plan I implemented with my students for this project.

The second part of this chapter will address the elements of *grounded theory* as the process related more specifically to dealing with the data. This process includes gathering, analyzing, and coding data, then writing memos, and drawing conclusions about the information that has been collected.

The last part of this chapter will discuss the reasons for using both action research and grounded theory as a hybrid methodological approach in my study. I discuss the ways I was able to use these two approaches as a way to deepen my understandings and ultimately inform the way I structured my study.
A Brief History of Action Research

Scholar Liora Bresler (1994) succinctly defines action research as “the study of one’s own practice in order to improve it” (p. 12). A large portion of the way action research is discussed in this study stems from the ideas of educational philosopher and pragmatist John Dewey (1933), who specifically addresses the idea of reflection as a process or activity that is central to developing practices. Kurt Lewin (1946), a noted psychologist and scholar, described the then-emerging field of action research as:

a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action” that uses “a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action. (p. 34)

The inclusion of a cyclical reflection as a vital part of teaching practice was enhanced in the 1970s and 80s by theorist Donald A. Schon (1983) in which he challenges practitioners to reconsider the role of technical knowledge versus artistry in developing professional excellence. Action research scholars Leitch and Day (2000) discuss the way Schon’s work also coined two types of reflective thinking: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-on-action adheres to a more traditional practice of retrospectively analyzing data and events after they happen. Schon differentiates reflection-in-action as acknowledging “the tacit processes of thinking which accompany doing, and which constantly interact with and modify ongoing practice in such a way that learning takes place” (as quoted in Leitch and Day, 2000, p. 180).

During the time in my study with the portable art gallery, I sought to improve my
teaching practice as I worked by consistently reflecting not only on the things that happened during the project, but also, in a meta-cognitive way, I tried to critically examine the way I thought about what I was doing, what the students were doing, and how my actions were affected by my cognitive processes.

Curriculum theorist and scholar Shirley Grundy (1982) classifies action research into three separate modes or types: technical, practical, and emancipatory. The first of these, technical action research, focuses on efficient and effective practice “through the practical skill of the participants” (p. 357). This approach requires external, technical skills that usually focus on specific outcomes dealing with efficiency, and therefore I do not think it would be a very appropriate fit for the portable gallery project. I have chosen instead to incorporate elements of the other two types as outlined by Grundy: Practical action research, which allowed me space for immediate, pragmatic judgments during the process, and emancipatory action research, which focused on liberating students from traditional norms and ways of thinking. I have used a hybrid system of these two types of action research as outlined by Grundy.

**Practical action research**

Leitch and Day (2000) discuss the other two of Grundy’s classifications in their treatment of a more contemporary, holistic view of action research. First of all, practical action research, in contrast to the technical approach, “aims to improve practice through the application of practical judgment and the accumulated personal wisdom of the teacher” (as quoted in Leitch and Day, p. 183). I believe that the portable art gallery project would benefit from using tenets of both of these approaches to action research.
methodology. Coming from the practical approach, my project encountered many unforeseeable problems, questions, and needs for immediate mediation and intervention. The practical approach empowered me, positioned especially as a teacher, to deal more fluidly and judiciously with the developments of the project as they occurred. This approach also benefitted my students, who were able to practically take into consideration various situations, constraints, and other restrictions that they encountered during this study.

**Emancipatory action research**

The third type of action research as outlined by Grundy is *emancipatory*. Its purpose is “the emancipation of participants in the action from the dictates of compulsions of tradition, precedent, habit, coercion as well as from self-deception” (Grundy, 1982, p. 358). This perspective aligns with my post-structuralist theoretical framework, and also dovetails with the grounded theory approach, which will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter. As I sought to create an environment where students could take ownership of their own projects, as well as their place in the class, I witnessed that my students were able to gain a sense of empowerment as they examined some of the socially and culturally constructed assumptions that come from their own traditions and experience, especially about their notions of art. As I approached teaching art through various disciplines of art education, as well as including many non-traditional, interdisciplinary approaches to teaching art, my students were more easily able to engage in critical inquiry about emancipation and dissension from mainstream culture, which also dovetailed into my theoretical framework of
poststructuralism. The ideas and attitudes of emancipation would also translate directly in an art class environment to support a methodology of inquiry.

**My Personal Pedagogical and Artistic Practices**

Although I focused the majority of class time on studio production, I also felt that students’ exposure to art in school should not be solely limited to studio production. Within the allotted time I had in class with my AP Studio art students, I tried to incorporate a variety of pedagogical practices that drew upon many interdisciplinary approaches to examine and explore themes, ideas, possibilities and materials for their art projects.

I sought to use a variety of pedagogical strategies, in order to create a classroom environment that would be conducive to student-generated ideas and projects. These strategies included lecturing, presenting slide shows, conducting class discussions, group critiques, showing relevant video clips, using worksheets which were designed to elicit student opinions, inviting students to show and tell what they had found to the rest of the class, and going on field trips. The integrated and varied instructional techniques for which I searched would encourage an environment that lends itself to students developing more meaningful learning experiences. Educational theorist Neil Postman (1993) offers as a suggestion for more effective teaching; teachers should discuss the *histories* and *philosophies* associated with every subject taught. When students are able to make historical, philosophic, and other contextual connections about art, they will be able to create more holistic, meaningful, and life-long understandings. Postman’s insight to teaching this way informs the way I have tried to teach my students about art, and
also underscores reasons for choosing both practical and emancipatory elements to my action research methodology in this study.

I often try to include and share my own art projects, concepts and theoretical perspectives with my students. I often am working on my own personal art projects in class, along with the students in class. This form of modeling my own critical and complex inquiry with my students offers them an alternative to the hegemony of direct instruction. Working this way in my classroom has been beneficial both to my students and me, as it helps me to create an environment that fosters experimentation, creativity, autonomy and ownership.

I tried to help create a classroom environment of working collaboratively, solving problems as they arise, and critically analyzing artistic practices. I will further outline in Chapter 4 how action research has impacted my pedagogy and curriculum. However, as I am discussing my own artistic practices here, it is important to understand that action research was key in bringing my practice as an artist and inquirer into the classroom environment as my students became involved in this study. Action research scholar Sue Johnston (1994) writes about the usefulness of action research, specifically for teachers, and includes a designation from McCutcheon and Jung (1990) which defines some salient characteristics of action research:

“as [a] systematic inquiry that is collaborative, [and] self critical” with the goals of such research being to gain an “understanding of practice and the articulation of a rationale or philosophy of practice in order to improve that practice” (as quoted in Johnston, p. 41).
The systematic inquiry of this study includes the collaboration of my students and the critical scrutiny of our practices as art makers in the classroom, which also helped me to define my role in this study.

**My Position as Teacher and Researcher**

Action research methodology poses a difficult question to someone in my position, who must act as both a teacher and a researcher. Art education scholar Liora Bresler (1994) distinguishes action research from other forms of research, in that “the researcher in action research is an insider...” and that “…the key distinction between action research and the other qualitative genres are the identity, role, and expertise of the principle investigator” (p. 12). As a teacher, I wanted to be sensitive to the needs of the students and their development and understanding of the things we address in class. As a researcher, I wanted to be critically aware of the teaching practices and student learning that may or may not be happening in the classroom. When I negotiate both of these identities at once, I need to be able to carefully navigate the distinctive situation of the art classroom, which is why I believe that this mode of action research methodology will best suit my goal to decentralize the traditional power structures in the classroom in order to increase a sense of student ownership. Art education scholar Eliza Pitri (2006) discusses the unique position of the art teacher-researcher as it pertains to action research:

> Human beings differ from chemicals or mice, therefore in the art classroom all the factors that affect teaching outcomes are acknowledged and embraced, rather than controlled. Action research
allows participants to build their own records of their improvement and is open-minded about what counts as evidence. Facilitating projects in a playful art-based context, for example, can be a way for the art teacher-researcher to directly interact with the subjects, encourage them to participate, allow personal expression and interaction, and focus on how school activities could be designed to facilitate cognitive action. (p. 44)

The position I have placed myself in this study is a unique one, combining my roles as both teacher and researcher. While I obviously could not become two different people during the project, I felt like the best thing I could do to reconcile these two positions was to remember the purpose of action research as concisely stated previously by Bresler (1994), to study my own practice while I try to improve it.

**Action research with the portable art gallery**

For my project, I have utilized a cyclical model similar to the seven-step action research plan outlined by educational scholar, Catherine Brighton (2009). Her steps are 1) Identify a focus, 2) Develop a plan of action, 3) Collect data, 4) Organize the data, 5) Analyze the data and draw conclusions, 6) Disseminate findings, and 7) Develop a new plan of action.

I have modified some of these steps to better fit the design of my own project. For example, since the focus of my study is on how student ownership can be better developed through exhibiting artwork with the portable art gallery. I have developed a plan of action that begins with each student show. Our class used a schedule that allowed each student to exhibit his or her work for one week. Due to this schedule, and
the number of students, some of them decided to work collaboratively, and had their shows together. This schedule allowed each week to equal one iteration of my inquiry. This proved to be very helpful, as the students and I were able to analyze and reflect on what happened each week, and then discuss and improvise any necessary modifications for the next iteration.

I used various modes of data collection, such as my own reflective journal entries, student artist statements, student interviews, and photographs of student works, student shows, and the accompanying artist receptions. After I organized and analyzed the data from each iteration, I drew conclusions about my findings. This data was then used in classroom discussions during each week’s iteration. Based on the findings from the previous iteration, I would lead the class in an informal discussion about my findings. This was a formative way that I found I could gather further student input and sometimes more data. I would use these informal class discussions to develop a new plan of action for the following student show of action research for the study. These class discussions were also very useful to me from a grounded theory approach, as the data which was gathered in these informal settings ultimately shaped the final outcomes of the study.

I believe that it is important to note that, with the cyclical pattern of this methodology, there is not a definitive beginning or end in the research study, I am entering in the middle of my teaching within a specific context, with a narrowed focus of my AP Studio Art students. Since one of my goals for using this methodology design is to improve my own practice as an artist/teacher, I recognized the need to see the
practical realities involved with my personal growth as a teacher. I hoped that by using
this type of action research I would be able to uncover enough credible, constructive,
and substantial findings that would lead me to improve the way the students and I
carried out student shows, and ultimately, help me become more aware of other aspects
of my teaching.

I have chosen a modified type of action research that is based in both practical
and emancipatory styles, as emphasized by research scholar Grundy (1982), which
originated from a larger historical scope of action research. This type of the
methodology suits my own pedagogical and personal artistic practices, as it
appropriately fits into the post-structuralist theoretical framework from which I intended
to approach this project. I have also positioned myself carefully within this study both as
teacher and as researcher, as I sought to fluidly and reflectively act on the necessary
issues that I encountered in my study. One important issue that I discovered while
engaged in this study is that grounded theory fluidly and almost seamlessly fits together
with many parts of action research, which I have also included in the portable art gallery
project with my APStudio art class.

Grounded Theory

This section is meant to briefly summarize the strategies associated with
analyzing data through a grounded theory methodology. I will primarily base my findings
from Kathy Charmaz’s text (2006), *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide
Through Qualitative Analysis*. I will introduce and sequentially outline five of the initial
tenets of analysis as discussed by Charmaz about constructing a grounded theory: 1)
Gathering rich data, 2) Coding, 3) Memo writing, 4) Theoretical sampling, saturation, and sorting, and 5) Reconstructing theory. In this part of the chapter, I will address the progression and construction of a grounded theory approach to research, focusing more specifically on the analytic aspects of grounded theory, as well as the ways I was able to utilize and incorporate these different elements into my own research study with the portable art gallery.

**Grounded theory methodology**

Grounded theory is a unique form of qualitative research that emerged in the 1960s from a collaborative study by sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in their research about dying patients in hospitals. According to Charmaz (2006), the dominant paradigm during this period was a positivist one, which mainly embraced quantitative methodologies and strategies as the only form of valid evidence worthy of serious study. Qualitative methods of inquiry during the 1960s were largely interpreted by positivist researchers as anecdotal, unsystematic, and biased.

Charmaz (2006) outlines seven of the most salient and distinguishing elements of grounded theory according to Glaser and Strauss' groundbreaking study *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*:

1) Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis, 2) Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses, 3) Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis, 4) Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis, 5) Memo writing to elaborate
categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify
gaps, 6) Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population
representativeness, and 7) Conducting the literature review after developing an
independent analysis.

Glaser and Strauss’ work opened numerous possibilities for grounded theory to
flourish as a legitimate methodology among many qualitative researchers during the
1960s and helped establish grounded theory, as well as many other forms of qualitative
research, as a viable and important way to contribute to scholarly inquiry.

1. Gathering rich data

One of the most enticing aspects about grounded theory is its flexibility and
openness to the principal investigator. The term grounded theory is used to describe
this methodology because the research begins from the ground and then proceeds to
move up from there. Gathering data plays a vital role in establishing what the entire
study is about. Charmaz (2006) underscores the importance of choosing ways to gather
data for a study, “How you collect data affects which phenomena you will see, how,
where, and when you will view them, and what sense you will make of them” (p. 15).

As I began interviewing my students about their experiences with the portable art
gallery, I planned to record the actual interviews I have with students, as well as keep
an ongoing personal journal that will document my own thoughts and feelings about the
things that happen in my classroom. I also planned to take photographs of student
artwork, art shows, processes and other pertinent information about the students’
interactions with the gallery. These three data sources, interviews, a personal journal, and photographs, served as a foundation that guided the rest of my study.

2. Coding

According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theory coding is divided into two main phases: initial coding and focused coding. In the early stages of grounded theory analysis, it is important that the researcher remain open to possibilities of what the research is about. Instead of trying to fit data into preexisting theories, the data ought to be carefully studied, which will help determine the researcher’s theories about the phenomena.

Initial coding involves the process of scanning the data and giving codes to what stands out to the researcher to be important or noteworthy. Often during this stage of coding, researchers ask questions such as What is this data a study of? What does the data suggest or pronounce? From whose point of view? (Glaser, 1978). Initial coding practices, according to Charmaz (2006) should remain open, stay close to the data, use short and simple codes, focus on specific actions, and move quickly through the data.

The second main phase of coding in grounded theory is focused coding. According to Charmaz (2006), this phase includes giving more direct, selective, and conceptual codes to the data. This allows the researcher to move across data laterally, instead of focusing solely on line-by-line or incident-by-incident codes. Focused coding allows for emergent ideas and processes that continue to inform and affect the overall outcome of the study, which has worked well for this chosen methodology. I experienced a theoretical and practical overlap of different aspects of both grounded
theory and action research as I conducted my study. I will elaborate more on some specific examples of what took place with my students in chapter four.

3. Memo-writing

Charmaz (2006) refers to memo-writing in grounded theory as the “pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (p. 72). In this stage of analysis, the researcher takes the codes from the data mentioned previously and begins to informally write down what they consider relevant and important to the study. She also discusses the positive effects of simply taking the time to write about the codes and data, and how the process of instinctual and informal writing gives the researcher a space to internalize, clarify, and process the ideas and theories that may arise in the construction of the study.

One of the key aspects of successful memo-writing in grounded theory, according to Charmaz (2006) is that the writing process be flowing, instinctual, and spontaneous. This quick and informal approach is designed to help the researcher capture some fleeting thoughts as he or she studies the codes and collected data. Instead of insisting on a rigid structure for writing memos, Charmaz recommends a writing style that feels comfortable to the researcher, whether it takes the form a series of short, stilted notes, or a free flowing personal narrative. The important thing, she notes, is to get your thoughts about your codes onto paper, or into your computer, in whatever shape that might take. I followed Charmaz’s (2006) advice to “treat memos as partial, preliminary, and provisional. They are imminently correctable” (p. 84).
Grounded theory analysis allows the researcher to change and shape his or her study during the actual process of creating it. In the process of writing memos, the researcher tries to uncover categories among the codes and data. These categories are meant to determine the direction, scope and purpose of the study.

4. **Theoretical sampling, saturation, and sorting**

The next phase in this method of analysis involves theoretical sampling, which entails seeking pertinent data that will help the researcher develop his or her emerging theory by putting the data into related categories. The main purpose of theoretical sampling is to refine and elaborate the categories that constitute and inform the emerging theory (Charmaz, p. 96). By approaching the study this way, the researcher is allowed a greater flexibility and ability to synthesize and fill the different categories with a robust assortment of information that is drawn from the data. Theoretical sampling is also a phase in grounded theory analysis that allows the researcher to revisit the data, codes, and written memos to check for missing or lacking information. Often researchers will reach this point in their analysis and find a need to conduct further interviews in their search for specific data. Once the researcher feels that a sufficient amount of data has been collected for each category, he or she will feel that the category has been saturated, and is ready to move to the next phase.

Saturating theoretical categories is one of the main goals that grounded theory researchers seek in their analysis. Saturation means that a category has been so thoroughly examined from many different angles and applications from the data that gathering fresh data will no longer produce helpful insights about the study.
Saturation is also considered problematic, as it is often claimed to be attained by researchers hastily and uncritically. Ian Dey (1999), a critical theorist, suggests that grounded theory researchers produce categories through partial—not exhaustive—coding. He also argues that following the process of a grounded theory analysis will lead to unanticipated consequences for saturating categories. Dey (1999) implies that the term saturation is too subjective and often interpreted too loosely by grounded theory researchers. He prefers to use the term theoretical sufficiency (p. 257). I recognize Dey’s argument as a valid one, and I do not anticipate claims of total or absolute saturation for the analysis of my categories, and prefer the term theoretical sufficiency, in the place of saturation, and I do hope to critically and thoroughly realize the possibilities produced from the data in this study.

Writing memos about the codes and data of the analysis helped produce the substance for writing rough drafts for my thesis about the portable art gallery. As this substance is critically and thoroughly examined, I was be able to arrange the information into relevant and useful categories. Charmaz (2006) indicates that sorting the categories produced from the memos “gives…a logic for organizing your analysis and a way of creating and refining theoretical links that prompts you to make comparisons between categories” (p. 115). Through sorting, I was able to develop a theoretical integration of categories as I examine them from a more conceptual, abstract level. Charmaz (2006) gives a few suggestions about specific methods to sort categories. She recommends turning off the computer, putting out some tangible, paper labels onto a large table, and carefully arranging the various codes, memos, and
categories around in a large visual diagram or situational map. She suggests being patient with the possibilities that may emerge with this type of visualization, as it can lead to new understandings about the organization of the categories. I find that her suggested method of sorting theoretical categories emulates a personal method that I often enjoy using in my own art-making processes, which motivates me to reach this stage in my study.

5. Reconstructing theory

Charmaz’s (2006) text discusses the next phase of grounded theory analysis as reconstructing theory, which essentially positions the researcher in a place to generate a theory specific to the study. Theorizing, according to Charmaz (2006) “means stopping, pondering, and rethinking anew. We stop the flow of studied experience and take it apart” (p. 135). When involved in the process of reconstructive theorizing, the researcher tries to examine the study from multiple vantage points, make comparisons, follow leads, and build on ideas. This phase of analysis is very important to grounded theory because it qualifies and substantiates the whole study by cutting to the core of studied life and at the same time posing new questions about it.

Grounded theory methods are depicted by Charmaz (2006) as a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages. In this paper, I have tried to emphasize the basic sequence and methodology that constitute generating an effective, qualitative analysis through grounded theory. The basic progression of grounded theory involves gathering data, transforming the data into codes, and writing memos about the codes to form categories. Once categories are established, they ought to be fleshed out and
saturated, then sorted and organized into a theoretical reconstructions that confirm and strengthen a theory that is developed by the researcher, instead of trying to fit data into pre-established theories.

**Using both Action Research and Grounded Theory**

This method of analysis is also compatible with other qualitative inquiry methods. For this project, I have tried to mix or overlap grounded theory analysis with a version of action research to more thoroughly examine the relational effects of exhibiting student artwork, student autonomy, classroom environments, and whatever else I might discover about my experience with the portable art gallery as it might emerge in creating a grounded theory.

When I began this study with my AP Studio Art class, I fostered some notions about what I thought the portable art gallery would do, as I mentioned in the first chapter. These early notions are very different from what I am now presenting in this study. The grounded theory portion of my methodology has effected the focus, goals, and theoretical lens from which I have ultimately decided to construct this study.

For example, when I began to build the portable art gallery in August, 2010, I thought that the main focus of creating an exhibition space would be about helping the AP Studio Art students build their art portfolios and get accepted into college art programs, or that it would have a focus on place-based art education. It was not until I was immersed in the data I was gathering, in the process of working with students and their art shows, that I realized why a theoretical framework of post-structuralism which focused on how the dynamics of power relations in the art classroom could affect
student autonomy and ownership was more important and interesting to me than a focus on student portfolios or acceptance to college art programs or place-based art education.

The action research portion of my methodology was an effective approach for this study because it allowed me to examine each student art show in separate, tidily scheduled iterations every week, which produced ample amounts of data, as well as opportunities to regularly reflect and improve on my teaching practice. The grounded theory portion of the methodology was helpful for me to determine what data I was ultimately looking for, on what theoretical framework I would focus, and finally how I would build and present the ideas in this paper.

This hybrid methodological approach has greatly informed and ultimately constructed the way I have decided to encapsulate and discuss what happened with my students’ art shows, in greater detail in the following chapter.
Chapter 4: Student Experiences with the Portable Art Gallery

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss in further detail what took place as the AP Studio Art students engaged with the portable art gallery. I begin by describing significant class occurrences over the course of one week in March 2011. These descriptions are primarily taken from my personal reflective journal that I maintained throughout the research study. To illustrate how the portable art gallery assisted me as a teacher to foster an environment of student autonomy and ownership through a focus on student exhibitions, I highlight specific instances from multiple student shows. This analytic description will include the data collected from my study in the form of my reflections, direct quotes from student interviews, and also from photographs taken during the student exhibitions.

March 7-11, 2011: A Sample Week

The following is a specific example of a week that I documented in the third term from March 7-11th, 2011. Our school has an A/B day schedule, so this particular week we met on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for an average of 89 minutes for each class period. Seventeen students had spent the entire school year together up to that point. I have chosen to document this particular week in March because I believe it represents a useful representation of classroom instruction, student participation, and provides a sense of the overall classroom environment as it relates to student autonomy and voice. I have used pseudonyms for the students’ names mentioned in this study, as part of the confidentiality clause I outlined at the outset of my study (see appendices 1 and 2).
Students work on a typical project for 2-3 weeks in class. I designed this strategy so that the students would be able to use these in class projects for the *Breadth* section of their AP Studio Art portfolio. In the Breadth section of the test, the students are “asked to demonstrate a serious grounding in visual principles and material techniques” (AP Studio Art course description, p. 16). These projects were usually approached in class by the students and I first selecting a theme, prompt, or idea that might challenge the students’ artistic interpretive skills. Students would then produce an artistic response, which would then be used in their final portfolio. Students were also expected to simultaneously complete an individual *Concentration* project every one to two weeks outside of scheduled class time. These outside works fulfill the *Concentration* portion of a student’s portfolio. The Concentration section of the AP Studio Art exam is defined by the College Board as “a body of related works that demonstrate a student’s commitment to the thoughtful investigation of a specific visual idea” (AP Studio Art course description, p. 14).

On Monday, March 7th, during the first part of the first class, I wanted to explore the idea of *vulnerability* with my students as a starting point for a new art project. This theme emerged from a previous class discussion and response to watching a video together. One student had started crying after we watched a video clip. This occurrence began as an unplanned discussion among the students about the reasons that we cry. I hoped that this would serve as a generative starting point for the students to create meaningful artworks for the Breadth portion of their portfolio. I handed them a worksheet that listed several questions about crying (see appendix 4). I gave the students about 15
minutes to quietly answer the questions. Then we had a class discussion about their responses. As the students brought up ideas and arguments about the ideas related to crying, I showed them a video clip from City of Angels that I thought would be pertinent to the discussion. Afterward, we collectively chose how we would define the assignment. For example, the students constructed the parameters by which they would carry out and assess their projects. This was accomplished primarily by the students themselves, but included suggestions and feedback from me as the classroom teacher. After about 15 minutes of careful consideration, we decided that the students would privately have an experience in which they would either make themselves cry, or become vulnerable in some other way, and then make an artwork that responded to their experience.

The students also decided that, in order to help each other initiate a crying session, each student would submit a video suggestion that would act as a crying catalyst, or a video that would encourage one to cry. I later compiled these student-generated references onto one sheet of paper that was copied and distributed to each member of the class. We then agreed that the due date for this project would be March 15th.

The students and I had often talked about giving ourselves enabling constraints for our AP Studio art projects, as discussed by Art Education scholars Mark Graham (2009), Daniel Barney (2009), and Juan Carlos Castro (2007). The idea of creating a set of constraints or limitations that would enable or provoke divergent responses in one’s artistic production was a strategy that was evident and accessible to the students at this
time. I noted one of the effects of allowing the students to participate in the planning of the project resulted with an added sense of confidence and ownership for most of the students. “The general feeling of the class today,” I wrote in my journal, “was exciting as I saw the students so engaged with this project. I am so happy that they generated the constraints for the project themselves!”

At the end of class on Monday, March 7th, I reminded the students that their concentration project was due on our next class, Wednesday the 9th. Typically, I would require the AP Studio Art students to complete a Concentration project at home every one to two weeks. They would then bring in their latest work for a brief class critique.

That next Wednesday, March 9th, before beginning our scheduled class critique of their Concentration work, I began the class by asking about the progress of their vulnerability project. Most of the students were already talking with each other about their ideas, and some of them had already begun working, so we talked about their ideas, and also discussed some practical solutions about specific materials and techniques that might help them in the execution of their projects. This discussion led us to discover that some of the students had still not decided what to do, or how to have a vulnerable experience. I responded by showing them a 6 minute video, called Last Minutes with Oden, which I had previewed the day before. I found this video as I was searching online for a video that I thought would help me to have an experience that would make me cry as well, as I wanted to participate in this part of the project with my students. The video won best short film in 2010 on vimeo.com. It is an biographical documentary about a man who has to put down his cancer-ridden, three-legged dog.
After seeing the video, almost all of us in the room had tears in our eyes, and it took over a full minute before anyone felt able or willing to talk. “This moment,” I later documented, “was a powerful and bonding experience for everyone. I think because I kind of cried too, I felt like the students noticed how invested I was in the project, and I think they felt more invested as well. I think this project was a great community-building experience for our class, it really gave the kids a meaningful and thoughtful moment for self-reflection, and the fact that we all shared it together made it that much better.”

At this point in the class, we decided to begin our scheduled class critique of their personal concentration projects. This segment of the class this day was quite normal for our class. We had 11 of the 17 students bring their work on time. They placed their work at the front of the class, and I gave each student a chance to talk about his or her work, as well as a chance for the other students to respond, give feedback, or offer suggestions. This was done for each of the 11 students. By this time in the year, most of the students were quite familiar with one another’s direction, style, and main ideas or concepts about the work. The critique this Wednesday only lasted about 20 minutes.

This left about 25-30 minutes of studio time for the students to work on their own projects. I usually allowed the AP Studio Art class about half of the class time in any given week to be used as studio time. Many of the students would use this time to work on their Concentration projects, to prepare for their upcoming shows, or to work on whatever class project they needed time to complete.

On this particular day, two of the students, Deena and Liz, were preparing for their collaborative show using the portable art gallery. They used the studio time on
Wednesday to set up the portable art gallery in the south end of the school. They found two other students in the class who were not working on anything at the time, and were able to collaboratively transport the gallery in pieces down the stairs to the designated area. Since there was not much time left in class, Deena and Liz both stayed after school for over an hour, assembling the pieces of the gallery together and hanging their artworks in preparation for their show, which was scheduled to be exhibited after school that upcoming Friday, March 11th.

On Friday, when the students arrived in class, I shared with them some findings scientists and evolutionary theorists had said about the positive effects of crying and vulnerability. This allowed for another collective discussion about the current state of their individual vulnerability projects. This discussion revealed that all of the students were now engaged with the project. For example, all of the students except two had each had a personal experience that involved either crying, or making themselves vulnerable in some way. The other two students said that they knew what they were going to do by the end of the discussion. All the students understood that the project would be due the next class period, which would be the following Tuesday, March 15th.

After this 15-minute discussion, the students had the rest of the period to be used for studio time. Seven of the students chose to work on their personal concentration projects and four other students offered to help Deena and Liz finalize their show with the portable art gallery. This involved re-arranging some of the works that had been hung by the girls two days earlier. These two students had to re-hang and re-frame some of their work, because other students in the school had bumped the gallery, and
two of Deena’s pieces had fallen to the floor and broken.

Two of the students, Jan and Julie, used this time to work collaboratively to plan for their upcoming art show the following Friday. The students were all given a checklist (see appendix 3), which I had designed from my own experience, that I thought could help them prepare for their show in a timely manner. These two girls were going to use the portable art gallery together. This decision was made based on constraints in the schedule, as well as the size and amount of work that each of them had to display. Neither student would have enough work to fill the gallery by herself, so they decided to hold their show together, and even created a common title that would thematically tie both of their projects together. The planning session between the two girls this particular Friday involved seeking permission from the school administration to set up the gallery in a designated space in the C hall the following week, making decorations and food arrangements for an artists’ reception, and also designing and printing copies of a promotional poster that would be hung the following Monday throughout the halls of the school.

The students in the AP Studio Art class were engaged with many art projects. I tried to create a classroom environment and organize a curriculum that would allow the students to have a voice in what they made in preparation for building a strong portfolio that would help them pass the AP Studio Art test at the end of the year. By having each AP student be in charge of their own art show, I hoped that the students would have an experience similar, albeit on a smaller scale, to one they might have in a college art B.F.A. program. I believed that focusing on exhibitions could create unique learning
experiences that would generate authentic artistic practices for my students. I thought that by creating opportunities for students to experience these practices firsthand, it could allow them to think and do as an artist might think and do.

I have included the preceding account of a three-day span of time in our AP Studio Art class to not only describe what happened during the designated class time, but to also reveal and illustrate the general tone, dynamics, and environment of the class.

**Student Art Shows**

The rest of this chapter documents some of the specific student shows from the AP Studio Art students. In each example, I discuss specific elements, occurrences or reasons for their inclusion in this study. I have used pseudonyms for each student, as was agreed upon at the commencement of the study. Some of the photos have been altered so that the students’ real names can maintain their anonymity.

**Kimberly and Stephanie’s show**

The first student art show that utilized the portable art gallery was shared by two of my students, Kimberly and Stephanie. They worked towards creating a show together, and decided that their work could be unified and tied together thematically with the title *Undisclosed Desires*. They worked together to create a promotional poster about their work (Figure 4.1). They were both working towards taking the 2-D Design A.P. Studio Art Test. Both of their work was based in digital media. These similarities in the visual representation of their work helped them come to the decision to work together on this project.
Most of Kimberly’s artwork was created by juxtaposing two seemingly unrelated photographs in order to create a new meaning by combining them into one finished work. (see figure 4.2)
Stephanie mainly took digital photos and used Photoshop to alter them into images that originated from common sayings, phrases or ideas. Usually her images would generate new meanings by the way she translated the text into an image, often playing on the preconceived notions of how these sayings were traditionally interpreted. (figures 4.3 and 4.4)
Figure 4.3. One of Stephanie’s digital works titled Freedom of Speech.
Kimberly and Stephanie’s show was held upstairs in our school, down the hall from the art classroom. Their work was hung for a total of about six days but they also promoted and worked to provide a reception specifically designated for an opening reception, held on one night. These students promoted their show using multiple strategies and through a variety venues. They made many copies of the poster seen above, which was hung up in various locations around the school. Kimberly went on the
morning announcements to tell the whole student body about it, inviting everyone to attend. Kimberly and Stephanie created a Facebook event invitation online, and made many personal phone calls as well.

Their reception was well attended, and despite a few obstacles, such as Stephanie showing up with her artwork later than she had told Kimberly, they both agreed that the show was a worthwhile event that exacted a lot of work and personal energy (Figure 4.5).

*Figure 4.5.* Some of the people that came to Kimberly and Stephanie’s artist reception.
When asked about the experience with her show, Kimberly replied:

\[M\]e and Stephanie decided to do it together since we both did photographs, and neither of us thought we’d have enough work done by the time we had a show. And so the day of, we were supposed to be there at six, and Stephanie wasn’t there, and she didn’t have any of her stuff ready. But after we took care of that and everything, it was all good, and it was awesome, because a bunch of people came, and they asked me about my work and like what I meant (from a personal interview 5/03/11).

Kimberly’s experience in the art class was especially significant because of the way she started at the beginning of the year. She described her experience and perspective about art from the beginning of the year.

“…when I first started the class, I had no idea even what I could make because I hated art…I didn’t think I could do it. Then as we went throughout the year, and had projects that we had to do certain things for, like a photograph or a drawing, then I had to do different things, like out of my comfort zone, and then that’s when I realized that I actually liked photography, and I like sewing things onto paper. The class helped me actually figure out what I like to do in art, and that I can actually do it, instead of feeling like I can’t. (personal interview, 5/03/11)

At the end of the school year, Kimberly, then a junior, was voted to be the school’s student body artist for her upcoming senior year.
Spencer’s show

Spencer made a series of semi-abstract, colorful landscape paintings for his art show. He was very responsible with the expectations associated with organizing his show. For example, he was in charge of moving and assembling the gallery in a different location of our school. He arranged for all the details of the reception, and created a promotional poster for it. He was only the second student from our class to put up a show, and despite his responsible and dutiful attention to the details of his show, my experience with Spencer’s show manifested one very important flaw, even though he created a promotional poster, his show was not very well attended. His parents, me, and one other AP student were the only ones to come during the first hour to his opening reception.

I would describe Spencer as a shy student, and although he made a poster about his show, I discovered after the reception that he had not used any other means to publicize or advertise it. As a consequence, only a handful of people actually knew about the time and place of the show. I later noted in my own journal about Spencer’s show, “I perceived the lacking audience as a serious detriment to Spencer’s experience, almost to the point that it could have backfired and made the whole experience a negative, sour one”.


I chose to view the weak audience problem from Spencer’s show as a learning experience for both Spencer and me, which presented an opportunity to improve in the future with other students. This adjustment felt like a natural move as part of my action research methodology. I saw each of the student shows as a cycle, and with each show, I sought to reflectively improve on what had happened the time before. After Spencer’s show, I made a point to meet with each student at least one week before their show in order to discuss with them specific plans to promote and publicize the attendance of their artist reception and art show.
Kelly and Kerri’s show

Similar to Kimberly and Stephanie, Kelly and Kerri decided to combine their efforts to have one collaborative show, because they shared thematic similarities, as well as a friendship and an ability to work together amicably. They each created artworks which they intended to unify under the title *Nature* (Figure 4.7).

![Figure 4.7. Promotional flier for Kelly and Kerri’s show.](image-url)
Kelly’s artwork for this show included pieces she had made for her concentration project, which were silhouettes of various game birds, created by gluing the BB shot of shotgun shells onto painted wood panels (Figure 4.8). She described the reason for doing this “like creating something out of something that usually destroys them” (from a personal interview, 5/01/11).

Figure 4.8. Kelly’s work, made from shotgun BBs adhered to painted Masonite panels.
Kerri’s work for the show was an eclectic mix of mostly small paintings and mixed media works that had images of trees and birds. Her work was more experimental and thematically exploratory (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9. Two of Kerri’s artworks from her show, Nature.

Kelly and Kerri wanted to capitalize on the portability of the gallery, and so, along with the predetermined theme about nature, they decided to set up their show and reception in a park by a local reservoir for a one-night-only event. They promoted their show through similar venues like Kimberly and Stephanie had done, but also faced unique challenges specific to their show as well. For example, Kerri had to talk to the local city office to reserve the pavilion for the space and arrange for her dad to bring his
truck to haul the portable art gallery pieces to and from the school (Figures 4.10 and 4.11). Kelly took charge of things such as bringing firewood and supplies to make s’mores. She also took charge of hanging the show once the gallery was set up. Both of these students participated in what I later referred to in my reflective journal as “one of the most memorable student shows of the year. So many people came to support these two girls, and it was a great time. I really feel like this show strengthened the already growing sense of community between the students in the class.”

Figure 4.10. Part of Kelly and Kerri’s reception involved a campfire.
Lauralee’s show

Lauralee worked to have a solo show that used the portable art gallery to create a thematic installation called *Soul Search* (Figure 4.12), which was about her interpretation and representation of the soul of a person. Many of her family and friends, as well as many of her classmates attended the reception for her show from our AP Studio Art class.
On the back wall of the gallery, she hung white Christmas lights above a large shelf unit filled with dozens of glass vessels that were filled with stones and water. On the other walls of the gallery she hung eleven realistic drawings which were realistic
studies of these jars and bottles. Over the doorway of the gallery, she hung a veiled sheet, which viewers had to pass through in order to experience her installation (Figure 4.13). Lauralee also displayed the following artist statement along with her work:

My artwork is a reflection of the individual soul of a person. I have assembled my own still lives (sic) consisting of glass containers representing the body, and the rocks as the spirit. Each of them is made of the exact same materials, but not one of them looks like another. The rocks I gathered came from the same stream, and each one was intentionally chosen for a specific attribute. By drawing them I was able to study them, see the fine details, and learn to appreciate the small details.

Figure 4.13. Two different views from Lauralee’s show, Soul Search, in the portable art gallery.
**Julie and Jan's show**

Due to some scheduling constraints with the portable art gallery, Julie and Jan exhibited their artworks together in one show. However, they chose to use this situation as an opportunity to explore the possibilities of curating their work together. As they did this, they were able to discover new meanings that were created by juxtaposing their individual works collectively, and ultimately decided on a theme and title for their show, *Unseen* (Figure 4.14).

![Figure 4.14. Julie and Jan in front of their promotional poster for their show, Unseen.](image)

Julie’s work consisted of realistic colored pencil drawings of zoomed in areas from animal references, such that they formed seemingly abstract forms and patterns.
Her main idea was “…to focus on the details, to look closely at things that we normally don’t pay attention to. I think we can learn about things when we study and examine the details in life” (personal interview, 9/07/11).

Julie described the reaction of viewers to one of her artworks and the meaning she had found during her individual research. (Figure 4.15). She noted that:

A lot of people thought that this was part of an owl, but it is actually a zoomed-in part of a butterfly. I think that’s cool because that’s why butterflies actually have patterns like that, it’s like a defense mechanism for their own survival and protection” (personal interview, 9/07/11).

Figure 4.15. Julie’s colored pencil drawing from her show, *Unseen*. 
Jan’s artwork explored another perspective about things being unseen. Her work was comprised of drawings about her own memories. She said part of her process for conceiving these images was her fascination with the idea of memory. “Sometimes you’re not sure if what you remember in your mind is real, or if your memories get exaggerated or forgotten or changed through time” (personal interview, 4/29/11).

**Thad and Toni’s show**

Thad and Toni had a collaborative show with their artworks. The main reason they chose to create the exhibit together had to do with their comfort level and friendship with each other. For their show, they set up the portable art gallery in a high-traffic area in the school, but chose to only use certain wall sections of the gallery in setting up their show, and instead of the normal box shape that the gallery was designed to take, they configured the walls to form a simple maze and did not put on the ceiling pieces (Figure 4.16).
Both Thad and Toni used imagery in their individual works that was often appropriated from photographs or other sources and then recontextualized with varied processes, which took the form of collages. They each talked about how their strongest artworks were often created in response to the class discussions that were able to happen in our class. Toni noted:

Our class discussions were the most memorable experiences for me. That's why I never sluffed this class. I mean, when we would sometimes cry in front of each other, in some weird way, I feel like that's what built strong relationships.
between us as classmates, and we were able to open up and be vulnerable with each other (personal interview, 9/09/11).

Part of Thad and Toni’s show involved an element that invited audience participation. In relation to the feelings of vulnerability and trust that Toni mentioned, she and Thad had recently been influenced by the ideas from Postsecret.com, in which anyone is invited to participate by publishing an anonymous secret online, usually in the form of some kind of artwork. The students had recently encountered this website during one of our class discussions. They found that this website had thematic ties to their methods of making images from recontextualizing existing materials, and hoped to exercise a similar method to generate more personal artworks in the future by using other people’s secrets as source materials.

These students placed an empty bowl and some slips of paper at the exit of the gallery with simple instructions that the viewer could anonymously write down a secret that would be used by Thad and Toni in future art projects (Figure 4.17).
Emily’s show

Emily represented our high school as the *Sterling Scholar* in visual arts. This is a state-wide award given to only one senior student in the school who demonstrates not only strength in a visual arts portfolio, but also examines community involvement, student leadership, and academic excellence. She used the portable art gallery for a solo show of her concentration work, which was comprised of illustrations about small...
but significant moments in a child’s life. She accomplished this through applying various two-dimensional processes to pencil drawings. Her show was comprised of a prolific body of work that was unified visually and thematically, and presented professionally in matching mats and frames (Figure 4.18).

![Figure 4.18. One wall of the portable gallery for Emily’s show.](image)

Emily’s use of the portable art gallery was especially helpful to her, as our school’s Sterling Scholar. She was seeking to build her portfolio and art experience to help her chances of enrolling in a university art program. At the end of her senior year, she was interested in applying for B.F.A. programs, as well as enrolling in art education courses so that she could become certified to teach art in the future.
Since Emily was interested in art education, we were able to arrange a unique opportunity with a local elementary school. She made appropriate arrangements with the administration and art teachers of the elementary school so that we could bring the portable art gallery to their school to do a collaborative, community art project with their students for two weeks.

For this project, Emily presented a brief lecture, as well as an informal show and tell session for about 90 students from 3rd to 6th grade. She showed the young students her artworks, talked about making art, and what inspired her to work on projects (Figure 4.19). This presentation was given in a shared space in the hallway of the elementary school where the portable gallery was set up. Emily had a body of work on display in the gallery, and the students were able to experience an art show.

Figure 4.19. Emily showing her art to students at a local elementary school.
Emily gave the young students an art project to work on, and explained that she would leave her work up for the first week, and then when they had completed their artwork by the beginning of the second week, she would take her show down so that they would be able to exhibit their work in the space. The teachers, parents and administrators at this school were very supportive of Emily’s project. They collaborated with her to facilitate the needs and demands of the time involved, the art supplies, and hanging and taking down their students’ show.

Some of the consequences that came from this project include: the young students had a memorable encounter with a local high school artist and experience with an art show; the surrounding community was able to have more exposure to student artwork; and Emily was able to have an authentic art education experience as she concurrently strengthened her own portfolio, which prepared her to enter a university art program.

**Erin’s show**

Erin used the gallery in a project similar to Emily. She was involved at a different local elementary school, working as an intern through the high school’s career placement program. For her internship, Erin was working directly with a fourth grade class. Her A.P. Studio concentration consisted of paintings that depicted memorable moments from her childhood, especially featuring the relationships in her family. Using her position with the elementary school, she collaborated with her mentor teacher, Mr. Smith, as well as with the administration of the school to set up the portable art gallery.
in a central space in their school. Erin was able to have an art show that involved the
fourth grade students’ artwork, as well as her own.

Erin worked with Mr. Smith’s class by sharing the way she used the theme of
family to create her artwork. She invited each of the young students to bring in an object
that represented an important part of his or her own family. She then collected these
objects and hung them from the ceiling of the gallery, while she hung her paintings
inside the walls of the gallery. She also invited the young students to draw things about
their family on the outside of the walls of the gallery with chalk (Figures 4.20 and 4.21).

Figure 4.20. Erin’s show with 4th graders’ objects hanging from the ceiling, and her paintings on
the walls.
Erin’s exhibit allowed a wide audience to be a part of the show. Many elementary students at the school were able to experience an art show first hand, interact with a high school art student, and have an opportunity to draw on the outside of the gallery. Erin benefitted from being in charge of the project from start to finish. She talked to the people at the school to get proper permission to execute the whole project. She also arranged for transportation of the gallery, coordinated other high school students to lift, move, assemble, and later disassemble and transport the pieces of the gallery to and from the two schools. Erin did all these tasks in addition to the creation and promulgation of the customary promotional materials.
Conclusion

By utilizing the portable art gallery as a common platform, I was able to set up conditions in my class that would allow my students to gain a sense of ownership over their art projects. The data from this chapter shows how I was able to create a class environment that would be conducive to strengthening student voice, student-centered art products, and also helped to develop strong relationships and trust between all members of the class. The students were then able to use the portable art gallery to show their own artwork. Each student show produced divergent outcomes, brought up some unique experiences, problems, and successes for the students. Ultimately, these experiences culminated in a positive direction for the school’s visual arts reputation and program, which I will discuss further in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

As a teacher, I consider my experiences with the portable art gallery largely positive. The students from my AP Studio Art class were able to experience many new, exciting and meaningful effects that would not have otherwise been available to them throughout the school year. As each student engaged with the gallery through their own shows, this project asked each of them to not only produce a significant body of related artwork in connection with their Concentration project, but it also meant making promotional materials for and publicizing their show, arranging for all the details of a reception night, making curatorial decisions about where the show would be exhibited, how the work would be displayed, and what they could do to involve the community with their art show.

In conclusion, I briefly discuss a few of the consequences that the portable art gallery produced. I focus on how this study addressed the initial problem of trying to have students make more meaningful art projects in school. I will discuss how the gallery affected the students’ experience with their own art projects, their ability to work collaboratively, and also the impact that the portable art gallery had on the surrounding community and the culture of our school. I also discuss how the gallery served as a platform for me to carefully reflect on and examine my own teaching practice.

The Portable Art Gallery as a Platform

The portable art gallery was created as a place of possibility for the students in my AP Studio Art class to develop their own voice as they worked toward putting on a solo art show. Many of the students in the AP Studio art class had their shows in
collaboration with another student. These shows gave the students experience and opportunities to cooperate, compromise and work through some real-life problems and situations. And as I focused on post-structuralist, decentralized power arrangements in the classroom, I realized that ultimately, this was one of the most important things on which I ought to focus.

For example, I observed become frustrations arise between Kimberly and Stephanie. As they worked collaboratively, certain issues of punctuality and inconsistent communication seemed to hinder their progress, and for a time, it appeared to me that they would not be able to complete their show on time. As their teacher, striving to advocate lateral power relations in the class, I fought my hegemonic tendencies to insert myself into the situation, trying to solve their problems by assigning them individual responsibilities in order for them to complete their show on time.

In the end, I was able to remain out of the immediate circumstances and observed impressive levels of patience and maturity on the part of both Kimberly and Stephanie as they demonstrated a willingness to work together to solve their problems. I observed similar occurrences with the other collaborative shows, which I believe attributed to developing skills and attributes that will ultimately help the students in their futures. As a teacher, this observation has greatly impacted my own teaching practice, and encourages me to relinquish these hegemonic tendencies as I strive for a more authentic, post-structuralist paradigm in my teaching practices in the future.
The Portable Art Gallery’s Effect on the Community and Culture of the School

When I started working with the portable art gallery in my AP Studio Art class, I was not sure how things would work, what consequences to expect, or how it might affect the surrounding community. I began the school year with barely enough students to carry one section of AP Studio art. I tried to recruit more students to fit the class into their schedules. At the beginning of the second semester, the numbers shifted, some students dropped the class, and others added. Ultimately I had 17 students that were committed to putting on art shows, of which I have included only 14 in this study. The first few shows were sporadically attended, but as other students, parents, and members of the community became aware of the tradition that was forming at the school, more and more people would attend the student art shows as the year went on. At the end of the school year, I had multiple students ask me about what was required to be in the AP Studio Art class for the following year.

I realized that instead of going out of my way to recruit students to fill the numbers so that the class could carry, I was able to administer prerequisite, summer homework for students that wanted to be in the class. At the beginning of the following school year, I had over 45 students who wanted to sign up for AP Studio Art. Thanks to the stellar work of my colleagues who teach ceramics and 3-D Design, we were able to start the new year with about 8-12 students who signed up to take the AP Studio Art 3-D test in the ceramics lab, while 35 students enrolled in my AP Studio Art class, which will help students build their portfolios for both the 2-D Design and Drawing AP Studio Art exams.
One of the best attributes of the portable art gallery has been its visibility to the public. The gallery's presence has been experienced by many people in our community, in a variety of locations and venues. The demographics of this community include high school, junior high, and elementary students, parents, administrators, district officials, and other people who may not even live in our immediate area. I have received many positive comments about the portable art gallery. The AP students have relayed many other similar comments to me that they would receive from other people as they participated in their individual shows. Overall, the gallery has made an indelible impression on our school's relatively young art program.

The portable art gallery has been an integral part of my AP Studio Art class, and a concrete platform for which I have been able to experiment with and reflect on my own teaching practice in this study. The gallery has allowed many students to explore their own voice as they have had authentic experiences with their own art shows. This study has tried to show how embracing a post-structuralist theoretical framework, focused specifically on the relational implications of power in the art classroom, can empower students to develop a sense of autonomy and ownership that will ultimately lead them to create more meaningful artworks and have more meaningful experiences.
References


http://www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/staff/profile/wolfgang.weileder
Appendices

Appendix 1: Parental Permission Form

Parental Permission for a Minor to Participate in Research
The portable art gallery: A qualitative inquiry about student ownership and exhibiting artwork.

Introduction
My name is Jethro Gillespie. I am a graduate student at Brigham Young University and I am conducting a research study about the effects that exhibiting student artwork may have on creating a positive environment in an art classroom. With the help and direction of Dr. Dan Barney, Assistant professor of Art Education at BYU, I am inviting your child to take part in the research because he/she is a student in the A.P. studio art class at MMHS and has a direct association and experience with the portable art gallery.

PROCEDURES
If you agree to let your child participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- Your child will be interviewed for approximately five minutes every week about their experience with the portable art gallery, their art projects, art show, and experience in my class.
- The interview may be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting their statements.
- The interview will take place at a time and location convenient to you.
- The researcher may contact you later to clarify their interview answers.
- Total time commitment for your child will be about 20-30 minutes per month until the end of the school year.

RISKS
There may be some discomfort at being asked some of the questions. Your child may answer only those questions that your child wants to, or your child may stop the entire process at any time without affecting his/her standing in school or grades in class.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The research data will be kept in a secure location and only the researcher (Mr. Gillespie) will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all audio-recorded interviews will be deleted and the data will be kept in the researcher’s locked cabinet or office.

BENEFITS
There will be no direct benefits to your child. However, it is hoped that through your child’s participation in this study, the findings from this research will influence the future art students at MMHS to create a more positive classroom environment as they exhibit their artwork.
COMPENSATION
Participants in this study will receive extra credit that would normally count for one of their gallery write-up assignments for each term. Also, your child will be invited to a class party at the end of the school year.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Jethro Gillespie at (801) 830-6574, jethrogillespie@yahoo.com, or Dan Barney, PhD, at (801) 422-1581, danielbarney@gmail.com.

Questions about your child’s rights as a study participant, or comments or complaints about the study also may be addressed to the IRB Administrator, Brigham Young University, A-285 ASB, Provo, UT 84602; 801-422-1461 or irb@byu.edu

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION
PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to have your child participate in this research study. You may withdraw your child’s participation at any point without penalty.

Child’s Name ______________________________________________

Signature   _____________________ Date __________

Parent

Signature   _____________________ Date __________

Researcher
Appendix 2: Photographic Release Form

Photographic Release Form

As part of this project, we will be taking photographs. Please initial in the spaces below to indicate which uses of these photographs you consent to, and sign at the end of the release form. Photos will only be used in the ways you consent to. Your name will not be identified in these photos.

1. ______ Photographs can be reviewed by the research team.
2. ______ Photographs can be used for project illustration.
4. ______ Photographs can be used for classroom presentations.
5. ______ Photographs can be used for academic conference presentations.
6. ______ Photographs can be used for fundraising presentations/proposals.
7.______ Photographs can be used for newspaper or magazine publication

________________________
Name

________________________
Signature

________________________
Date
Appendix 3: Art Show Checklist

Art Show Checklist

Complete the following 2 weeks prior to your opening:

_____ 1. Finalize which artworks will constitute your show.

_____ 2. Determine the location of the show, and make any necessary arrangements with the appropriate people about your chosen venue.

_____ 3. Create a promotional poster or fliers, including the pertinent information about your show (date, time of opening reception, location, image(s), title, your name, ect) You can use a Pages template- easy-peasy.

_____ 4. Publicize your show. This includes printing your promotional poster (preferably in color), use Facebook, phone calls, put your poster onto the morning announcements, send invites to your rich relatives, ect.

Complete the following 1 week prior to your opening:

_____ 5. Figure out the presentation details about your exhibition. Cut mats, arrange frames, video equipment, projectors, nails, strings, tacks, or any other materials you want to include in your show.

_____ 6. Finalize details about your opening reception. Arrange for refreshments, cups, napkins, tables, ect.

_____ 7. Arrange for other people to help you set up your show.

_____ 8. Write an artist statement and make title cards, and prices (if applicable) about your show.

_____ 9. See if your parents will buy you a cool new outfit for your big night! (optional)
Appendix 4: Prompt Worksheet About Crying and Vulnerability

Crying: A personal, experiential inquiry

Name: _______________________

1. Why do you think we cry?

2. What are some of the social or cultural consequences that come with crying?

3. What positive consequences could come from crying?

4. What do you think can happen if we don’t cry?

5. Tell about a time when crying affected your life.