



All Theses and Dissertations

---

2015-12-01

# A Theory of Presence: Bringing Students and Art Closer Together

Joshua T. Hobbs

*Brigham Young University - Provo*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#)

---

## BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Hobbs, Joshua T., "A Theory of Presence: Bringing Students and Art Closer Together" (2015). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 5717.  
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/5717>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

A Theory of Presence: Bringing Students and Art Closer Together

Joshua T. Hobbs

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

Daniel T. Barney, Chair  
Mark Graham  
Sharon Gray

Department of Art  
Brigham Young University

December 2015

Copyright © 2015 Joshua T. Hobbs

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### A Theory of Presence: Bringing Students and Art Closer Together

Joshua T. Hobbs  
Department of Art, BYU  
Masters of Arts

In seeking to create a richer learning environment in a junior high art classroom, the author develops a theory of *presence*. Closely connected to object-centered learning, a theory of presence in the art classroom places value on students being in the presence of, interacting with, and responding to artworks, artists, and other individuals and objects from the visual arts community. The author then describes how curricular plans are influenced by this theory of presence. Using an action research methodology, the author engages in the spiral process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting on curriculum that explores the possibilities of connecting students with objects, artifacts, and people that privilege physical interaction and presence. Guest artist visits, utilizing a local art museum, and other methods are explored as possibilities for this to be achieved.

Keywords: presence, object-centered learning, action research, authentic, guest artist, art museum education

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although my name is attached to this thesis, I would be in the wrong to not recognize the highly influential, even collaborative role so many wonderful individuals played in this research journey. First and foremost, I wish to thank my wonderful wife, Annie. I thank her for her continuous support and willingness to give up so many of our evenings and weekends while I attended class, worked in the library, and wrote my thesis. She inspires me, reminds me who I am, and keeps me focused on the most important things in life. She makes me such a better version of myself.

I wish to thank my parents. They have encouraged me all along the way in this journey as an art educator and artist. Their parenting and love have defined who I am. I am forever grateful for them teaching me how to work, to love education, and how to always find joy in life.

I'm indebted to Dr. Barney, Dr. Graham, and Dr. Gray for opening my eyes to the world of art education research. Their encouragement and support have been greater than I ever expected. I am continually awed by their abilities as master educators.

I wish to thank the wonderful friends and co-researchers in my program cohort. Their enthusiasm, knowledge, and friendship have been so appreciated during these past couple of years. They are like family.

Finally, I wish to thank all the wonderful students, teachers, staff, and administration I have had the privilege to work with. I love my career because of them.

## Table of Contents

TITLE PAGE .....	i
ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Figures .....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
A Personal Narrative: Rediscovering Art .....	1
Another Personal Narrative: Rediscovering Van Gogh .....	2
Reflections on Presence .....	2
The Problem .....	3
Bringing Students and Art Closer Together .....	3
Research Site .....	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	5
Introduction .....	5
Formulating a Theory of Presence .....	5
In the Presence of Things .....	5
In the Presence of Persons .....	10
Examples of Object-Centered Learning in Art Education .....	12
Technology and Digital Resources .....	15
Visualizing a Theory of Presence in the Art Classroom .....	16
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	18
The Climb Called Research .....	18
Introduction to Action Research .....	18
Action Research Defined .....	18
A Brief History of Action Research .....	19
The Action Research Process .....	20
A Solution to the Theory-practice Problem .....	21
Other Characteristics of Action Research .....	21
Action Research in My Classroom .....	22
Data Collection and Validity .....	22
Reflection journal .....	23
Student written reflections .....	23
Participant observation and field notes .....	24
Photography .....	24
Data Analysis and Generating Knowledge .....	25
Chapter 4: A Theory of Presence in the Classroom .....	26
Introduction .....	26
Initial Research: First Lesson on What Really Matters .....	26
The Guest Artist: A Rich Resource .....	29
A student's reaction .....	30
Artist demonstration and student response .....	30

Learning in the third site .....	31
Discoveries of Guest Artists Related to My Theory of Presence .....	34
Being in the Presence of the Artist .....	35
Continued contact with artists.....	36
The Guest Artist's Original Artwork .....	36
Printmaking art gallery in the classroom. ....	37
Artists Tools and Techniques.....	39
Curriculum Development.....	39
Student example.....	43
The Art Museum .....	44
The art museum visit.....	45
Comparing the Museum Visit Versus the Guest Artists.....	46
My Vision of Art Museums and Guest Artist Visits.....	46
Final Guest Artist: Performance and Interaction .....	47
Chapter 5: Final Reflections .....	50
Reflections on Theory and Practice .....	50
Reflections on How I Have Changed As a Teacher .....	51
References.....	53
Appendix.....	56
Sample Unit Curriculum: Portrait Drawing – Fine Art .....	56

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Guest artist creating illustrations for students during Flex Time. ....	32
Figure 2. Students watching and conversing with a guest artist during a demonstration. ....	35
Figure 3. Example of a guest artist's work displayed, creating a mini-gallery in the classroom..	37
Figure 4. Student holding and viewing original prints and printmaking supplies. ....	38
Figure 5. Student example of Nicolai Fechin copy in charcoal. ....	41
Figure 6. Student working on portrait from life in charcoal. ....	42
Figure 7. Student work, using a guest artist's theme. ....	44
Figure 8. Students experimenting with performance art. ....	48

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### A Personal Narrative: Rediscovering Art

Like so many college students, as a freshman I set out on a course that meandered across the collegiate map in search of a degree best suited for me. I considered careers ranging from architecture to agriculture, but nothing seemed right. With no clear direction, I reverted back to what I had always loved: art.

Without a vision of how art could be a career, I had never considered studying it. I had hardly picked up a pencil to draw since high school, but I enrolled in my first college drawing class. Terrified is the word that best describes my emotions on that first day. I had attended a high school with a small arts program. It was so small that I had been the only senior to enroll in an art class my final year of high school. I assumed that I was somehow behind, but it was what I loved. Despite my concerns, the first week was extremely encouraging. I felt I could draw as well or better than most in the class. However, I was still not convinced I would continue down the art degree route.

After a few classes, the drawing professor spoke to me individually about attending an art seminar that the department of art was hosting. I was not enrolled in the art seminar class, but he told me to just show up.

A few days later, I slid into a seat inside a lecture hall. The lights dimmed, and the artist was introduced. Brett Helquist, an illustrator from New York, stood up. He told his tale of graduating from art school, moving across the country, and working part-time jobs to support himself while he pursued his goal of becoming a professional illustrator. He showed his work, both digital and traditional, and talked about his artistic process. I was sucked in. It was like an

adrenalin injection. He was so real to me. He loved making art, and so he found a way to make it his life and living. From that moment, I knew I would do the same, and I never looked back.

### **Another Personal Narrative: Rediscovering Van Gogh**

A couple of years later, I found myself on a personal pilgrimage across Europe to sample the artwork the continent had to offer. Backpack strapped to my shoulders, I stepped off the train. On foot and alone, I navigated across the fan-shaped layout of Amsterdam. I arrived at the Van Gogh Museum. I passed through the doors. It seemed important to see the work of Van Gogh while in Amsterdam. However, I did not have high expectations. Posters, slides, and other reproductions of paintings like *The Starry Night* (1889) had been standard images used in art classes from junior high and throughout college. Nonetheless, I felt Van Gogh's fame was the result of tradition and folklore rather than his ability as a painter.

I began to walk around. I examined his brush strokes. I read his personal writings on experimenting with color while looking at his paintings. I observed the evolution of his work during his lifetime. Being an oil painter myself, I found myself fascinated. The more I looked, the more interested I became. I felt a connection. Van Gogh's work had suddenly become exciting to me!

### **Reflections on Presence**

Trying to dissect exactly what made these two experiences so significant in my life is a complex task. However, upon reflection, I believe they have an important element in common. In the first scenario, I met a living, working artist. Being able to interact with, direct questions towards, and listen to a successful artist as he discussed the successes and failures of his career was extremely motivational for me. In the second, I saw Van Gogh's work in person. Viewing the collection of Van Gogh's original work proved to be a thrilling experience in contrast to

viewing reproductions. I was able to see textures, the glow of the oil paint, and evidence of the artist's development throughout his career. In both cases, I was in the physical presence of the artist or artwork, and I believe that is at the heart of what made these experiences powerful for me.

### **The Problem**

I think my students often have similar experiences like mine when introduced to various works of art and artists. They struggle with connecting to reproductions of artwork and artists they have never met or know very little about. Perhaps a reason for this is that my students are removed from the experience by technology. They live in a technology-filled world. At home, on the bus, during lunch, and sometimes under their desk, my students are blowing things up, building civilizations, making collections of images online, and socializing with groups of people across the globe on some digital device. Is it any wonder that they are not at the edge of their seats when I show an image on my projector screen—even if it is some cutting-edge artist from New York or great master of the Renaissance? Please do not misunderstand. I do not view the digital world as at odds with my curriculum. The digital world has changed the landscape of the classroom like those living even thirty years ago could not imagine. However, to me, a PowerPoint does not seem exactly thrilling for today's generation of students. If students are over-saturated with digital imagery every day, what can teachers provide to make art classes the rich experience they should be? Is there a way to balance the virtual, digital experience with other, more physical interactions with art and artists?

### **Bringing Students and Art Closer Together**

Inspiring events like my meeting Brett Helquist and my visit to the Van Gogh Museum sparked within me a desire to change the way I teach art. These experiential moments also

demonstrate the power of viewing artwork in its original form and meeting artists in person. Technology provides easy access to visual art resources, and is especially beneficial when the artwork is digital art. However, as my personal narratives illustrated, technology cannot completely duplicate the experiences I described. I am interested in creating a classroom environment that brings students and original artwork closer together. While embracing digital resources, I wish to eliminate the digital middleman some days as well. I want students to have actual conversations with artists other than myself. I want my students to be in the presence of original artwork.

In this action research study, I will explore the possibilities of doing just that. In each unit of learning, I will continually strive to examine the possibilities of connecting my students and classroom to actual artworks and artists. By inviting in guest artists, transforming the classroom into a gallery space to view original artwork, and visiting a local art museum, I will allow my instruction to be varied and my curriculum to develop in response to my students' reactions with these objects and people.

### **Research Site**

This research study was carried out at Mapleton Junior High in Mapleton, Utah where I teach art. The students that participated were all in either the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade, enrolled in Art Foundations 2. Most all of them had previously taken at least one art class from me. They would generally be considered to come from a middle to upper socio-economic class. The community that they live in, Mapleton and Springville, Utah, would generally be considered conservative.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

After recognizing the significance of presence in my own art experiences, I sought out any material related to this interest. While reviewing the literature in this chapter, I develop what I call a theory of presence. This theory of presence served as the foundation to my research study.

### **Formulating a Theory of Presence**

Presence, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, can be defined as, “the state of being with or in the same place as a person or thing...” (Presence, 2002). In curricular sites, such as the school classroom, students have placed in their presence, persons and things meant to assist in their learning. On a typical day, the persons are likely the teachers and other students. The things in their presence are numerous and vary greatly. Textbooks, whiteboards, projectors, paints, videos, microscopes, desks, basketballs, musical instruments, and theatre costumes are but the beginnings of the list of things that could be found in schools and classrooms. These things are generally present to support the curricular goals of the educational site in one way or another. My earlier narratives illustrate how being in the presence of things and people can have a profound impact on learning. With this realization, it makes sense to explore what persons and things could be added to the classroom to afford more powerful learning opportunities.

### **In the Presence of Things**

Historically, the belief that rich knowledge can be gained by viewing or interacting with objects, such as art, historical artifacts, and fossils, served as the grounds to create museums (Conn, 1998, p. 4). A theory called “object-centered learning,” which has evolved from learning through objects inside a museum, is founded on the assumption that “real objects ‘speak’ in ways that representations of those objects do not” (Evans, Mull, & Poling, 2002, p. 50). These authors

argue that “the authenticity and uniqueness of the museum-based object summons the most powerful reactions” as well as having the ability it “evoke personal reactions as well as shared knowledge and history” (p. 50). Roberts (1997) argues that the twentieth century’s explosion of mass produced objects coming off of an assembly line, ranging from cars to pre-prepared food, started to distance society from the “physicality of the ‘real world’” (p. 94). This new characteristic of human culture created an appetite for experiences or interaction with what was considered “authentic” (p. 94). Falk (2002, p. ix) argues that what occurs between a child and an object is at the foundation of why and how museums work as educational settings. Despite this important occurrence, little research has been made concerning the matter in the past. Although, historically, the museum docent has been the proprietor of knowledge and interpretation, new recognition and value is placed on the viewer’s perspectives and interpretations (Kai-Kee, 2011). Object-based learning embraces this concept (Evans, Mull, & Poling, 2011). The basis for this paper will be founded on the claim that students find value in object-centered learning. As a researcher, I am interested in having my students describe what is afforded by these types of learning experiences.

Dierking (2002), from the Institute for Learning Innovation, argues that much of educational research has placed an emphasis on learning in a classroom while studying objects or concepts that are decontextualized. As a solution of this issue, she argues experiences with objects outside of the classroom are important. She advocates what she calls the “Contextual Model of Learning,” which is built around learning from objects. Three contexts overlap and work together to create meaning: personal context, sociocultural context, and physical context. Personal context refers to the learners’ prior knowledge, their motivation, interest in the topic at hand, and their ability to control the situation. The sociocultural context refers to how individuals

naturally collaborate to create meaning and how that meaning making is influenced by those viewed as more knowledgeable such as a teacher or museum docent. Finally, physical context refers to the setting the objects are viewed in and how the learners are prepared for that setting. Consideration should be given to all of these, as they are what develop meaning making in object-based learning.

Paris and Hapgood (2002, p. 44-45), researchers from the University of Michigan, argue that from an educational perspective, experiencing and interacting with objects is not the ultimate goal of object-based learning. Rather it is the experience or interaction with that object that serves as the vehicle to promote thinking, meaning making, and reflection. Objects in museums are often viewed as rare or special in some way, so they naturally stimulate curiosity. This curiosity often accompanies a desire to learn more or explore.

Museums are an obvious example where object-centered learning occurs. The museum only exists because of the value placed on the collection of objects (Paris & Hapgood, 2002). Although much can be said of museums in general, this paper will focus on the art museum. Many sources in literature support the building of relationships between schools and art museums to allow for greater and better art museum education experiences for students (e.g., Buchenal & Lassar, 2007; Kydd, 2007).

Liu (2007), art museum education researcher, strives to categorize the various methods of collaboration between art museums and schools into six models. The Provider and the Receiver Model is the historically typical model. The museum plays the role of provider, in the sense that it provides the building, objects, tour, and information. The school plays the role of receiver of those things. In this type of partnership, little collaboration exists beyond scheduling a visitation date. In the Museum-Directed Interaction Model, the museum strives to shift part of the

responsibility of designing museum resources and materials to the schoolteachers. Teachers are invited to participate in workshops or other collaborative activities where they work with museum educators. The School-Directed Interaction Model shifts even more responsibility to the schoolteacher. In this scenario, the teacher would suggest and direct the development of curriculum used by his or her students when they visit the museum. The Museum as School Model goes beyond visiting the museum once or twice a year. In this model, the museum becomes an extension of the classroom, with the students visiting on a regular basis, even as much as multiple times during a week over the course of several months. Since the museum becomes the classroom on multiple occasions, it provides teachers opportunities to explore objects and ideas more in-depth. The School in Museum model is a rarer example. In this case, the museum becomes the school campus. Essentially, every day is spent at the museum. This model appears only to be seen in the charter school setting. The final model presented by Liu is the Museum-School Interaction Through a Third Party Model. Here, a third party is generated and works as a facilitator between schools and museums. They often provide financial support to allow interactions between schools and museums to exist. Liu's breakdown of museum-school collaborations shows the variety of approaches that have been made to allow more students to interact with objects at museums. Despite great efforts to get students into museums, it may not be the only way to provide students with rich opportunities to experience object-centered learning.

Nora Christie, from the Amon Carter Museum, is quoted in Kydd's (2007) chapter arguing that although programs designed to have students learn in museums for extended period are ideal pursuits, "budget cuts and stricter teacher-accountability measures within U.S. school districts have made it almost impossible for teachers to bring their students to area art museums

more than once a year” (p. 118). Although opportunities to visit museums should still be sought after, it becomes apparent, that finding other means for students to interact or be in the presence of artworks or objects becomes necessary, aside from possibly one, two, or no visits to museums a year.

Many museums have explored other ways of connecting to students more in their regular school classroom. Increasingly museums offer either digital images of their collections or virtual tours where students may navigate through the museum’s hall, zooming in and out to get different perspectives of works of art. The National Gallery in London and the Uffizi Gallery are two examples of many museums that offer such types of virtual tours. These resources allow students unique access to museums that otherwise would not be available to them. Frost (2002, p. 79) states the following concerning these digital resources:

For classroom teaching, there is the potential to visit far greater numbers of digital objects than we would be able to show students in real museums. However, although digital objects are made much more accessible through online museums, experiencing the digital object is vastly different from seeing the actual object in person. These differences can extend to the visual as well as the other sensory experiences, and they affect the social experience of the museum visit as well.

Frost further explains how multiple things are altered in the digital surrogate, such as three-dimensional quality, color, and size. Also, she argues that the sense of smell, sound, and even touch are part of viewing an artwork in person that can greatly alter the viewer’s experience. Nonetheless, digital resources are still valuable that should be used in tandem with actual object viewing.

In summary, technology offers extensive resources that benefit the classroom. However, being in the presence of original objects can provide much different and richer learning experiences than experiences with reproductions. These differences are why opportunities to have physical objects a part of class instruction should be sought out.

### **In the Presence of Persons**

Educational researchers, McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (2003) argue, “Education does not mean teaching or instruction though it can involve these practices. In our view, education refers to the interaction between people (and other beings) which enables them to grow in life-affirming ways” (p. 19). This claim serves as a foundation that objects are not the only important element when building and considering a theory of presence. As noted earlier, Dierking (2002) argues that even in object-centered learning, the interaction with individuals such as the teacher, docent, parents, tour guide, or artist plays a key role in meaning making. By carefully considering the inclusion of more individuals in the students’ presence or their sociocultural context, rich learning opportunities may be available. To do this, teachers will need to be willing to give up some of their role as a main source of knowledge.

Blazwick (2013), art critic, said, “...it is the interview as a genre of art criticism which promises to deliver the frisson of listening in on the voice of the creator – the primary voice, concealed behind the image, the text, the work of art.” This quote illustrates reasons why some may find it so fascinating to personally hear from the artist, scientist, performer, or politician. Although the teacher will often serve as a main guide to information, opportunities should be sought after to bring the students into the environment of other artists or persons connected to what is being learned.

Nagawa (2012), in her research with art tours in Uganda, discusses the power of bringing the audience to the artist. Both today and traditionally, artists display their work in museums and galleries. These locations have served as meeting grounds for the artist and the audience. However, there is often a disconnect between the artist and the audience in this common scenario. Although artists are often at opening nights or special events, in most instances, people do not interact or engage in conversation with the actual artist. Rather a curator, docent, or salesman serves as the link between the two.

In Nagawa's research, she arranged artist tours to allow audiences to meet with the artists. Small groups would gather and travel to a different artist's studio on each occasion. This allowed for a much more intimate setting while

...conducting a more personal interface with the art in the artist's presence; taking an opportunity to touch as well as see the art, art materials, and work surfaces at various stages of development; and hearing stories about artists' daily routines as well as ideas behind artworks (p. 16).

This more casual setting provided for different perspectives and experiences that could not occur in the more scripted and planned out setting of a museum or gallery. Most importantly, this study shows the enriching experience individuals can have when able to converse in these more intimate settings.

It is obvious that access to specialists across the country would be difficult for teachers to arrange. However, individuals from the community, county, or state might be much more available and willing to come and participate in conversations and teaching opportunities in the classroom. An opportunity to visit the specialist in their working environment, as described in Nagawa's research could provide a rich experience as well.

In the case of art education, arrangements could be made for local artists to come and talk with students, share artwork, or hold workshops. If field trips are an option, smaller classes may be even allowed to visit the artist in their studio or workspace.

Technology can also provide similar experiences using Skype or other video chat resources. These resources can offer opportunities in cases where an artist lives too far from the school to visit.

### **Examples of Object-Centered Learning in Art Education**

The theory of presence constructed here focuses on bringing students closer to authentic objects, as opposed to reproductions, and providing interaction with persons that can provide rich conversations about the topic being studied. It is argued that more object-centered learning opportunities could be sought after in order to give students a different kind of learning experience. The teacher can serve as one of those persons that provide rich conversation, but should be willing to seek out other persons that can provide different insight on a topic.

Another idea to explore is having museum curators or docents visit the schools and bring objects with them from their museum. An example of this type of program is one developed between the University of Missouri Museum of Art and Archaeology and the University's Art Education Program. After classes had visited the museum, pre-service art teachers would make a follow-up visit. Using Marcel Duchamp's *Boite-en-Valise (Box in a Suitcase)* (1935-1941), students created foldout displays with reproductions related to the artwork they experienced at the museum. This type of activity helped create a connection between their museum experience and their classroom experience (Unrath & Luehrman, 2009). Although this type of interaction between museums and the school does help bridge a gap between the two, it does not address the issue of being in the presence of the actual artwork. The conversation between pre-service

teachers and the students may be enriching and rewarding, but the activity of displaying reproductions could easily be done by the art teacher using images from the Internet, printed reproductions, or a virtual tour of another museum. In other words, this type of experience does not provide any additional opportunity for students to view or interact with original artworks.

A program designed by the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, called the Traveling Museum Project, sets up a mini-exhibit in schools that contains works from their Fine Arts' Education Collection. Most of these objects are what would generally be considered original artworks. For obvious reasons, these objects are not of great monetary value and would most likely sit in storage without the program (A. Ream, personal communication, August 5, 2014). This object-based learning program is a means to bring original artwork into the classroom. This could provide multiple discussions and observations of the artwork while being in the presence of the original verses a reproduction.

Both of these examples illustrate the intriguing idea of bringing original artwork into the school as a way to address the challenge of leaving the school to visit museums, that bring in a physical dimension that goes beyond online. Collaborations with local museums and local artists could be a possible avenue to allow original artwork being brought to the school. The teacher's network of artists from universities, social media, or regular social circles among fellow artists and educators would be a starting point in identifying artists willing to share their artwork with classes.

Szekely (2014, pp. 37-38) points out an interesting trend in museum education that could easily be applied to the classroom setting. Since it is rare that students have the opportunity to touch or hold an artwork, educators will have students play or create with something that is connected to the object they are viewing. For example, while looking at pottery, students could

hold or play with clay. When looking at mosaics, ceramic or stone tiles could be passed around. This could be an excellent way to connect students to artwork especially when viewing digital reproductions.

Inviting artists to the classroom is a way to bring both people (the artist) and things (their artwork, tools, artifacts, etc.) into the classroom. Kind, Irwin, Grauer (2005), important art education authors, give a look into the Learning Through the Arts program, which invites an artist into a school to work with students for extended periods of time. The teaching approach is meant to be holistic. In their article, Gabriel, an artist of indigenous Coast Salish decent, is spotlighted. During his visit, the artist introduces students to his culture through drumming, dancing, storytelling, and through the symbolism of the artwork of the medicine wheel, an object/symbol of important to his culture. Students learned to dance, played Gabriel's drum, and looked at the symbolism of the medicine wheel while looking at actual artifacts. The article's authors argue that the fact the students engaged in those kinds of activities made it all the richer an experience as opposed to just reading about it or looking at pictures. Gabriel's presence and interaction connected students to culture and history in a powerful way.

Research by Erickson and Hales (2014), concerning teens and contemporary art, supports the notion that there is value in students interacting with a local artist. They suggest the value of students not only meeting with artists but also visiting with the artists in their studios. Visits to artist studios would allow students to gain rich insight into how the artist works, prompting questions about studio arrangement and other ideas that were discussed earlier in Nagawa's (2012) research in interactions between artists and audiences in the artist's studio.

Despite the positive influence artist guests can be, the significant influence the regular classroom art teacher plays in students' lives should not be disregarded. Graham and Zwirn

(2010), art education researchers, discuss the impact of artist-teachers. No part of a K-12 art teacher's job requires him or her to be a practicing artist. In addition, the demands today of a teacher's time and energy can make it challenging for art teachers to find time to create artwork. However, Graham and Zwirn found that when art teacher were practicing artists it influenced and enhanced their classroom in positive ways. Artist teachers understood the frustrations of art production and focused on process and learning over product. When teachers were well-versed in a discipline, they felt confident in self-teaching other disciplines so they could in turn teach their students. Also, conversation between the teacher and the students sounded more like dialog from an art studio rather than a classroom. These and other observations led Graham and Zwirn to argue the importance of the artist-teacher.

### **Technology and Digital Resources**

Although the discussion in this paper has focused on students being in the physical presence of things and persons, it needs to be clear that the powerful resources of technology are not disregarded. It would be a disservice to students in a contemporary classroom if the teacher chose to embrace aspects of this theory of presence in a way that banned the use of reproductions and technology in his or her teaching practice. Roland (2010), an art education professor, discusses how using technology is worthwhile in classrooms. Technology has broadened the horizons of the classroom as it could have never been imagined years ago. However, technology should not be used just for the sake of using technology. It should be seen as a tool to reach curricular goals. Thus, we see that technology can be used to enhance learning, but videos, slideshows, and the Internet should not be the only instructional resources used in class. Additionally, some artists work in mediums that can only be viewed using technology, such as film. In these cases, new technologies become essential in viewing and learning about the work.

### **Visualizing a Theory of Presence in the Art Classroom**

After all this theorizing, what might an art classroom look like when founded on this theory of presence? Possible learning methods could include: guest artists in the classroom; object-centered learning around the guest artist's original artwork, sketches, and supplies; conversation with the guest artist; experimenting with the mediums used by the guest artists; visiting an artist in their studio using Skype; and creating artwork built upon all these experiences.

Collaboration between art museums could play an important role in the curriculum building. Depending on the school's financial and time resources, one or multiple art museum visits would be arranged. It would be important for the teacher to visit the museum beforehand and collaborate with museum educators on how to make the experience most meaningful. Before the visit, students could play with art materials, examine artwork featured online, or read about artists that would be viewed before going to the museum.

Another aspect of museum collaboration that should be explored is discussing the possibility of having museum curators bringing original artworks to the classroom either as a pre-visit or post-visit to the museum, thus providing students with an additional opportunity to be in the presence of artwork objects. Comparison of other museums online through virtual tours could be made. Discussion and reflection on the perceived differences by students could occur.

The theory of presence, which has been created here, embraces much of what is valued by object-centered learning, but also seeks to place an emphasis on the importance of what might be called person-centered learning and in particular, the artist within the classroom. Ultimately, the goal is to bring students enrolled in an art class closer to and in the presence of actual artworks, a variety of artists, artist working spaces, art museums, art mediums, and other things

and persons connected to the world of the visual arts. As outlined previously, these differentiated learning experiences help add to a richer learning experience for students.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **The Climb Called Research**

As a beginning master's student, the idea of conducting research can be daunting. Research can feel like a cliff, and you are supposed to climb it. The problem is that you do not see a place to begin, let alone a path to the top. However, after taking a research methodologies class and learning about action research, I felt I had found the necessary climbing gear that would help me ascend to the research area that I was interested in exploring. Action research seemed to be a natural fit for me as an educator because, as Buffington and Wilson McKay (2013) discuss, much of what is involved in action research mimics the practices of good teachers.

### **Introduction to Action Research**

In this chapter, I will define action research and give a brief history of it. Then I will outline the particular model of action research I have followed. Lastly, I will delineate the methods used in my research study and discuss how they assist in validating my research.

### **Action Research Defined**

According to important action researcher John Elliot (1991), a primary goal of action research is for teachers to improve their practice. The generation of new knowledge is secondary to this main goal. This concept may seem contradictory to some traditional notions of research. The forefront objective as an action researcher is to improve the way I teach. However, I hope that insights gained from my experience will be beneficial or transferable to other educators as well.

Art educator and researcher, Sheri Klein (2012), provides an enlightening definition for action research: "...action research is a 'systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers' (Cochran-

Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 53; Stenhouse, 1985, as cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 7) designed to ‘bring about practical improvement[s], innovation, change or development of social practice’ (Zuber-Skeritt, 1996, p. 83) and to ‘understand, improve and reform practice’ (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 297)” (p. 1). Although there is not a set-in-stone approach, one way to view action research, according to Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014), is a spiral process of “planning, acting, observing, and reflecting” (p. 18). I will unpack each of these steps later on in this chapter.

### **A Brief History of Action Research**

Ernest Stringer (1999), action research author, explains that numerous and differing genealogies exist for action research, but typically Kurt Lewin’s (1946) work is identified as significant in the evolution of this methodology. Daniel Tomal (2003) argues that Lewin’s support and development of action research was spurred by a belief in its ability to make positive social change. Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead (2002) explain that although Lewin’s work did not directly deal with education, rather it focused on productivity in the industrial workplace, it was clear that Lewin’s ideas were transferable to educational research. Thus, many educational researchers began using action research in their work.

Today, various action research guides exist for the classroom teacher (e.g., Kember, 2000; Klein, 2012; McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003; Meyers & Rust, 2003; Mills, 2000; Stringer, Christensen, McFayden, & Baldwin, 2010). Each of these guides gives a different perspective on action research, but I found that similar ideas were often simply expressed using different terms. For example, Stringer, Christensen and Bladwin (2010) give a slightly different model for action research from the model mentioned earlier from Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014). Stringer, Christensen & Baldwin illustrate action research as a 3-step process:

Look, Think, and Act. Although the models look different, the underlying principles appear to be similar. I gleaned valuable insight from various authors, but I will note that I relied heavily on the guidebook by McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (2003). Personally I found their insight and direction easy to follow and applicable to my situation.

### **The Action Research Process**

Planning is the starting point of action research, according to McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (2003). To begin, researchers must be interested in and committed to improving their practice to provide a better learning experience for the students they teach. The researchers are actually at the center of action research because the major changes or experimentations being made are not on the students, but rather on the teachers and their teaching practices. Researchers then need to identify a question they wish to address. My question was in what ways does increased interactions between students and art related objects and people enrich students learning experience in my classroom. Meyers and Rust (2003) emphasize the importance of researchers becoming familiar with current literature related to the question or topics being addressed. Knowing what has already been said will help researchers make better and more informed judgments as they direct the study. McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead explain that action research is not simply a problem-solving method, but it identifies what goals are trying to be achieved. These goals then direct and justify the researchers' decisions.

The second step is acting or putting in place the changes that have been planned. McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (2003) discuss that the step of observing goes hand-in-hand with implementing these changes. Data is collected by the researchers while observing. This data collection can occur using a variety of methods. Ultimately, methods are chosen based on their ability to give the clearest representation or description of what will be evaluated in the specific

research. Tomal (2003) argues that the forms of data collection often evolve or change during action research as the researchers determines if the tools they are using are providing adequate data. I will outline the methods I chose to use in my research study later on in this chapter.

According to Mills (2000), important to the action research process is that the researcher is willing to be reflective and critical of his or her practices daily. In the reflection step, Meyers and Rust (2003) explain the researcher is asking what changed. The data collected will help reveal what has changed. As meaning is drawn from the experience of the process, the data collected serves as the means to back up the claims made. Reflection then starts the process over by making new plans and taking new action, informed by what was previously experienced.

### **A Solution to the Theory-practice Problem**

John Elliot (1991) discusses how teachers often feel leery towards theory. It is seen as something from an outside source, disconnected from the everyday demands of teaching. He calls this the “theory-practice problem” (p. 45). He proposes that teachers practicing action research is a possible solution to this problem. Action research provides the creation of individualized theory for a teacher as opposed to generalized theory and best practices. It becomes apparent that action research allows teacher-researchers to take ownership of their theory making while doing it in a professionally valid way. Elliot (2009) argues that action research “unifies the process of developing theory and practice” (p.28).

### **Other Characteristics of Action Research**

McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (2003) further outline a variety of other characteristics that set action research apart from other forms of research. I will highlight a few here that support why I feel action research was an appropriate fit for my research inquiry. First, action research is interested in understanding and improving learning. This lends itself to being an

education-oriented form of research. It promotes individual and social change in that those practicing action research are engaging in ways to improve their teaching. This improved teaching ultimately influences others to change for the better as well. In action research, the researcher must be willing to question assumptions about his or her teaching practice, even if they are widely accepted. Only by questioning can new doors be opened. Finally, researchers recognize that their actions affect others; therefore, they must take responsibility for their actions and be conscious of their own personal values and how they influence those around them.

### **Action Research in My Classroom**

As I initiated my research, I was not necessarily out to prove that being in the presence of artists, original artwork, and art objects is a good thing. The literature already supported this idea, and I felt it did too. I was mainly interested in observing *how* it changed the learning experiences of my students in my classroom. What types of experiences were most inspiring for students? What was realistic for me as the teacher in my particular situation? Would this focus on presence have a significant impact on my teaching?

I planned on allowing my curriculum to evolve as I made judgments based on my students' reactions and the way I felt about different classroom activities. The changes would be driven by my findings while observing, collecting data, and reflecting.

### **Data Collection and Validity**

A possible challenge of action research, according to Mills (2000), is making the findings appear valid or relevant to others. To address this, he emphasizes the importance of triangulation. The principle of triangulation means using at least three different methods of data collection. Claims from action research are considered much more reliable if multiple forms of data

collection were used. I chose to focus on four main forms of data collection: teacher-researcher reflection journal, student written reflections, participant observation, and photography.

**Reflection journal.** Elliot (1991) promotes the value of keeping a diary or reflection journal as a method of data collection. He stresses that entries should not simply be a list of facts from the day, but a personal record of feelings and interpretations of what was observed. McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (2003) further argue that a journal will show the progress made as it records both successful and unsuccessful actions and how the researcher responded to them. General points, with good descriptions providing written illustrations to support the general points, can prove valuable in reflection journals. A timeline approach could be used so that a clear chronological order is kept of how phenomenon evolved. I found that as I reflected through writing, that I was often able to answer my own questions that had arisen during my classes.

**Student written reflections.** Elliot (1991) also supports having the other participants keep a written reflection journal or to write responses to questionnaires as ways to provide valuable additional data. It is beneficial to compare student responses and reflections with the researchers' perspectives. It can be a way for the researchers to self-check and see if they are interpreting the students' experiences correctly.

As a researcher, I felt collecting written reflections from students would provide rich insight from another perspective than my own. At various times throughout the course of the study and at the conclusion, I had students write reflections about their experiences in class. I felt this was valuable because not all students actively participate in classroom discussions. In this way, I was able to receive feedback from a greater number of students. Sometimes the reflections were about classroom experiences that had immediately occurred, and others required students to reflect over a longer period of time. This proved to be valuable because student reflections could

either confirm what I had concluded about a particular experience or inform me that what I had concluded was different from what the students felt. I was surprised by how informing these student reflections were. In Chapter 4, I will often quote from student reflections to help illustrate ideas and experiences.

**Participant observation and field notes.** Participant observation seems like a natural data collecting method for teachers since they are constantly doing formative assessments in their classrooms. Gail Zieman (2012) explains, “The essential purpose of observation is to watch human behaviors and actions and derive meaning from these experiences” (p. 50).

Much of what I observed was recorded in my reflection journal at the end of the day. However, I also felt it was important to make field notes of participant observations during the class period. During class discussions, guest artist visits, or one-on-one conversations with students, I wanted to write down exactly what was said, what I saw, or what I felt at the moment. Kemmer (2014) argues that both individual and group conversations are beneficial because each setting may encourage different types of responses from students. I felt that keeping two types of written records, one made while a specific experience occurred, and one made later as a reflection of a whole day or several days, provided different and valuable perspectives.

**Photography.** McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (2003) discuss taking photographs during action research is a great tool for documenting your research. For example, in my research, photographs are used to “show the quality of people’s engagement in an activity” (p. 126). As the researcher, I took photographs of activities that I felt illustrated what I was trying to learn or accomplish. Later on these photographs were reviewed and reflected upon for “deconstructing personal memories” as the researcher (p. 126).

**Data Analysis and Generating Knowledge.**

Mills (2000) explains researchers will come to a point during the research process that they want to make sense of all the data collected and share it with others. Data analysis is when the researcher is summarizing the data and trying to find meaning in it. While doing this, the researcher is looking for patterns and any new understandings gained. The better your data is, the easier it will be to defend your interpretations (p. 99).

McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (2003) emphasize that all research has the end goal of generating new knowledge, even though, as described earlier, I was most interested in improving my personal teaching practice. For action research, that new knowledge may be different from what “old scholarship” may look like. Old scholarship is interested in “replicability and generalizability” (p. 133). However, my action research is about me and my unique situation as a teacher with a unique group of students. I responded to my unique situation. It would not be worthwhile for another teacher to try and duplicate my research study. Through storytelling, I will be sharing my research. However, it is hoped that some of the ideas gained can be transferable and beneficial to other teachers and researchers in their practice and inquiries.

## **Chapter 4: A Theory of Presence in the Classroom**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will discuss in more depth how I applied my theory of presence in my own teaching. I will begin sharing a learning experience from early on in my research study that taught me about focusing on the quality of objects I brought into my students' presence. I will then share how I quickly discovered the value of bringing guest artists into my classroom, and how after the first one, guest artists played a major role in my study. I will outline the common benefits I observed across the board with having the guest artists an integral part of my research. Next I will discuss the role the art museum and art museum educators played in my curriculum, including the highlights and challenges I experienced working with them. I will conclude the chapter by sharing the final guest artist experience in my research study.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, concerning my research methodology, much of my evidence is derived from my personal reflection journal and field notes, student reflections, and photographs. In many cases, I will illustrate ideas through the re-telling of experiences from my classroom and teaching.

### **Initial Research: First Lesson on What Really Matters**

As I initiated my research, I was focused on having my students be in the presence of different art-related objects and people as frequently as possible. At first, I tried to have something new each day, such as viewing original artwork, meeting a guest artist, or introducing a new art supply.

I was in my third year of full-time teaching at the junior high level when I started this research. During that time, students had continually expressed an interest in learning more about drawing cartoons, superheroes, comics, and other illustrations. The two classes, in which I was

conducting my research, had several students in particular that had requested we spend some quality time learning about illustration. I decided to begin with just that.

I made arrangements for a local illustrator to visit my two classes as a guest artist. As art education researchers Kalin and Barney (2014) discuss, I was interested in not having pre-determined outcomes for my curriculum, but rather I wanted my curriculum to emerge in response to the students' experiences with the guest artist. Although I would have preferred to begin the unit with the guest artist visit, scheduling around a guest artist did not always allow for that. Therefore, I had a few days to introduce illustration before the artist came.

The first day, I brought in a large stack of illustrated children's books. I tried to showcase a range of artistic styles. Assuming that many of my students would have read or looked at some of these books when they were younger, I thought the nostalgia of flipping through these books would be a good way to spark their interest in our curricular topic. After passing out the children's books, I asked the students to thumb through a couple of them and find a book or specific illustration they liked. I had also asked students to bring favorite children's books from home to class as extra credit. A few students brought books, so that added a few more to look at. After giving them time to look, I started a conversation by asking students to share which ones they liked and why. Despite my energy and excitement to start this unit, which they had asked for, the discussion was rather unenergetic and unexciting. A few students were willing to share, but the class was mostly quiet. The students that I thought were most interested in illustration did not even comment. I cut the discussion short, and I gave them their first sketchbook assignment to make a copy of an illustration. Although this class discussion may seem like a little thing, it was a quick indicator to me that I had not successfully engaged my students as I had wished.

At the end of that day, as I was writing in my reflection journal about this first day on illustration, I recognized rather quickly what I had done wrong. I was showing children's books to junior high students. Even if *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* brought back fond childhood memories, it was not what my students were excited about right now. In my reflection journal, I noted how their body language, facial expressions, and lack of interest in the class discussion revealed to me that my students were not engaged. I was showing them books they had seen possibly numerous times growing up, but they did not offer anything new, original, or exciting.

I quickly adjusted my plans for the next day, recognizing I needed to be placing things in my students' presence that really mattered to them. I planned a day on the library computers looking at various artists' websites that were making artwork I hoped connected better to my young teenage audience. The whole intention of the activity was to encourage them to view a variety of illustrators and styles. I tried to think back to books I had seen students carrying around. For example, I recalled seeing copies of *Fablehaven* and *Candy Shop Wars* on various occasions, so Brandon Dorman, who illustrated both of those, was one of the artists I used.

I also took this Illustrator Internet Search Activity as an opportunity to introduce our first guest artist, Cam Kendell. I knew Cam made lots of fan art around characters that my students were probably interested in such as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Mario Brothers, He-Man, and the Hulk. His other work included gnomes, elves, and other fantasy creatures. I thought that several students would be interested in his work, but I was not sure how many.

My change in direction proved to be a good one. Students seemed much more interested and engaged as they browsed through the different illustrators' websites. Positive exclamations were made both when something familiar was seen and when something new was discovered

such as, “That is so awesome!” In my field notes, I wrote that I felt a higher engagement level from my students than in the previous activity from comments such as this. In a later written response, one student affirmed my conclusions about these two different activities, “I thought it was better to see the artists on the computer because they are modern and realistic too. I liked when we looked at the artists’ work in the library better.”

After this activity, I continued attempting to bring new things into the presence of my students on a daily basis. However, as the previous example illustrated, I quickly learned that it was the quality of the thing that mattered more than the quantity. Thumbing through children’s books did not seem to add much value to the illustration unit because it was slightly disconnected from many of the students’ interests. I soon refocused on not necessarily having new art things for each day, but providing objects and people in my students’ presence that truly enriched their learning experience.

### **The Guest Artist: A Rich Resource**

The day arrived to have our first guest artist visit, Cam Kendell. I had become acquainted with Cam because we lived in the same neighborhood, but all I knew about his art was gained from browsing through his website and from a few casual conversations. I knew he was an illustrator, and his work appeared as if it would be something to which my students would connect. I explained to Cam beforehand that I was working to bring artists and original artwork in the presence of my students. I told him he could do whatever he wanted, but I suggested bringing in some of his original art and doing a demonstration.

Although I was interested in Cam’s presentation, I was most interested in observing my students. During his presentation, our guest artist passed around books and pictures of artists that he liked, showing that as a professional illustrator he is constantly looking at other artists’ work

for inspiration. On the projector, he browsed through his website to show a quick glance of some of his work and then passed around some prints of his work for the students to review. Students were very engaged at this point, as his work really connected with their age group. The following account illustrates one student's experience to help support my observation.

**A student's reaction.** One of the most exciting moments occurred while the guest artist was showing an image of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles fan art. A student quickly raised his hand and asked for reassurance, "You made this? This is your art?" Cam replied that it was indeed his work. This student enthusiastically went on to explain how he bought a print of this work from the guest artist the previous year at the Salt Lake Comic Con and expressed how much he admired Cam's work.

This was exciting for me. This student was an excellent artist that was constantly drawing comics and other illustrations. We had a fairly good relationship, but I felt I struggled connecting with him. I think the main problem arose that he really just wanted to create illustrations in art class, and although I had tried to provide a few assignments in previous classes, which allowed him to create what he wanted, it seemed it was not enough. This experience was exciting for him. The guest artist was able to connect to and motivate a student that I had felt unsuccessful in truly inspiring or motivating. This student, in a later conversation, expressed that Cam Kendell was his hero and that he wants to create work just like him. Additionally, he wrote in a later reflection, "Best 45 min[ute]s of my life 10/10."

**Artist demonstration and student response.** In the second half of his presentation, the guest artist demonstrated how he makes his illustrations. Students asked questions during the demonstration about where he purchased the markers he used, why he started out drawing in red pencil, and if he always used photo references when drawing. The enthusiasm and interest almost

felt tangible in the room. I immediately knew that we would be making illustrations following the example of our guest artist for our illustration project. Students later wrote in their reflections comments such as: “It was great to see how he did his work, and the tools/supplies/materials that he used. It made me want to draw right beside him. I watched in awe the entire time.” “Very inspirational and motivating because he also did what I want to do...” “It helped to see what a real illustrator does every day.” “This guy was cool. He got a lot of the class into art.” This last comment reveals that even students recognized the positive impact this guest artist had on our class. It also shows how guest artists may connect to students in a different way than I possibly could.

**Learning in the third site.** As mentioned earlier, this study was conducted with two Art 2 Foundations classes. The classes were during second and third periods. Between these two periods is what my school calls Flex Time. It is a half an hour break where students may go to teachers to get extra help or attend enrichment activities. After second period had ended, many students did not want the demonstration to end. While I was busy taking care of the routine tasks of setting up for Flex Time, a group of students asked the guest artist if he would make drawings for them during this enrichment time. He agreed to it (Figure 1). He continued answering their questions as he did a couple of drawings for them. As soon as I was able, I joined the group of my students huddled around the guest artist.

I was so intrigued by this learning experience that occurred on its own. It was not planned or anticipated. I recognized this as a rich learning environment. Long-time art education researcher, Brent Wilson (2008), describes this type of learning environment as the “third pedagogical site.” Differing from the first-site, where kids make artwork on their own, and the second-site, where kids make artwork guided by structure from adults, such as in school, the

“third pedagogical site is a life-changing space where new forms of hybrid visual cultural artifacts, production, and meaning arise through informal contacts among kids and adults” (pp. 119-120). I felt that I saw something like this occur. This was not structured. The regular art teacher was not really involved. Although the students were not involved in art making in the moment, they were making new meanings and learning new things in this informal contact with the illustrator. At the conclusion, the guest artist was even kind enough to give them the drawings he made.



Figure 1. Guest artist creating illustrations for students during Flex Time.

**Developing curriculum in response to the guest artist visit.** Students seemed so excited to make illustrations the way our guest artist did, that it would have seemed unnatural to not immediately begin making them. I tried to set things up and provide supplies as similar to the guest artist as possible. He worked in Prismacolor markers, and I just so happened to have a large set of Prismacolor markers donated to our program. I quickly scheduled a day in the

computer lab so that my student could search for photo references to combine in creative ways like our guest artist did.

Our guest artist had given his demonstration drawings to students. I asked them if I could hang them on the board while we worked on our illustration unit, and they agreed. I felt this was a perfect opportunity to have original artwork in the presence of my students that was directly related to the current art projects they were working on. Students on occasion would walk up to the board to look at the illustration demonstrations. I was pleased that they had original artworks to refer to during their art making process.

In my field notes, I wrote that students, in general, seemed to be excited and engaged as we worked. Most everyone seemed to have little difficulty designing an original character for his or her own illustration. One student commented, "He [the guest artist] showed it was pretty easy to make a cool drawing using references." After helping each student that needed help, I found I had time to begin my own illustration. I have to admit, I was anxious to design one too. I know many teachers that make artwork with their students, but in my style of teaching, I have found that I typically do not have enough time to ever finish or even begin something. It is common for me to spend a significant portion of class walking around helping or talking to students.

Although I did not feel the guest artist was any sort of competition, I felt it was good for me to demonstrate the assignment of creating an original illustration as well.

As I worked, students were able to see what I was working on and came up to my desk to watch and ask questions. In a similar fashion to what occurred with our guest artist, the students were able to ask the questions they had, when they felt they needed to ask them. After I had finished, I hung my illustration on the board as well.

### **Discoveries of Guest Artists Related to My Theory of Presence**

Through this first unit, I discovered several things that heavily influenced the direction of the rest of my study. I found that this guest artist and the ones that followed provided several valuable things related to my focus on presence. First, students were able to meet, have conversations with, and watch an artist make artwork. As in Nagawa's (2012) work, this provided a more casual and intimate environment that fostered conversations that would not occur in a more formal gallery or museum setting. Second, guest artists bring in original artwork for students to see. In many cases, they brought a large amount. It became almost a mini-gallery tour in the classroom. This experience is at the core of my theory of presence. As argued by Evans, Mull, and Poling (2002), there is something inherently different or special about seeing artwork in person rather than a reproduction. Additionally, students are able to be in the presence of both the artwork and the artist that created it. Third, guest artists often bring some of the art making tools they use. Students seemed very interested in knowing what type or brand of supplies the artist used and where they could acquire them. Finally, allowing my curriculum to develop from the experiences students had with the artist and their artwork, created meaningful art projects that were driven by student interest.

Recognizing the guest artist as a motivating factor for both my students and myself, I decided to bring in one for each unit during the course semester. After our illustrator guest artist, I brought in an animator, two different gallery painters, a printmaker, and a new genre performance artist. Next, I will describe in more detail, relying heavily on student responses, how these guest artists contributed to enhancing the art presence in my classroom.

### Being in the Presence of the Artist

The majority of students continually expressed in their written reflections and our class discussions how they enjoyed having the guest artists. One student gives a good summary of what many students enjoyed about the guest artists, “I really liked having guest artist[s]: learning about how they started out, about their kind of art, seeing their work, seeing a professional, [and] possibly watching them work right then and there” (Figure 2). During a class discussion, another student shared how she found it inspirational to see and meet a living, working artist, “I liked that we saw the end goal: a working artist that is successful.” Several students seemed to recognize and appreciate having a variety of artists invited to the classroom. One student explained, “It gave us a different view of the art world. I really liked how there was such a wide variety. It showed us different paths we could follow.” Another student expressed a positive perspective on having the guest artist in the classroom, “I loved having guest artists! I felt like they were a great intro[duction] into each of our units. They were all very inspiring and had unique things to teach...” Another student summed up what many other students communicated, “They helped me a lot to get [...] motivated.”



Figure 2. Students watching and conversing with a guest artist during a demonstration.

As the teacher, I felt energized and excited by having the guest artist’s visit. It was refreshing for me to be around other professional artists and to feel their enthusiasm. I feel one

student expressed my feelings when she wrote, “It was cool seeing how different their styles were and how passionate they each were.”

However, on the other hand, some students also argued, that despite the variety of guest artists, it became repetitive and even boring. One student reflected, “I really like having guest artists, but I don’t like that it takes away from drawing time, and sometimes it’s not something I would want to do so it can be a little boring.” Despite comments such as these, the large majority gave positive comments about their experiences.

**Continued contact with artists.** One unanticipated result of the guest artist visits was the continued contact students made with artists. After being impressed by one guest artist, a student wrote, “I liked how he painted such realistic paintings. I follow him on Instagram!!!” Several other students expressed how they followed this and other artists that used Instagram.

After discovering that our animation guest artist was currently working on his favorite video game, a student stayed after class to talk about the game with the guest artist. The guest artist was so impressed with my student’s knowledge and skill level that they exchanged identification information used by the online video game so that the guest artist could send him free points. The student later enthusiastically confirmed that the artist had followed through.

Additionally, many students informed me that they stopped and talked to our illustration guest artist at Comic Con in Salt Lake, shortly after he visited.

### **The Guest Artist’s Original Artwork**

One thing each guest artist did in common was to bring in original artwork. In each case, I had suggested to the guest artists to bring original artwork to show the students, as it was an important part of my study. I was pleased to see that each artist did. As I mentioned earlier, I found it created a mini-gallery type of experience (Figure 3). In some cases, the artist even

passed around the artwork for students to hold and see closer. Some students recognized this as a positive aspect of having the guest artist visits. One student wrote in a reflection at the end of the year, “I liked the different art every time. It was really cool to see all the examples.”



Figure 3. Example of a guest artist's work displayed, creating a mini-gallery in the classroom.

**Printmaking art gallery in the classroom.** One experience stands out in my mind as being an exceptional chance for students to view original artwork. The printmaker brought not only his own work but also a collection of prints he had obtained over his career, along with printmaking supplies. After briefly explaining each item, he passed them around for the students to see and hold (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Student holding and viewing original prints and printmaking supplies.

A student wrote referring to this experience, “I loved how he brought in a lot of his work so we could look at it. It was a really good intro[duction] into printmaking and made me excited to do my own work and to be creative.” I was personally excited that he brought in so much as well and that it gave students an opportunity to see a wide-range of printmaking examples. Many of my students were not familiar with printmaking, so this provided a good introduction to the unit. One student explained, “I wasn’t originally interested in his art form,” but because the guest artist “was cool and I liked how much original art he brought” the student became more interested in the printmaking unit. Although not every student recognized the uniqueness of viewing the original art brought in by guest artists, many, such as this student, did and wrote about its positive impact on their learning experience.

### **Artists Tools and Techniques**

An unexpected observation was how intrigued my students seemed to be in asking the guest artist about the materials they used. Whether it was the animation programs used on a tablet or the electric sharpener used to sharpen charcoal, students were asking about and almost immediately looking them up online. Occasionally, they would ask me if we could order some of the supplies the artist used if I didn't have them. Typically, I had to substitute for something similar because the product was too expensive or I couldn't order it in time for the assignment. However, I had a few students show me different things they had purchased or downloaded after seeing a guest artist use it. One student showed me a marker she had ordered online that the illustrator guest artist had used. Another student had downloaded an animation app onto their tablet that the animator guest artist had used.

### **Curriculum Development**

As I selected and invited each guest artist, I had in mind a general plan for an art project to follow up after the visit. However, I always wanted to allow the experience of the guest artist to influence exactly what we did. In one case, I scrapped all original plans and changed the project altogether. A gallery painter came whom I had taken a class from in the past. He brought in many original paintings for the students to see and then did a short charcoal drawing portrait demonstration. Although a few students later commented how they, "liked his style of painting," most of them were much more excited about his charcoal drawing demonstration. Numerous students wrote about the how motivating they found this guest artist's drawing demonstration, "I loved watching [the guest artist] draw. I had never drawn with charcoal before, so it was very new to me. It really helped to see his techniques to try for myself." Another reflection explained that the artist "got me excited to start charcoal."

I had originally planned to do a landscape painting *en plein air*, but students seemed so interested in drawing charcoal portraits that I decided to switch project plans. The guest artist had expressed how much he admired artist, Nicolai Fechin, and had shown the students copies he had made of the artist's drawings. He also commented on how by copying artists that he admires, it influences his own work. With this in mind, I planned a curriculum that I hoped would lead to what the students felt as some successful portraits.

I felt that sitting down and doing a portrait from life would likely be overwhelming for many of my students, so I decided to break things down into steps to help them get to that point. First, I had them complete a drawing exercise of copying each individual feature of the face. I graded these in class so that they could quickly receive feedback on how to improve. Next I had them copy a Nicolai Fechin portrait. I provided several different options to choose from. I hope this would help bring the drawing exercises together. Then finally students completed the unit by drawing another student from life using charcoal. I tried to provide all the supplies and materials that our guest artist had used, but also showed them other possibilities: charcoal pencils, compressed stick charcoal, vine charcoal, chamois, various erasers, and drawing boards.



Figure 5. Student example of Nicolai Fechin copy in charcoal.



Figure 6. Student working on portrait from life in charcoal.

Despite the challenge and intensity of this unit, students seemed enthusiastic about it and pleased with their Fechin copy, portrait from life, or even both (Figure 5 and Figure 6). Referring to the Fechin copy, one student reflected at the end of the unit, “This helped me to really try to make everything accurate and precise. I wasn’t aware that I could really make a realistic human face.” Referring to the portrait from life, another student wrote, “I found out that I actually draw people ok.”

On the other hand, reflections expressed responses such as, “It’s harder to draw a real person, and it wasn’t really helpful.” However, several students recognized the guest artist’s

demonstration as beneficial before attempting one themselves, “It really showed me good tips on how to draw a successful portrait with charcoal.” Others expressed problems with the usefulness of the demonstration, such as, “I couldn’t really see. I didn’t really understand it.”

**Student example.** The guest artists also sometimes influenced concepts or themes for class art projects. The printmaker guest artist described how nearly all of his work focused on history or genealogy of places, and often places that were connected to the artist’s life. I decided to use this same concept for the printmaking project.

One student expressed to me how he was intrigued by our guest artist’s work and theme. He also wrote in a reflection, “I loved looking at this artwork and [him] explaining his profession.” While discussing his work with me, this student explained how he was paying homage to his heritage on his mother’s side. His mother had emigrated from Holland, so he used photographs he had taken while on a family trip back to where his mother had been raised (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Student work, using a guest artist's theme.

### **The Art Museum**

Art museums are a trove of original artwork. Having the Springville Museum of Art only three miles away from my school, I wanted to take full advantage of using the museum's resources. I had taken my classes to the art museum in the past, but the main disadvantage I saw with a museum is that it only provides students with an opportunity to view original artwork on one day during the entire year. I wanted to provide more opportunities to view artwork. Although my school provides sufficient funding for multiple field trips, I did not want to strain my relationship with the rest of the faculty or administration by taking my students out on numerous

visits to the museum. Rather, the solution seemed to be in bringing the artwork from the museum to my classroom.

Early on I contacted a museum educator and formed a positive relationship with her. I proposed my idea to her of bringing in original artwork to my classroom on several occasions to create a more extended experience between the museum and my students. The museum educator seemed supportive about the idea. She explained she would have to get approval from her superior, but felt that it was a real possibility because we were located so close to the museum.

Unfortunately, in the end, the museum educator was unable to arrange things so that original artwork could be brought into the classroom. However, the discussions with her were always positive and encouraging, indicating that bringing original artworks to the classroom is a likely possibility. She wrote to me, “I hope we will be able to work towards getting an education collection (works that have been approved to travel to classrooms)” (R. Stratford, personal communication, April 3, 2015).

**The art museum visit.** Despite being unable able to have original artwork brought into my classroom, I still scheduled a visit for my art classes to the Springville Museum of Art. Visiting this local art museum was already a part of my curriculum, so this was nothing new to my teaching. However, viewing this experience through the lens of my theory of presence, caused me to value this museum experience even more than before. The museum visit allowed my students to view more original artwork in one day than another day during the semester. Additionally, I was interested in students comparing and contrasting their experiences with the guest artists and the art museum.

### **Comparing the Museum Visit Versus the Guest Artists**

At the end of the year, I asked my students to reflect on whether they enjoyed the guest artist or the museum visit more. I found it interesting that the students seemed to be split in their opinions. One student explained why she enjoyed the guest artists better, “It’s way better when you actually get to see them in action. You can ask about the pieces, you can watch them demo, and you hear about their background! So much more helpful!!!” During a class discussion, one student explained, “I liked seeing a lot of artwork at the museum, but it felt disconnected from the artists. Whereas when the guest artist came, we were able to see the artist that made the artwork.”

On the other hand, one student stated simply why he enjoyed the museum more, “[be]cause you could just look.” Several students expressed how having a guest artist typically limited you to viewing one artist’s work, whereas the museum provided a vast variety. One student wrote, “I like the museum more, because you were actually walking around. They had different artwork from lots of people, instead of just the guest artists.”

### **My Vision of Art Museums and Guest Artist Visits**

Early on in my research, I imagined the art museum bringing in artwork on a regular basis as a way for my students to be in the presence of more original art objects. I viewed the guest artist visits as more of a way for my students to be in the presence of people involved in the arts. Despite, the unsuccessful attempt to use the art museum in the manner I envisioned, I was pleased at how well the guest artists actually provided both art people and art objects. Although bringing in original artwork and art objects from the museum would have added rich learning experiences for my students, I am pleased with how the guest artists were able to provide what they did.

**Final Guest Artist: Performance and Interaction**

After various guest artists had visited, through student reflections and class discussions, I recognized a common complaint from students about the guest artist visits. The students felt the visits could seem long and non-interactive at times. I decided to address this issue in my last unit by inviting an artist that would have my students participate with them more.

I invited a guest artist that specializes in the new genre art of performance art. After explaining and showing examples of performance art, the guest artist had the students participate in writing, concept building, and physical activities that allowed them to move around the room as they experimented with performance art (Figure 8).

I teach another class in the junior high that allots more time for exploring new genre art; however, I still wanted to have one new genre art project. I had never introduced this group of students to performance art, so I thought having a guest artist introduce it would be an excellent way to begin. That being said, I felt like I had tried to expose my students to a wide range of art forms in past classes with me. I was surprised that a large majority of students felt they struggled accepting performance art as art or found it too “weird” for them. One student wrote in a reflection, after participating in performance art, “I didn’t like how she said anything can be art, because some things are kind of weird. It was a little uncomfortable doing the art she does.” Another shared, “She [the guest artist] was cool and I still learned stuff, but I didn’t really like it too much.”

On the other hand, several students really enjoyed it. Most of these students identified being able to move around and kinesthetically participate with the artist as being the positive aspect of her presentation. One reflection states, “I really love how I could tell how much thought was put into her art. She was very passionate about what she did and she let us

participate.” Another wrote, “In this one I liked how we got to get up, move, and participate. It was funny and fun.” This guest artist was one of the few that did not receive a single comment about the visit being boring. A student reflected, “It was really fun and [she] let us do things creatively.”



Figure 8. Students experimenting with performance art.

Despite the challenge this unit was for some students, I was pleased that all were at least willing to participate in some fashion. The guest artist was successful enough to coax each student to perform in front of the class. This was a great way to begin, because later on, when their performance projects were more self-directed, all the students participated as well. On

reflecting, I was pleased that this unit helped my students expand their definition of art and exposed students to art making possibilities they hadn't previously considered.

## Chapter 5: Final Reflections

### Reflections on Theory and Practice

As I reflect on this research study, I recognize that I would have never utilized guest artists to the degree that I did had I not first formulated a theory of presence. Without studying the literature mentioned in Chapter 2, I would not have made the conscious decision to consider the role that art-related objects and people influence student learning.

Early in the research, I found guest artists as a practical solution to the problem I was addressing. I recognized guest artists as a rich resource that provided a high amount of exposure to quality art related objects and people. These types of experiences were at the heart of what I was trying to accomplish. Although it took networking and effort to find the guest artists, it was not overly challenging. It did require planning and scheduling in advanced. Fortunately, all the guest artists seemed enthusiastic about coming to my classroom.

Each guest artist experience was unique and offered the students something new. Having additional perspectives from artists others than myself and being able to candidly interact with those artists seemed to add an enriching element to my class. Additionally, it gave me more confidence to teach units on areas that I was less familiar with. It also gave validation to what we were doing in each unit. I could justify that we were creating artwork inspired or influenced by our experience with the guest artist and the art that was shown.

However, as I reflect on continuing to use guest artists the way I did during the semester of this research study, I question how quickly I would exhaust my resources. If I were to continue teaching in the same location for numerous years, I am not positive I could rotate through enough artists without straining those relationships. I feel that other resources would have to be more heavily relied on to bring my students and art closer together. It is possible that I

could build my image as more of a visiting artist, rather than just a classroom teacher. I imagine achieving this by setting up my classroom as if it were my personal studio. Students could see me working on art projects in the same fashion I would work on them at home in my own studio. I regularly show my work to my students, but currently I rarely create artwork in the classroom, other than short demonstrations.

Initially, I had envisioned museums playing a greater role in my research. Nonetheless, taking my students to the Springville Museum of Art was the greatest opportunity I provided for my them to view original artwork. The large variety, ranging from historical to contemporary, paintings to installation, allowed my students to view a wide range of artistic possibilities at once. Also the environment of a museum could not be duplicated in my classroom with our mini galleries of art brought by the guest artists.

I am still passionate about museum education and foresee museums playing a larger role in my teaching, but in my research study it became apparent that it would take more time and relationship-building to utilize the museum as I would like. Although, having museums bring artwork into the classroom is a possibility, the fact that it is challenging to do so, presents the problem of practicality. This may be a possibility for me in the future, along with other teachers, but it makes me question if it is a practical solution for most teachers in bringing more original art into their students' learning environment.

### **Reflections on How I Have Changed As a Teacher**

Considering the successes and challenges from this research study, I am ultimately pleased with how I changed as an art teacher. I feel as though this thesis stops in the middle. I have merely started exploring possible ways to bring my students and art closer together. For me, that has been the key: I have discovered that I value what I place in my student's presence.

Arthur Efland (1976) and Olivia Gude (2013) both argue that schools have been plagued with providing students an art education that results in a “school art style” or art that is “unlike art made in other settings” and are often “not effective in teaching students about methods of artmaking outside of school contexts” (Gude, 2013). Although my research does not resemble that of Olivia Gude, I found that my new teaching approach naturally pulled me away from giving assignments that might appear as school art style. By placing so much emphasis on viewing original artwork, working with professional artists, and allowing my curriculum to evolve from those experiences, the art projects and assignments seemed more authentic to what living artists do. Although this was not necessarily an intended outcome, I was pleased with this phenomenon.

Although I call it my theory of presence, ultimately it is a compilation of ideas from various researchers. Being an art teacher, my emphasis has been placed on improving my personal approach to teaching art. Although it has been specific for me, I feel that the main theory may benefit other art teachers, as well as teachers of other subjects. The closer we can connect students to the objects and people about which we are teaching, the greater possibility of creating a rich learning experience for our students.

## References

- Blazwick, I. (2013). An anatomy of the interview. In P. Bickers & A. Wilson (Eds.), *Talking art 1* (p. 25). London: Ridinghouse.
- Burchenal, M. & Lasser, S. (2007). Beyond the field trip. In P. Villeneuve (Ed.), *From periphery to center: Art museum education in the 21st century* (pp. 103-109). Reston: National Art Education Association.
- Conn, S. (1998). *Museums and American intellectual life, 1876-1926* (p. 4). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Efland, A. (1976). The school art style: A functional analysis. *Studies in Art Education*, 17(2), 37-44. doi:10.2307/1319979
- Elliott, J. (2009). Building educational theory through action research. In S. Noffke & B. Somekh (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of educational action research* (pp. 28-38). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Elliot, J. (1991). *Action research for educational change*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Evans, E., Mull, M., & Poling, D. (2002). The authentic object? A child's-eye view. In S. Paris (Ed.), *Perspectives on object-centered learning in museums* (pp. 55-75). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Falk, J. (2002). Forward. In S. Paris (Ed.), *Perspectives on object-centered learning in museums* (p. ix). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Frost, C. (2002). When the object is digital: Properties of digital surrogate objects and implications for learning. In S. Paris (Ed.), *Perspectives on object-centered learning in museums* (p. 79-94). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Graham, M. & Zwirn, S. (2010). How being a teaching artist can influence k-12 art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 51(3), 219-232. Retrieved December 19, 2014, from EBSCO.
- Gude, O. (2013). New school art styles: The project of art education. *Art Education*, 66(1), 6-15.
- Kai-Kee, E. (2011). A brief history of teaching in the art museum. In *Teaching in the art museum: Interpretation as experience* (Vol. 19-48). Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum.
- Kalin, N. M. & Barney, D. T. (2014). Hunting for monsters: Visual arts curriculum as agonistic inquiry. *International Journal Of Art & Design Education*, 33(1), 19-31. doi:10.1111/j.1476-8070.2014.01774.x

- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2014). *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research*. New York: Springer Singapore.
- Keifer-Boyd, K. (2013). Critical action research activism: Social structure and human agency. In M. Buffington & S. Wilson McKay (Eds.), *Practice theory: Seeing the power of art teacher researchers* (pp. 246-251). Reston: National Art Education Association.
- Kind, S., Irwin, R., & Grauer, K. (2005). Medicine wheel imag(in)ings: Exploring holistic curriculum perspectives. *Art Education*, 58(5), 33-38. Retrieved December 19, 2014, from EBSCO.
- Klein, S. (2012). Action research: Before you dive in, read this! In S. Klein (Ed.), *Action research methods: Plain and simple* (pp. 1-20). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kydd, G. (2007). Moving beyond the classroom: Learning and the world of the art museum. In P. Villeneuve (Ed.), *From periphery to center: Art museum education in the 21st century* (pp. 103-109). Reston: National Art Education Association.
- Liu, W. (2007). Working together: Collaboration between art museums and schools. In P. Villeneuve (Ed.), *From periphery to center: Art museum education in the 21st century* (pp. 129-137). Reston: National Art Education Association.
- McNiff, J., Lomax, P., & Whitehead, J. (2003). *You and your action research project* (2nd ed.). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2002). *Action research: Principles and practice* (2nd ed.). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Meyers, E. & Rust, F. (2003). How We Do Action Research. In E. Meyers & F. Rust (Eds.), *Taking Action with Teacher Research* (pp. 1-16). Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Mills, G. (2000). *Action research: A guide for teacher researchers*. Columbus: Merrill.
- Nagawa, M. (2012). Beyond the gallery: Interactions between audiences, artists, and their art through the Kampala art tour 2007-2010. *Art Education*, 65(2), 16-19. Retrieved December 16, 2014, from EBSCO.
- Presence. (2002). In *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- Roberts, L. (1997). *From knowledge to narrative educators and the changing museum* (pp. 94-96). Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Roland, C. (2010). Preparing art teachers to teach in a new digital landscape. *Art Education*, 63(1), 17-24. Retrieved December 16, 2014, from EBSCO.
- Stringer, E. (1999). *Action research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Stringer, E. T., Christensen, L. M., & Baldwin, S. C. (2010). *Integrating Teaching, Learning, and Action Research: Enhancing Instruction in the K-12 Classroom*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Szekely, I. (2014). Creating meaningful art museum experiences for young children: discussions with future art teachers. *Art Education*, 67(4), 34-39. Retrieved December 16, 2014, from EBSCO.

Tomal, D. (2003). *Action research for educators*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Unrath, K., & Luehrman, M. (2009). Bringing children to art--bringing art to children. *Art Education*, 62(1), 41-47. Retrieved December 16, 2014, from EBSCO.

Wilson, B. (2008). Research at the margins of schooling: Biographical inquiry and third-site pedagogy. *International Journal Of Education Through Art*, 4(2), 119-130.

Zieman, G. (2012). Participant observation. In S. Klein (Ed.), *Action research methods: Plain and simple* (pp. 49-67). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

## Appendix

### Sample Unit Curriculum: Portrait Drawing – Fine Art

Day 1	Teacher uses guest artist's website to introduce students the artist that will be visiting the next class period.
Day 2	Guest artist visits the classroom. Students view original artwork brought in by the guest artist. A portrait drawing demonstration in charcoal is done by the guest artist of one of the students. Students ask questions and engage in conversation with the guest artist.
Day 3	In response to the students' interest in the guest artist's demonstration, a unit planned to help students learn about portrait drawing. Students are introduced to charcoal. Students hold and experiment with different types of charcoal and new drawing tools such as a chamois. A pre-assessment drawing is done. Students draw each other to the best of their ability.
Days 4-6	Students do various drawing exercises learning the proportions of the human head and practice drawing the features of the face. During the entire unit, the guest artist demonstration drawing is displayed in the room to be used as a reference.
Days 7-10	Students practice combining all that they learned about proportions and features by copying a drawing of a Master artist. They learn about line quality during this time as well.
Days 11-12	Students complete the unit by doing a final assessment drawing of another student in the class, striving to apply all that was learned from the guest artist, the teacher, and the assignments from the unit.
Day 13	A peer or class critique is done in class, where students will identify how they improved as they compare their first pre-assessment drawing to their last. Students write responses to questions that have students reflect on their experience working with the guest artist and how they influenced their experience working on the assignments in this unit.
Day 14	Other artists that use charcoal are looked at, including those that use it in a non-traditional way. Other projects could result from this experience as well. In the future, charcoal or portrait examples can be analyzed during a museum or gallery visit.