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The Art Museum: A Site for Developing Second Language and Academic Discourse Processes


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Section II: Weaving Community: Learning with Each Other

The Art Museum: A Site for Developing Second Language and Academic Discourse Processes

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Abstract

This chapter presents the art museum as a socio-cultural learning site, where emergent bilingual students engage in multiple modes of expression to expand oral, written, and visual literacies for academic purposes. A historical view of the art museum as an educational space is considered with past limitations and new directions. Theoretical considerations contributing to new conceptualizations of the museum as a contextual-space for development of academic discourses provide a backdrop for new museum approaches. After describing the situated perspective of the authors who work with students at a Hispanic Serving Institution, we offer three approaches for incorporating the museum in undergraduate courses: instructor-docent collaboration, paired conversation activities, and the use of voice in creative writing for those studying to be teachers of writing. We propose the museum is an outside-of-school context that requires further theoretical discussion and educational research for advancing second language development and college learning opportunities.

Keywords: art, museum, sociocultural learning, emergent bilingual, visual literacies, Hispanic Serving Institution, collaboration, writing, second language development, academic discourse

Background and Purpose

This chapter is designed to show how student experiences in the art museum can be instrumental in higher education for developing a second language and academic discourse. While there have been programs for English language learning in art museums in the past (Preece & Tomlinson, 1996), they have been few in number, limited in scope, and informal in design and setting. However, we propose there are varied possibilities for second language learning through oral and written discourse in the art museum, specifically for emergent bilingual undergraduate students. First, we explore the art museum as a potential resource for college students who are developing a second language and expanding oral, written, and visual literacies. Second, we examine the possibilities of the museum visit as a perceptual, cognitive, and socio-cultural experience, where students engage in multiple modes of expression, such as speaking and writing about artwork, and move through processes of perception and cognition. To

elaborate, we consider the art museum as a conduit for developing academic discourse and thinking that may be useful in learning in academic disciplines offered in higher education institutions.

In order to achieve the complex interwoven goals stated above, the chapter is organized as follows: we begin with an historical view of the art museum as an educational space by considering past limitations and new directions for these institutions. Next, we proceed with theoretical considerations that contribute to new conceptualizations of the art museum as a space for emergent bilinguals and their language development. Finally, after describing the situated perspective of the authors who serve students at a South Texas university, we offer three approaches for incorporating the art museum in undergraduate second language learning and as a means for developing academic discourse processes.

As noted earlier, we address the oral, written, and visual forms of communication. In an art museum, visual presentations may include paintings, drawings, sculptures, and other historical objects. Discourse, oral or written, about and around an art object within a museum setting can contribute to an individual's construction of meaning and second language development in ways that differ from the routine classroom context. For emergent bilinguals, our approach extends and supplements classroom learning in disciplines taught at the college level in novel ways.

Historical View of the Art Museum: A History of Limited Opportunities and Practices

Traditionally, art museums functioned as sites for collecting, preserving, and displaying creative cultural objects, while the educative role of these institutions was mostly assumed to occur through visitor observations. Through much of the 19th and 20th centuries, it was believed that “patrons were cultured and educated about the world” and concurrently could grow by simply viewing the artwork (Hein, 2000, as cited in Acuff & Evans, 2014, p. 17). In addition to the classist view that working class visitors' tastes and morals could be “learned” and elevated by simply accessing art objects (Weil, 2007), art museums have a history of serving White, upper-middle class, educated patrons (Reid, 2014; Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). Even in recent times, there has been serious underrepresentation of some racial and ethnic groups visiting art museums. For example, only 11.9% of African Americans and 14.3% of Hispanic Americans reported visiting an art museum or gallery in 2012, while 24.1% of Whites reported visiting a visual arts institution (National Endowment for the Arts, 2013). This may be due to the location of museums, the kind of information disseminated about and within them, the lack of family exposure to the museum, or a number of other reasons.

The art museum's history of hegemonic and exclusionary practices related to its visitors is also very likely related to its distinctly exclusionary practices in collecting, displaying, and

interpreting objects. Until recently, few artworks by minority and women artists were included in U.S. museum collections and exhibitions. For example, “[p]rior to 1967 one could count fewer than a dozen museum exhibitions that had featured the work of African American artists, with the exception of museums at historically black colleges and universities” (Cahan, 2016, p. 1).

Current and Potential Shifts in Art Museum Functions

Because of their history of catering to elite audiences with a Eurocentric curriculum, art museums may not initially appear as ideal educational sites for emergent bilinguals. However, over the past 30 years, museums have greatly broadened their policies and practices, initiating programs to include a greater spectrum of visitors, artworks, and perspectives. In order to remain relevant in our diversifying society, many institutions have re-oriented themselves to an outward, visitor-centered focus (Weil, 2007), and their educational purpose has come to the forefront with more inclusive outreach goals (O’Neill, 2006). As art museums continue to broaden their vision in terms of the artists represented in their collections, the interpretations of cultures presented by their exhibitions, and the communities they serve, these institutions become visually rich sites for a variety of types of educational experiences.

The new, learner-centered focus allows museums to offer unique educational opportunities that are “more open-ended, more individually directed, and more unpredictable and more susceptible to multiple diverse responses than sites of formal education” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, p. 4-5). The subjective and expressive nature of visual art as well as the art museum’s new openness of interpretation allows much freedom for students in terms of the content of their dialogue in a museum space. Visual rhetorical messages emanate from the art and are processed from the unique perspectives of the viewer—whatever their language and culture (Handa, 2004). Emergent bilinguals “offer information about other countries and cultures, different perspectives about society, and varied cultural beliefs, which become opportunities for exploration in the context of the museum” (Gutiérrez & Rasmussen, 2014, p. 147), where cultural exploration is one of the main goals and outcomes.

Theoretical Considerations: Contributions to Re-conceptualizing the Art Museum

In what ways can a visit to the art museum help undergraduate students develop literacies and academic discourse? In exploring the theoretical underpinnings for using the art museum to facilitate language learning, multiple aspects of the art museum visit should be explored, including the language experience of looking at artwork, the social engagement that takes place in the museum space, and the dialogic nature of student interaction with the museum curriculum.

The Language Experience of Looking at Art

Emergent bilingual students have often been subjected to constrained requirements of language use in the classroom. However, the museum opens the possibilities of many dialogic opportunities for emergent bilinguals who may have previously felt inhibited, constrained, or discouraged. As students engage in viewing artwork, they become part of a dialogic interaction with the object itself and the artist (Dewey, 1934; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2009). As Dewey (1934) explains, “Because objects of art are expressive, they are a language Language exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken. The hearer is an indispensable partner. The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it” (p. 110). Bakhtin (1986) also discusses how objects (including artworks) have voice and the potential to “speak” to people. In other words, the student who is engaged as a visitor and viewer of artwork in the museum space becomes part of a conversation with the art simply by looking, thinking, and interpreting.

Not only are students engaged in language through their experience of looking, they are engaged in multiple languages, “for each art has its own medium and that medium is especially fitted for one kind of communication” (Dewey, 1934, p. 110). An oil painting speaks one language while a feathered mask speaks another. Signs, labels, and other textual exhibition materials are often provided in both written and audio format and often in multiple languages depending on the museum’s location. As students engage with various media in an art museum, they are essentially “communicating” and/or “hearing” multiple languages and rhetorical perspectives. As a place that “speaks” a multitude of languages, the art museum is an ideal site for those students developing and acquiring multiple languages with their respective ways of interacting and thinking.

The Social Experience of Looking at Art

Because of the public nature of museums, they become social spaces (Falk & Dierking, 1992). Art museums, in particular, are socially oriented by both their content and the person-to-person interaction that takes place in the space via group tours and activities. “It is because museums have a formative as well as reflective role in social relations that they are potentially of such influence” (Macdonald, p. 4), and community is formed through a variety of group activities for visitors in the museum, including conversations, discussions, and other forms of dialogue (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011). As students interact with not only the artwork, but also instructors, museum educators, docents, and fellow students, these social experiences provide low-stakes opportunities for emergent bilinguals to practice oral abilities in a variety of ways with the potential to move into more formalized written exercises to further develop language.

It is worthwhile to discuss why oral conversations and dialogue in the museum space are so important for emergent bilinguals. There is a long history of limited opportunities for oral conversations in school classrooms, especially for diverse students and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds throughout the twentieth century (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). While the

status of classroom talk has grown significantly over the last 30 years, teaching practices have not necessarily kept pace with research in this area (Edwards & Westgate, 2014). However, the communal and social nature of the museum visit, whether its conversations are facilitated by a docent, museum educator, college instructor, or peers, allow emergent bilinguals to engage in academic dialogue.

As students listen and talk to one another in conversations analyzing, questioning, and interpreting artworks, they negotiate meaning and engage in co-inquiry. “In contributing to a knowledge-building dialogue, then, a speaker is simultaneously adding to the structure of meaning created jointly with others and advancing his or her own understanding through the constructive and creative effort involved in saying and in responding to what was said” (Wells, 2002, p. 74). When students contribute to a conversation about the artwork, they are enhancing their own understanding and constructing meaning. As Voloshinov (1929/1973) states, “Any true understanding is dialogic in nature” (p. 102).

The Academic and Personal Experience of Looking at Art.

Beyond meaning-making of the artwork itself, students can engage in conversations focused on a variety of academic topics and disciplinary vocabulary. For example, many European Renaissance paintings feature linear perspective and some Native North American pottery display perfect geometric patterns, both of which embody complex mathematical concepts. Also, historical and contemporary social issues can be discussed in terms of the visual imagery produced by various cultures. Abstract academic concepts become more concrete and personal when we examine them in the visual, social, and contextualized space of the museum gallery. For college-level, emergent bilinguals, there is often disengagement with textual-sources because of a lack of cultural connection to academic materials. However, the art museum offers an open field for varied cultural experiences particularly when there is opportunity for dialogue, and conversations in front of artworks provide opportunities for students to practice using the academic language they learn in their undergraduate classrooms from various disciplines and cultures.

Oral language is a significant part of meaning-making and building academic language for all students (García-Carrión & Villardón-Gallego, 2016; National Reading Panel, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978), but talk is particularly important for emergent bilinguals (Gunderson, D’Silva, & Odo, 2014; August & Shanahan, 2006). Opportunities for building vocabulary and literacy skills emerge as students engage in dialogue. As Bakhtin (1986) notes, we learn words from other people, not dictionaries. The opportunity to use new words in informal, yet authentic conversations about real objects in the museum help those words become familiar tools for building ideas, rather than just another term to memorize (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). Both oral and visual literacies grow as students converse about artwork, such as the visual effects, mood, and symbolism of an artist’s use of color within a painting. As oral and visual literacies develop, they provide a greater foundation for reading and writing (Roskos, Tabors & Lenhart, 2009;

Horowitz, 2007). They also contribute to the styles of thinking that may be needed for studying different disciplines in the academy.

The subjective and expressive nature of visual art allows much freedom for students in terms of the content of their dialogue about artwork. As discussed by Elliot Eisner (2002), “[W]ork in the arts, when it provides students with the challenge of talking about what they have seen, gives them opportunities, permission, and encouragement to use language in a way free from the strictures of literal description” (p. 89). While Eisner describes the variety of types of talk (beyond description) that students can be challenged with, Sullivan & McCarthy (2009) identify the variety of content that viewers are free to dialogue about according to their own values. “In the context of viewing art . . . people get different meanings from the same work and place different values on the same piece of work. This involves making choices as to the kinds of value he or she feels the work is deserving of” (p. 186). As students are able to make choices around what to say and how to talk about an artwork, a more equitable educational environment and opportunities for critical thinking emerge.

Because of the ineffable quality of visual images, there is opportunity to be creative in the language used to describe, analyze, and interpret, which liberates students from “right” answers or even “right” ways of speaking about the artwork. While academic conversations can certainly be part of an emergent bilingual’s museum experience, more personal and subjective interpretations of artwork are also appropriate and can actually facilitate language learning and academic content as well as identity formation. As Lake (2013) states, there is “the need to imaginatively create spaces beyond the walls of the fragmentation of knowledge. The stories of individual lived experience that combine valuable content with personal, sensory-laden literary prose can tie geography, history, literacy skills, math, and science with the arts in ways that give context and humanness to dead and isolated facts” (p. 74). Artwork itself provides a visually sensory experience, often exhibiting a personal viewpoint or creative expression and frequently eliciting a personal and emotional response in viewers. Opportunities for students to respond to artwork either orally or in writing by connecting it to their own experiences can facilitate learning. “When we talk about learning, and particularly learning in museums, we are not talking about learning facts only. Learning includes facts, but also experience and the emotions” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p.21), which can be expressed in speaking and writing.

The Authors’ Perspectives from an HSI Context

As the authors of this chapter, we write from a faculty perspective acquired at a large Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) that serves many first-generation college students. While one of the authors teaches undergraduate courses in art history and art appreciation, the other is a professor of discourse and literacy studies with a research focus on the centrality of oral discourse in the development of reading and writing processes. We note that approximately 73% of our student population comes from traditionally underserved populations, with Hispanic and Mexican American students making up about 50% of the student body.

The three approaches described below grow out of teaching and learning experiences with our undergraduate students in South Texas, many of whom come from border towns. Often, Spanish is a first language and English second for our students. We were surprised to learn that many of our college students had never visited a museum. Despite the low visitation of art museums by marginalized populations, we argue that the museum is an ideal educational site for multi-literacies and dialogic communication in order to facilitate language development, academic discourse, and thinking; we have used our local museum for just such purposes with the present student population.

As Duncan (1995) notes, the museum can be viewed as a social, political, and ideological instrument. One question that arises is how this instrument can be wielded to encourage language learning to empower historically disenfranchised students. Theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) discusses the socio-cultural dimensions of informal learning environments and the geo-spatial powers that force learners to function in hybrid worlds. Emergent bilinguals may be caught between a familial world and the academic realm, living on both a physical and mental border. The microcosm of border crossing that takes place in an art museum as visitors move back and forth from one cultural exhibition to another provides a context for students to think, connect, and talk about their own cultural experiences and border crossings.

Approaches for Language Learning and Discourse Processes

The research on classroom discourse and language learning is extensive (Cazden, 2001; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991; Mercer, 1995). However, studies focused on dialogue within the art museum for second language learning is much more limited (Gill, 2007), and there is very little research focused specifically on college students in museums and their interactions with artwork. While the art museum has not been conceived of as a language training site for higher education, we propose there are unique possibilities for second language learning through oral and written discourse in this informal space. Below, three theoretically-based approaches are discussed that generate student collaboration and dialogic communication and advance learning about art, subject fields, and self.

Developing Academic Discourse through Instructor-Docent Collaboration

The first approach encourages that a coordinated effort between college instructors and museum educators be developed to design tours that enhance students' experiences. As most trips to the museum are limited in frequency and length, instructors and educators need to be very focused and strategic in their planning. However, college instructors often depend on museum educators-docents to provide the content of a museum tour. The curriculum typically focuses on the artwork of temporary, special exhibitions at the museum or artwork from the permanent collections that the instructor indicates is related to their academic course content. One of the issues that arises with this generalized approach to a museum visit is that teachers have one set of learning goals for their students, and museum educators often have a different set of objectives for their visitors (Bhatia, 2009).

Collaborative gains for the museum educator

In order for a museum tour to offer enhanced opportunities for academic discourse and student dialogue, specific and extensive coordination between the instructor and museum educator on aligning tour objectives and methods is essential. Generally, goals for a museum trip would involve specific conceptual gains that enhance the classroom curriculum. For emergent bilingual populations and students with few museum experiences, goals should also involve engaging them in as much academic dialogue as possible and introducing the museum as an informal learning environment for creative and engaging inquiry.

Direct communication between college instructors and museum educators is essential in helping museum personnel to more effectively and purposively prepare to address the specific aligned objectives. For example, docents do not have to spend time asking questions at the beginning of a tour in order to gauge students' previous knowledge about a topic if the museum educators have already spoken in detail about the classroom curriculum with the course instructor. Also, with prior knowledge about course topics, museum educators can select the most appropriate artwork for students to see, discuss, and relate to their course curriculum. While it may seem obvious that a docent would tour the contemporary art galleries with students from a Contemporary Art class, the tour plans for other groups in different disciplines may not be as apparent. For example, a museum tour for students in a Political Science course may involve viewing and discussing artworks that focus on a specific theme, such as political leadership, social rebellion, or racial experiences, but these artworks may be spread across the museum in various cultural galleries. This type of thematic tour would require significant planning on the part of the docent in terms of both the physical tour route through the galleries and also determining which aspects of each artwork would be emphasized and discussed. Substantial communication between the course instructor and museum educator to define learning objectives, determine themes-vocabulary, and select artworks, is needed to organize such a focused tour that addresses the conceptual goals of the visit.

Often there is limited time for interaction between faculty and a museum educator-docent. However, full coordination and cooperation between college and museum educators allows the opportunity for academic discourse to emerge during the visit that would enhance disciplinary classroom concepts. For example, docents can be purposeful and strategic in the contextual background information and disciplinary vocabulary they insert during the tour. How much contextual information to include about the artwork is a contested issue within the museum education field (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011). Does too much background information on an artwork limit the interpretative experience of a viewer or does not enough contextual "facts" about a piece lead to inaccurate, misinformed interpretations? With familiarity of the students' prior knowledge and an understanding of the museum trip objectives, docents can more effectively gauge how much contextual information is appropriate to provide for a certain group of students. They can also incorporate the pertinent academic terms that students are learning in the classroom. For example, embedding and addressing academic vocabulary, such as *three-*

dimensional, grid, coordinates, axis, and linear perspective, has the potential to focus the tour and to reinforce terms and concepts specifically for students in a mathematics course.

On tours with emergent bilinguals, deciding how much contextual information to provide students is particularly challenging but important. Providing a lot of contextual information to students means the docent is doing a lot of the talking on a tour. At the other end of the spectrum, if very little background about the artwork is provided by the docent and the tour focuses mostly on visitor interpretation of artworks, then students may do a lot of talking but may not gain conceptual understanding or academic vocabulary. The more communication and cross-fertilization of ideas there is between a college instructor and museum educator in terms of expectations for the visit, the more carefully and strategically docents can balance pertinent academic information with room for personal interpretations, both of which are needed for an engaging and meaningful experience in the museum (Sienkiewicz, 2015) and determine how much students contribute to the tour dialogue. Before students arrive at the museum, faculty-docent collaboration on the following topics would greatly facilitate their experience: the faculty member's learning objectives; the docent's learning objectives; the specific artworks to be discussed in the museum galleries; tour themes and academic terms; the students' familiarity with the artworks, themes, and vocabulary; and expectations of student participation during the tour.

Kate Gill's (2007) dissertation shows that authentic conversation can encourage a language learner's oral participation in the museum setting. Vital to authentic discourse is that learners are free to talk about what they care about and their own topics of interest, which means there needs to be some flexibility built into a museum tour. For example, a figurative sculpture by Latino artist Fernando Botero caught the eye of a group of students while on tour with one of our classes at the local art museum. Although the sculpture was not part of the originally designed tour, the docent facilitated an in-depth conversation on the artist's presentation of the body. She was flexible enough to deviate from her original plan based on authentic student interest and their initiation of dialogue. While planning by college instructors and museum educators is crucial for meeting the agreed-upon learning objectives, leaving room to explore students' interests and questions is also essential, especially for students where language learning is a priority.

Collaboration for the college instructor

While collaboration between teachers and museum educators is vital for docents in facilitating an authentic dialogic experience for students at the museum, the collaboration is also important for instructors in preparing students for their museum experience. Prior knowledge can affect student learning in the museum space. An example of this is D'Alba's (2012) study examining the effects that visiting a virtual museum had on students before their visit to a real museum space. Participants who experienced the virtual museum agreed that using it was a positive experience, preparing them for the real museum because they already knew what they

would find. A majority of the students who experienced the virtual museum were more engaged during their museum visit, either agreeing, disagreeing, asking questions, and offering opinions and analyses. Introducing students in the classroom to the museum setting, norms, and curriculum before the actual visit enhances the learning experience.

As instructors and museum educators collaborate to facilitate an effective museum experience, teachers can use that information to more effectively prepare students for their visit and develop follow-up activities to incorporate speaking, writing, or visual presentations that capture aspects of the museum tour. This could be a simple introduction to general museum information, guiding students to the museum's website where they can explore information on museum etiquette, photography policies, and artwork examples. Such an introduction to the norms of an art museum visit could be particularly important for emergent bilinguals who may be coming from marginalized communities that rarely make use of these institutions. However, preparation for the visit could also be much deeper with introductions to specific academic vocabulary, presentations of other artworks by the artists that they will see on their museum trip, or discussions of specific social issues, formal properties, mathematical concepts, etc. to be explored on the tour.

Prior experience with the museum context and academic content has the potential to propel or transform student learning while in the museum itself. As Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (1999) notes, "reality is not found intact, it is shaped through a process of continuous negotiation, which involves individuals in calling on their prior experiences to actively make their own meanings, within the framework of interpretive communities" (p. 16). When students are prepared for the museum experience, they more fully engage once in the museum space, and more engagement means more oral discourse and empowerment.

Paired Conversations in the Museum Gallery

The second approach to facilitating language development, such as vocabulary, varied syntax, or rhetorical structures, in academic discourse in the museum involves paired conversations about artwork. While many students and other visitors experience the art museum via the docent tours discussed above, people often visit museums with a partner, friend, or family member and choose not to participate in organized programs at the institution (Ebitz, 2007). This means that much of the talk that occurs in an art museum takes the form of peer conversations, and undergraduates who choose to visit the museum for their own personal informal learning would likely experience the space in this manner. Therefore, a college course activity within the art museum that prepares students for this type of informal collaborative museum experience and that enhances their personal learning would be beneficial.

The paired conversational activity

One of the authors of this chapter organized a museum visit for undergraduates in her art history and art appreciation courses, asking them to participate in a paired conversational and

writing activity while in that space. With a partner, students chose an artwork and spent 30 minutes to an hour examining, analyzing, and interpreting the object in person. A worksheet with open-ended questions, asking students to interpret meaning, analyze compositional and display languages, and make connections to other artwork-media was provided to each pair of students with the expectation that they collaborate and write answers directly on the paper (See Appendix). The assignment involves all aspects of language learning in that it asks students to read, speak, listen, and write. First, students read not only the visual artwork, but also textual sources such as museum labels, brochures, and other information in the gallery space. Second, partners spoke extensively with one another, especially in attempting to construct meaning and support their reading of the selected piece. Students not only conversed with their partners but they often turned to other classmates that selected the same artwork to discuss their findings. In addition, many students flagged the instructor, teacher's assistant, or gallery attendant to ask questions about the artwork and verify their interpretations. Third, they listened to their peers throughout the process, but they also listened to the artist through careful examination of their selected piece. Lastly, students wrote about meaning, form, and presentation of the artwork. The writing process asked students to synthesize and make sense of what they read, spoke, and heard about their artwork.

A museum gallery is the ideal site for this type of activity in that the subjectivity of artwork frees students to make meaning, rather than look for a right answer. Within a constructivist learning model (Wells, 2000; Hein, 1996), students integrate their own ideas with the perspectives of their peers and museum experts in attempting to determine the artist's message. "Knowledge is created and re-created between people as they bring their own personal experience and information derived from other sources to bear on solving some particular problem" (Wells, 2000, p. 77). As students dialogue with one another in composing their ideas on paper, the talk and writing shape their understanding and thinking about the object.

Academic conversations for language learners in higher education

For emergent bilinguals in higher education, this type of paired activity can be particularly important. At colleges and universities, it is likely that students will be in at least some large classes with little opportunity for talk, and even in courses that do incorporate discussions, emergent bilinguals may not feel comfortable contributing in front of the whole class or content experts, such as professors, instructors, TA's, etc. Students may feel more comfortable in talking and sharing ideas about the artwork with their peers, since conversations with experts (docents, museum educators, or course instructors) can feel overwhelming due to differences in knowledge and authority (Lachapelle, 2007; Kim, 2011). Paired conversations in the museum allow for time and space where students can engage in much low-stakes dialogue.

The guided questions on the activity worksheet help to focus conversations on the academic content and vocabulary pertinent to the course discipline but also leave room for students to incorporate their own ideas and cultural readings of the artwork. In the present

project, students have the opportunity to show a working knowledge of academic art terms such as *medium* or *formal elements* and to reflect on course content by creating connections to topics and concepts already discussed in class. Although the questions anticipate an academic analysis of the artwork by asking for evidence and support, they are also open enough that students can bring their own funds of knowledge to their interpretation and evaluation of the images. The concept of funds of knowledge is based on the premise that people are competent, and their life experiences have given them valuable knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). As emergent bilinguals have often been excluded from both academia and museums in the past, facilitating educational opportunities that encourage and value their cultural perspectives and life experiences is important.

While it may seem obvious that students in a college-level art history or art appreciation class would visit an art museum, groups of students from other academic disciplines could just as easily make use of the space to enhance and contextualize their disciplinary course content. The interdisciplinary nature of the arts means that students in mathematics, sociology, history, communications, and many other courses, could engage in academic investigations through dialogue within the art museum. The guiding questions for this paired conversation activity can be tailored for almost any academic discipline. In fact, examining artwork in a museum may be even more effective for students in non-arts disciplines in terms of providing the visuals to contextualize abstract concepts introduced in higher education courses. Engaging in this type of visual contextualization within the informal learning environment of the museum could be especially important for those students continuing to develop language skills and practicing academic discourse.

The Voice that Emerges When Students Take on the Personality of Art Sculptures

The third approach in using the art museum for language learning and academic discourse introduces the concept of voice in the arts. During a trip to a local museum, one of the authors of this chapter asks undergraduate students to create a voice from the perspective of an ancient Roman figurative statue. While in the psychology discipline, there has been controversy around the meaning of the concept of voice, the literary arts, particularly composition and rhetoric, provide a more solid definition that refers to the persona or personality of an author or character. In this chapter, we introduce the literary concept of voice for meaning-making in the visual arts and in producing creative writing.

The language of sculpture in the art world

We selected sculptures for an oral and written discourse activity with our undergraduate students. As an artistic category, sculpture provides a unique vantage in that it not only represents a figure or object, but it also stands on its own as an object in the real world. Unlike a painting, a sculpture is not only a representation of the world but also a three-dimensional

presentation. Historic sculptures present a distinct form of perception and lend themselves to a unique form of speaking, often portraying an isolated figure or pair of figures, rather than the multiple figures embedded in a detailed setting as many figurative paintings portray. While two-dimensional artworks often provide a lot of situational context for their figures, three-dimensional works tend to be simpler as sculptors typically do not include as much visual detail due to the nature of their medium or language.

The voice project in the museum

In the present project, undergraduates toured a local museum led by docents. Students were exposed to various perspectives and readings of multiple artworks from different cultures. The tour ended in the ancient Roman gallery, which is filled with stone sculptures of gods and goddesses (e.g. Cupid, Athena, Aphrodite, etc.) in addition to portraits of powerful rulers and everyday people from history. We asked our undergraduates to choose a sculpture to focus on and write about. Students situated themselves around their selected statue in the gallery and composed an identity or voice for their selected sculpture.

We propose there are multiple layers of interpretation in this type of assignment as students both visually analyze the artwork and create an identity on paper. Students “read” the artist’s sculpture – as a visual text. In viewing the statue in a museum setting, the student perceives visual features, such as body position, costume, color, symbols, etc., that lead them to infer, imagine, and construct aspects of a personality. Through a combination of extracting visual information from the artwork and interpreting that information through their own personal and cultural lens, students create a persona that is then transmitted into writing. This personality is captured in the writing process on paper through use of a voice that will be processed by a reader-audience. The creative writing aspect of this activity inspired emergent bilinguals to personally encounter and dramatize an artistic figure and to practice a dialogue-like written form of communication. They can move from a first language (i.e. Spanish) to a second language (i.e. English) depending upon the intention of their writing and the audience for whom they are writing.

The dialogic communication that students practiced orally with docents and peers as they initially toured the museum served as a precursor to the voice and talk they produced in writing for their sculpture. Horowitz (2007) points to overlays among talk, text, and culture as exercised in cognition and learning that enriches the content. Research has shown that prior knowledge, specifically schema, plays an important role across cultures in reading and writing (Anderson & Pearson, 1988).

Among our students in a Writing Development and Processes Course and who are training to teach K-College writers, there was a wide range of prior knowledge and schemata about Roman history and its expression in art. Those with more familiarity and a distinct schema talked about potential historical contexts for the figures. For example, one student drew upon her previous knowledge of Roman history as it relates to the story of Christ. She created a voice

for a partial Roman sculpture of the torso of a man in armor and told his story as one of the Roman soldiers present and responsible for the crucifixion. She writes, “I saw the man they called ‘The Messiah,’ being dragged by my fellow guardsman to his cross. They threw him on the floor right in front of my feet.” Another student composed a speech-like document from the perspective of Septimus Severus, a Roman emperor featured in marble portraiture within the gallery. She used her prior knowledge concerning the succession of Roman emperors and the tumultuous nature of the late Roman empire to write a speech that the emperor could have delivered as he came into power. She writes,

There has been much chaos and hardships that have occurred following the assassination of emperor Commodus. I am now appointed as the new emperor and have elevated to the imperial throne. . . . I plan to pay great attention to the administration of justice. Fellow people of my community, please join me in this fight to fix our city and bring peace among us.

For those students with limited prior knowledge of ancient Roman history or art, the sculptures still served as rich visual stimuli for creating voice and dialogue in writing. Some students found opportunity to project a humorous voice by “speaking” from the sculpture’s perspective, rather than the person represented by the sculpture. For example, one student writing from the perspective of a partial Aphrodite sculpture says:

I am the goddess of love. What you see right now is my head. I don’t know where the rest of my body is because they lost it somewhere a long time ago. It’s probably in another museum. I sometimes wish I was complete. I would love to be standing here in the museum as bold and deep like Athena across from me. But I’m just grateful my head is complete. The random guy across from me doesn’t even have his nose. If you have any questions about me, just ask the internet. Apparently, the internet is the new guide for everything.

This talk and writing by emergent bilinguals, from their own cultural situations and perspectives, overlaid and interacted with the art object and its Roman culture to create personal meaning.

Conclusions

This chapter demonstrates how valuable the art museum can be as a site for fostering second language activity and discourse processes through dialogic communication initiated by educators-docents and sustained by students. The museum is valuable for higher-level learning. Initially, we provided a critical examination of the exclusionary history of art museum practices and a description of their more recent shift toward inclusiveness. Next, we addressed the theoretical aspects of an emergent bilingual’s museum visit, including the communicative experience of looking at artwork, dialogue within the social learning environment, and the academic and personal readings of visual texts. Finally, three methods for instructional

practices were described: college instructor-museum educator collaboration, paired conversations, and voice creation.

While we used an off-campus museum in exploring these three approaches, we also found a smaller on-campus gallery to be a useful site for similar practices and developments in language learning and academic discourse. As art galleries are fairly prevalent on the campuses of higher education institutions, these spaces may be more accessible than off-campus trips to an art museum, and some approaches may work equally well in such a space, such as the paired conversational activity mentioned above. However, if the activity calls for a more specific type of artwork, such as the figure requirement in the voice activity discussed above, then a trip to the art museum where there is more variety and consistency in the artwork displays may be required.

Since little research has been conducted on language learning and second language processing of college students or adults within museum settings, there is opportunity to explore the complex interaction of undergraduates and meaning-making in this informal, unique learning site. Also, because visual consumption and social conversation, rather than writing, are perceived as the main activities of museum visitors, less research has been done on writing in the museum (Noy, 2105). The present project is part of a research line being developed to shed light on how talk, writing, and art in a museum context can be integrated to increase second language development and discourse processes in academic content within higher education. We present the teaching of art and discourse in the context of the 'reading' struggles students experience and the challenge of relating to content fields. It is our hope that we have opened doors that lead docents, educators, and emergent bilinguals into genuine, authentic visual opportunities and collaboration that strengthen our capacity for learning. It is our hope that the conceptualization of art with talk and the examples provided will stimulate educational researchers in a variety of disciplines to pursue dialogue and writing research in the museum.

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Appendix

Paired Conversation Sample Questions for Students on a Museum Visit

On a museum visit, undergraduates partnered with a fellow student to talk about a single artwork in one of the galleries. The following questions were provided on a paired conversation worksheet to focus the conversation and written composition:

1. Provide the artist's name, title, and medium of the artwork that you and your partner have chosen.
2. What meaning do you find in the artwork? Is there a message (political, social, personal, etc.)? What do you think the artist is trying to say with this work? How do you interpret this image? Be sure to provide evidence from the work of art itself to support your reading.
3. How does the manner in which the artwork is displayed in the museum setting affect the meaning or viewer's experience? For example, is the work hung very high or low on the wall? Is it set on a pedestal or directly on the floor? Does the lighting in the gallery change the way you perceive the object? Does the image correlate visually or thematically with other works around it?
4. What is the dominant formal element in the artwork? How does a commanding use of this formal element focus the work visually and contribute to meaning?
5. How is viewing this artwork in person in the museum gallery a different experience than viewing artworks in textbook photographs or on a computer screen?
6. How does your chosen artwork connect to an issue, theme, vocabulary term, artist, and/or artwork that we have discussed in class this semester?
7. Would you or your partner want to install the selected artwork in your own personal space, such as your apartment, house, or office? Why or why not?