

## “I Was Skeptical at First”: Content Literacy in the Art Museum

**This study determined if preservice middle and secondary teachers accepted use of an art museum as a tool for literacy and for learning their content.**

Arlene Lundmark Barry

Any eighth-grade teacher knows that a comprehensive classroom library can be a lifesaver. As a resource-room teacher working with struggling eighth-grade readers, I regularly found myself expanding my classroom library.

Often I stood in front of the magazines racks at Borders bookstore picking up *Skateboarder*, *Game Informer*, *Seventeen*—whatever it took to pique adolescents’ interest and get the reading process started. Duane had me stumped, however. “I’m not going to read, and you can’t make me,” he announced ominously when we first met.

I could not have predicted that the material that would finally break the ice with Duane would be an exhibition catalog he found on my bookshelf featuring the artwork of Aaron Bohrod (1907–1992). Bohrod was a still-life artist who always hid a small self-portrait in his paintings. Bohrod’s cluttered still lifes fascinated Duane and became focal points for discussion, prompts for writing and reading, and an improbable way for me to connect with Duane.

### Background

This experience began my use of artwork as a path to literacy. I used familiar scenes to captivate the children of migrant dairy workers who spoke little English. Objects in prints and photographs were labeled and expanded children’s vocabulary, which grew into sentences, paragraphs, and graphic novels. Students wrote in many of the genres associated with both in-school (poems, fiction, nonfiction, short stories) and out-of-school (advertisements, cartoons, letters, and notes) work.

Glossy pictures from *Time-Life* books reinforced concepts in history, science, and health. I used both fine art and commercial art (art made to sell something). My students liked reading and talking about Warhol, Dali, and Van Gogh. They learned things that many of their peers did not know. They felt empowered.

**The museum walls took on the “appearance of vertically displayed, exploded textbooks.”**

I took these experiences with me when I moved to State University (SU) to teach Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum, a required course for all preservice middle and high school content teachers. (Draper’s, 2008, emphasis on *content* is used). I wanted course participants to be aware of the multiple literacies (Tierney, 2008) that conveyed their subject matter and to be sensitive to students who did not share their

passion or ability to read text in science, social studies, English, foreign languages, and mathematics.

Shortly after I arrived at SU, I was afforded the opportunity of a museum–faculty collaboration through a faculty–training program titled, “The University in the Art Museum.” This program introduced faculty to the Spencer Museum of Art (SMA) and helped professors integrate works of art into established courses.

We learned that while the earlier mission of the art museum was solely aesthetic (e.g., Gilman, 1918), the more recent mission was to foster aesthetics and emotional connections and to serve a broad educational role. Art was perceived largely as an instructional tool (Henry, 2007). Instruction might be about the past, about other cultures, and societies, about current issues or injustices. Art used in this manner provided excellent support to the information taught by content teachers.

We learned that the process for educating the public in art museums had changed during the 1990s. As an art educator himself, Yenawine noted that he previously thought his responsibility was to “consider the art on view...and decide what key elements needed to be made clear for visitors to ‘enter’ the work” (Rice & Yenawine, 2002, p. 2). He felt that he needed to convey information and ideas to viewers so that artists like Jackson Pollock would be understood and made “approachable.” Yenawine said that perspectives on interacting with the public changed so that he and others drew on “what people already know” (Rice & Yenawine, 2002, p. 2).

According to Mayer (2005), museum educators “empowered” visitors “to construct their own meaning in the 90s” (p. 366). They began to tap into a visitor’s

prior knowledge, or schema. Rice (Rice & Yenawine, 2002), another art museum educator, reinforced this constructivist notion, explaining that “instead of buried truths that must be discovered...making meaning is about the stories we tell ourselves...individual viewers or learners are the ones who are best equipped to make their own meanings” (p. 3).

This constructivist view of education, based on Dewey’s (1938) ideas of “expression and cultivation of individuality...free activity...learning through experience” (p. 19), served as the theoretical framework on which this manuscript was based. I found it especially interesting that Mayer described making meaning in the art museum in a manner similar to the Rand report’s (Snow, 2002) definition of making meaning when reading. “Meaning was constructed,” Mayer said, “through an interactive dialogue between work, viewer, and their respective contexts” (p. 364).

As art museums supplied a variety of texts (e.g., labels, interactive kiosks, video monitors, study galleries, maps, timelines), the museum walls took on the “appearance of vertically displayed, exploded textbooks” (Eakle, 2005, p. 29), and provided rich out-of-school literacy and learning environments (Eakle, 2008). I thought preservice teachers should be exposed to and allowed to explore this kind of environment, because the complexities of literacy warrant a broader approach given current out-of-school literacy practices (Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 1999; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Moje, 2008).

I therefore designed an activity involving a 75-minute class period at our community art museum, the SMA. The museum educational director and I originally brainstormed to find content-related works of art. Further collaboration with SU content faculty resulted in a pool of questions connecting art with one’s prior knowledge and content standards.

I wondered, however, if the participants of my course accepted this as an approach to literacy and learning. Did they see the benefit in a process in which they used works of art to address issues in their content area? It is the purpose of this manuscript to explore these issues. As Shulman (2004) said,

Scholarly teaching is what every one of us should be engaged in every day that we are in a classroom, in our office with students, tutoring, lecturing, conducting discussions—all the roles we play pedagogically...But

it is only when we step back and reflect systematically on the teaching we have done, in a form that can be publicly reviewed and built upon by our peers, that we have moved from scholarly teaching to the scholarship of teaching. (p. 1)

## Study

Participants in this study were the 51 middle and high school preservice teachers (pseudonyms are used) enrolled in spring sections of Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum. This group of 51 contained 34 females and 17 males. Breakdown by content area was: 11 English majors; three social studies; 14 science; eight math; three art; 12 foreign-language majors (Spanish, five; French, four; German, two; Chinese, one).

Most of these individuals were seniors (35), but there were four juniors, one sophomore, and 11 graduate students. The majority in the group was Caucasian, with two Asian Americans, two Hispanic Americans, and one Native American. Preservice teachers will be referred to as PTs.

To reflect on this activity, “classroom action research” was used. This method “typically involves the use of qualitative interpretive modes of inquiry and data collection by teachers with a view to teachers making judgments about how to improve their own practices” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 561).

Multiple data sources were used to explore the issue of using an art museum as a springboard for content learning. Those sources were classroom anecdotal notes, observational field notes, informal interviews, and student artifacts, including a written assignment and semester-end evaluations.

These data were gathered during a pregallery preparation class, a gallery visit, a one-week period after the visit when assignments were submitted, and during semester-end evaluations. Member checking (Flick, 2006) was used to make sure that participants were represented accurately. Because of space constraints in this manuscript and the multiple levels of interaction, emphasis is placed on assignments and evaluations.

Because each of my two sections would spend only a 75-minute class period in the SMA, I wanted to ensure maximum use of our time. As Ansbacher (1998) urged, “pre-visit preparation of the teacher and students is critical” (p. 4). Therefore, prior to our visit, I explained the purpose of the assignment, the

task to be completed, and shared three digital images per content area with related questions, issues, and specific subject standards.

Three images per content were provided to allow for choice, a component in a constructivist perspective (Johnson, 2008) and a factor noted by Guthrie (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004) as important in motivating students’ reading. Questions were used to connect the artworks to participants’ prior knowledge and content expertise.

The format conformed to the “Accountive Stage,” or first stage of Housen’s (2001) Visual Thinking Strategies, in which participants produce a short response relating a work of art to their own lives or expertise. Examples of content standards, with related questions and images, are found in the Figure.

The SMA visit began with a brief introduction and overview by one of the museum educators. Key here was for students to understand the extent of the resources (22,000 works, a renowned quilt collection, a *Classroom Collection* for teacher checkout, and an interactive *teaching gallery*), the range of instructional possibilities, and the willingness of SMA personnel to provide support once participants entered their own classrooms.

After the introduction, PTs headed off to any of the 12 exhibition areas or to the print room. They could choose to work together or on their own. Collaboration is another component of constructivism (Johnson, 2008) and noted by Guthrie (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004) as motivational to student reading. During this time, I began systematically walking through each area, answering and asking questions while I recorded field notes.

One week after the SMA visit, participants were asked to turn in a written response to the questions or issues posed for their content area. Additionally, they were asked to choose a work of art themselves and to explain how they could use it to teach a concept. They were asked to brainstorm, collaborate, read, research, write, and problem solve.

Curatorial files, the SMA art library, or the Internet were recommended for participant use to acquire additional information. The purpose of this assignment was to have participants experiment so they could decide if this was an approach that would work in their content classroom.

**Figure Museum Images With Related Content Standards and Questions**

Content	Standard	Question	Image
Science	NSTA Standard VI, Science and Technology	What do you know about the use of pesticides in the U.S. and other countries?	
Social Studies	NCSS Standard IV, Individual Development and Identity	What experiences have you had with prejudice or racism?	
English	NCTE/IRA Standard 4, Communication via Spoken, Written, and Visual Language	How does place connect you to others? How do people affect the place you live or places that are special to you? Describe a special place.	
Math	NCTM Communication Standard, Language of Math Used to Express Mathematical Ideas; Connections Standard, Math Applied to Contexts Outside of Field	What do you know about fractals? How is fractal geometry used? Can you find other examples of fractals in nature?	
Art	National Art Standards, Grades 9-12, Content Standard I, Media Techniques and Procedures Understood and Applied	How would you represent your self-portrait? What aspects of your history would you include?	
Foreign Language-Spanish	Standards for Foreign Language Learning 4.2, Cultural Understanding: Compares Own Culture with those Studied	How do your culture's sources of entertainment compare to those represented by Amigheiti?	
Foreign Language-Chinese	Standards for Foreign Language Learning 4.2, Cultural Understanding: Cultures Compared and Studied	What role does hair play in your culture? Compare the importance of hairstyle and color in cultures.	

In semester-end evaluations, PTs were asked to provide written feedback, both positive and negative, on the class period spent at the SMA and on the assignment related to the visit. Participants were told that their feedback would guide future planning for this course. They were asked to put their evaluations in an envelope in the Department office to be read after grades were submitted so that feedback would not influence participant grades. A structured survey was not used so as not to lead responses.

Of the three choices given, the images most frequently chosen by PTs for their writing were those

included in the Figure. Math educators struggled a little and asked to brainstorm with me. We talked and constructed problems together using a special exhibit on “Climate Change.” The related problems focused on the development of predictive weather models given multiple variables and the multicollinearity of the variables.

### **Responding to Questions About Images and Content**

Many participants said they liked being given questions with works of art, because they would not

have been able to generate something on their own without a model. As Barbara said, “I thought it was helpful that you *showed* us future teachers how we could use art in our content areas.”

I was surprised by the participants’ frankness when they wrote about their experiences with prejudice. One Asian female spoke of the humiliation of being a nonnative English speaker and how she was ridiculed in middle school when she mispronounced words or was unfamiliar with a common food, like spaghetti. Another felt he received negative treatment from his peers because he did not have a father. A third believed her lower socioeconomic status and lack of wardrobe resulted in prejudicial treatment by peers and, surprisingly, by her teachers. Even as an adult, the memory of attending second grade in soiled clothes still bothered her.

I had not considered all the forms prejudice might take. Similar personal connections and prior knowledge would allow for rich and honest discussions with participants’ own future students. This is an authentic way to explore the concepts of social justice.

I was perhaps most interested in all the ideas generated by the PTs when they chose the artwork and suggested their own related activities. The 51 participants identified 72 works of art in the galleries that they thought were appropriate for their content classrooms.

PTs proposed specific reading and writing assignments to go with their works. For example, Juan said he would use *El Sueno de la Razon Produce Monstruos*, a 1999 etching by Enrique Chagoya, which he thought alluded to the “repression of indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America.” Much debate ensued regarding Chagoya’s meaning.

All Spanish majors thought this would be a good piece for making inferences, critical thinking, multiple viewpoints, research, and writing. Juan also identified Rigoberta Menchú’s *I Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* as an appropriate related trade book.

Tio, a future middle school English teacher, chose *Colored Girl* by Carrie Mae Weems (1989) and thought he’d use journaling along with Christopher Paul Curtis’s novel, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. Sandy, a chemistry major, liked the unusual process

used by Koo Kyung-Sook in which faux furs drenched in photo chemicals were wrapped around the artist’s body and then placed on photosensitive paper. Sandy thought reading about and discussing the process involved in black-and-white photography would be a great real-life connection to chemistry.

Participants had ideas that never had occurred to me and involved multiple text types and forms of writing. I learned a lot from these PTs. Even Beth’s parting comment that she identified 12 different types of clouds in paintings throughout the SMA impressed me.

### **Reflections on the Process**

All 51 of the participants provided written feedback. They were given the option of signing their names or remaining anonymous, and 46 signed their names to their evaluations.

Surprisingly, all 51 provided not only positive but enthusiastic feedback about using works of art in their content area. Participants described the activity as “the coolest class period of the semester,” “enjoyable,” “inspiring,” “fun,” “one of the more interesting projects,” “beneficial,” “learned something new,” “unique experience,” “one of the most memorable times in class,” “very informative,” “useful,” “helpful,” and “definitely positive.” All but one said the activity should be continued in the future.

Dante, the lone dissenter, said, “I got just as much out of logging onto the Internet and finding a piece of art that I could use in a lesson” as viewing the original works in the SMA. Nevertheless, he said, “Your encouragement to use art has influenced my future use of art.” Apparently he thought seriously about “future use,” because he made the point to describe a lesson he wanted to try: the “perspective of art from a strictly scientific stance.”

Dante also discussed a book titled *Education, Science and Truth*, in which the author, Nejadmehr (2009), posited that

science strictly taught says that art cannot be beautiful...My question to students would be, Can art actually be beautiful; if so, why? What is beauty? Our understanding of “beauty” is only a vestige from our evolutionary ancestors. Lines and symmetry are pleasing to Man, because they make Man’s brain feel like they are in the jungle again...It would be an awesome discussion.

**They found the idea of integrating art into their content an “uncommon and positive opportunity.”**

Admittedly, the middle and high school PTs in these classes initially did not think of the SMA as a content area resource or as a springboard for reading and writing. In the 51 written responses, 45% (23/51) of PTs began their evaluation by sharing their initial “hesitancy,” or surprise when the class activity was first described. Opening comments frequently began, “I was skeptical

of the idea” or “of the benefit at first,” that it “seemed improbable for me.” However, attitudes changed dramatically. For example, Anita, a foreign-language major explained,

I was skeptical about going to the Spencer Art Museum, not because I didn't think art could be incorporated into my Spanish classroom, but because I hadn't been to the Spencer Museum, and I didn't know they would have art there that interested me for my content area.

Anita concluded by saying, “I had so much fun creating my lesson plan that incorporated art. It was unlike anything I have ever created.” Juan's reflections followed similar thinking, “Using art to teach Spanish history and culture is, surprisingly, something that had not dawned on me prior to our class exposure to it,” he said. “Now, beginning with Chagoya, Goya, and Avery, I have a great starting place for teaching my students through the medium of art.” Responses from many foreign-language majors echoed this sentiment.

### **Reflections Coding**

Because the purpose of this manuscript was to assess PTs evaluation of the museum activity, their semester-end evaluations were coded. “In Vivo Coding” was used in a First Cycle analysis of this written feedback. Also called “Verbatim Coding,” a key word or short phrase was taken from the actual language used by the participants in their evaluations.

In Vivo Coding was used in this study because of its applicability to action research: “One of the genre's primary goals is to frame the facilitator's interpretations of terms that participants use in their everyday lives, rather than in terms derived from

the academic disciplines or professional practices” (Saldana, 2009, p. 74). This coding process resulted in 66 different codes written in quotes in the margins of participant evaluations. These 66 were read and reread, combined, condensed, and categorized.

The process of ‘meaning condensation’ or “themeing the data,” as Saldana (2009) called it, is “applicable to participant-generated documents and artifacts” (p. 140). Identifying the repeated ideas, words, and concepts resulted in six themes, the first of which already was noted as a pervasive, initial “skepticism” about an activity that did not represent traditional textbook learning. Five other themes constituted PTs' perceived benefits of the art-museum activity.

The benefits were (a) increased understanding of ways to integrate content; (b) development of additional tools and resources; (c) practice of thinking outside the box; (d) the ability to provide for multiple learning preferences, or multiple intelligences; and (e) an opportunity to get out of the classroom. Words and phrases identified in the coding process were carried over to elaborate on the following themes.

### **Content Integration**

First, participants found that the activity and assignment helped them understand how to teach in a more holistic, integrative, and collaborative fashion. In their feedback, 45/51 (88%) of participants specifically used words like “integrating,” “incorporating,” “connecting,” and “cross-content.” Participants wrote that they found the idea of integrating art into their content an “uncommon and positive opportunity.”

Many said they were surprised at the current events addressed (e.g., the Climate Change exhibit) and how easy it was to relate the works of art to content concepts. Most noted what they saw as the value of integrating content areas. Manuela expressed the notion well when she said,

For me, the inspiration was not just about integrating opportunities to view and write about works of art, but it also gave me the opportunity to think about the place the humanities could have in the science classroom. Science is an objective discipline and visual art and creative writing have something to inform us about science and technology. I do plan to bring high school students to the SMA and continue to think about other ways to [integrate] art and science.

In a practical sense, Andre pointed out the need to see the collaborative process modeled and to try it out for himself. “I think it was a good way for us to get out of the classroom and get a firsthand experience of how we could incorporate other subject areas into our content area,” he said.

Nona expressed her concern regarding the effects of budget cuts on the arts in the schools and her belief that integrating the visual arts across content areas may be the only way to “help save the subject.”

### **Tools and Resources**

Second, participants believed the activity and assignment gave them more “tools” to use in their teaching. On the basis of their feedback, 38/51 (75%) of the participants noted that the activity gave them additional resources to use in future instruction. In their writing, they frequently used phrases like “using many tools,” “another tool and context,” “a tool like a memory aid,” and “different style of teaching,” or they described instructional scenarios like Tomica’s:

I have never considered using art as a way to bring historical events into the classroom. After seeing the exhibit at the Spencer on the First World War, I will definitely use art in my lesson plans and assignments. Seeing how the artists captured the setting and the culture of war so much better and in more detail than any textbook was very beneficial, and I will use this a great deal in my classroom.

Emon, a foreign-language major, said that she “liked the idea of having students use their imagination and make inferences based on a work of art, rather than just searching for answers in a text.” It is just this kind of process—careful observation, justification, and speculation—Housen (2001) has determined, that leads to critical thinking.

Having a wide variety of resources helped the PTs feel more confident. As Jemma pointed out, this activity made her “feel more prepared as a teacher.” Also, the participants were thrilled to realize the supportive nature of SMA faculty and staff. They now saw museums as a viable teaching resource. Monique described this realization:

One thing that really stood out to me was the museum’s willingness to work with students and teachers. Not only did they want us in their museum, but also they

wanted to work with us to enhance the experience. I was very impressed with the fact that they have people working at the museum to help brainstorm ideas about lesson plans for teachers as well.

### **Stretching the Boundaries**

Individuals representing all content areas, except for art majors, talked about seeing the art–content connection as a novel instructional approach. Forty-seven percent (24/51) claimed that the activity forced them to think outside of their present curricular parameters: “think outside the box,” “think outside traditional,” and “un-science science.” In reflecting on the activity, Meeka said,

I really enjoyed looking at all of the possibilities art can become and what is considered to be art. It made me personally open my eyes at projects that can be easily put into a lesson plan or journal entry. I found the visit very useful!

Tomica, a social studies major, noted,

I think the trip to the Spencer single handedly helped me think more creatively about planning lessons and incorporating other aspects that might be of interest to my students...I ask you to retain this fieldtrip due to its pertinence, its motivating factors and its ability to get teachers to think outside of their conventional ways of approaching their content areas.

A science major said she thought that “stepping outside the box” and taking a trip to an art museum would be novel enough to grab teenagers’ attention and get them involved.

### **Multiple Intelligences and Learning Preferences**

PTs concluded that the activity and assignment would help them (as Gardner, 1983, discussed) provide for multiple learning styles, multiple intelligences, and multiple lenses through which to view a concept. On the basis of their written feedback, 15/51 (29%) used phrases like “various ways of learning,” “different learning styles,” or “opens doors for some students.” Latoya speculated that the experience provided a way to “reach more students...Visual learners would really benefit from having a writing assignment that originated from a painting or other piece of artwork.”

Emile believed that a visual representation could “provide a way for students who might not understand a reading to still think about a concept and participate in a discussion.” Looking at her content from a teen’s perspective, Maura noted that images “can help those students that are more artistic but believe that biology is boring.” PTs also saw the resources available in an art museum as being “culturally relevant” and therefore allowing diverse student populations to connect.

Echoing a discussion on the NRC listserv (see Ridgeway, 2010), Melinda concluded that a multimodality approach was one that best served her future students. “I believe that by combining lecture, writing assignments, reading assignments and images, like those from the Spencer, I will definitely be able to make sure that my students are comprehending all the aspects needed to succeed in my class,” she said. Once again, Melinda and others reinforced the importance of “actually seeing how the works of art could be included into a lesson” and seeing “various ways of learning the same concept” so they would know how to implement it in their own future classrooms.

### ***Getting Out of the Classroom***

Despite the fact that most of these PTs had spent four years on the campus, several noted that they had never stepped foot inside the SMA. From a very practical perspective, Linda explained the predicament many of them were in:

As a full-time student with a full-time job, it can be difficult to make time for activities like a museum visit. However, when it is part of a class requirement, it fulfills both an interest as well as an assignment completion.

Even those who had been to the SMA at some point, such as Enid, noted, “I was reminded how much fun museums are...I was so vividly reminded how much you can learn outside a classroom.” On the basis of written feedback, 31/51 (61%) noted that it was “nice to take a little field trip,” “have a change of scenery,” “break from the regular classroom,” or “get into a different environment.” In addition, PTs perceived the action of learning outside of the classroom as something that would be “motivating” for their students.

Perhaps one message to students should be that visiting an art museum, or any museum for that matter, is not a form of playing hooky—it is an important part of their educational experience. As Wilson (2006) noted, “All college students should be able to read a museum before they graduate” (p. 5).

### ***Teacher Preparation***

One other category appeared in semester-end evaluations. The process of stepping back and extending the analytic work from First Cycle Coding, “reassembling data that were split...and specify[ing] the properties and dimensions of a category” (p. 159)—what Saldana (2009) referred to as “Second Cycle” or “Axial Coding”—led me to recognize that the PTs were reflective practitioners. They realized it was necessary to have new concepts modeled.

Even though initially skeptical, once modeled, PTs tried new instructional approaches and then tailored them to suit their needs. By engaging in this process, PTs reaped the benefits of “free activity” and “learning through experience” (Dewey, 1938).

The benefits of this experience, as perceived by the PTs in this study, manifested themselves in the five themes noted. Participants believed that these themes represented qualities that would prepare them for teaching. Therefore, an umbrella category here is teacher preparation.

### ***Criticisms***

About 25% (13/51) of the participants offered criticisms of the experience. Some criticized the assignment, noting that they did not like the particular work of art or prompt suggested. Troy, a math major said, “I wanted to see something crazy—something I hadn’t seen before.”

Others found fault with the process, recommending that I not show the works to be used ahead of time or that I require the task to be a group-only project. Finally, one practical student noted, “a lesser funded museum in a smaller city might not have the materials readily available to justify a field trip” (Ming).

### ***Final Reflections***

I needed to decide whether to continue an art-museum excursion and related content reading lesson. While

I personally believed in the value of this alternative source of literacy and learning, I did not know what the preservice teachers in my courses really thought. If they were not receptive to the task, if they “resisted,” as participants of content reading classes historically did (e.g., Ratekin, Simpson, Alvermann, & Dishner, 1985), I decided my time would be better spent in other forms of instruction.

The main focus of this manuscript, therefore, was to determine if preservice middle and secondary teachers accepted the use of an art museum as a tool for literacy and learning in their content areas. Additionally, I wanted to know if they believed that they benefited from an activity that used works of art to address content issues.

On the basis of semester-end evaluations, written assignments, informal conversations, and observations, my answer to this question was “Yes!” Preservice teachers in a required literacy course concluded that they “learned” by visiting a community art museum and by connecting content concepts with works of art. They learned because they tapped into their prior knowledge, pulled out what they already knew, and built on it by reading, writing, discussing, questioning, talking, and developing their own materials.

The ambiguity of many of the artworks piqued their interests, causing them to want to learn more as individuals and as future teachers. They saw ways they could integrate their content with others, the way images could cause one to make inferences, trigger memory, motivate, learn through another modality, and tap into expertise outside of their classroom. They believed the process helped prepare them to be better teachers, and they enjoyed it.

I learned from this experience as well. First of all, I realized that there are several reasons that art museums are good environments for out-of-school literacy exploration. Literacy is complex, and many of the literacy activities teens engage in are out of school.

Therefore, PTs should be exposed to and engage in out-of-school (e.g., online, museums, libraries) literacies as well. It was important that as someone who prepares individuals to be teachers, I took the time to model these kinds of experiences, because, based on the feedback from 51 participants, it would not occur to them to do this.

One advantage of physically being in the SMA as opposed to merely using images online was all of the interactions and connections PTs made and the curriculum ideas they generated. This was evidenced by the 72 works of art they independently identified for use in their content areas and in the rich text connections they provided in doing so. As Ming noted, “Seeing the artwork up-close and personal is ten times more fascinating than looking at it on the computer screen.”

I also realized that to improve my practices, I needed to be less controlling and to allow PTs to do more exploring, make better use of their prior knowledge, and have more opportunities to develop their own curriculum. In addition, the PTs in this study and I discovered a tremendous range of works available at an art museum that could be used across all content areas. This awareness fit with a constructivist notion that we all use different materials and make different personal connections to help us construct our knowledge. Dee, a science major, said,

I love how art is up for interpretation and that so many words can come from what looks like a simple drawing. I truly enjoyed how we were able to go off on our own and explore the museum. Sometimes a guided tour can be limiting, but being able to have time to wander around allowed me to see exactly what I was interested in.

This notion that knowledge is not passively received, that it is actively built up or constructed by individuals as they connect their prior knowledge and past experiences with new information (Johnson, 2008), became clear in the actions of these preservice teachers. They were, as Rice (Rice & Yenawine, 2002) described, “seduced” into “wanting to look more closely and to know more” (p. 5). In my years teaching both junior high school and college-content reading courses, I have concluded that this process of seduction is critical.

**They were...  
“seduced” into  
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to know more.”**

At the risk of sounding contradictory, however, the importance of providing models and examples was clear. Because PTs were skeptical and had not considered this form of out-of-class learning, they needed some examples to consider the range of possibilities.

When asked informally, 50/51 PTs said they found specific examples of art with content questions and related standards necessary. As a matter of fact, some PTs reported needing the larger process modeled. Dana said, "Going on the fieldtrip also helps you think as a teacher, as to what steps need to be in place in order for the trip to be successful."

Examples are helpful for teachers in the field as well. Time is a major determinant of the activities that inservice teachers use in their classroom (see Barry, 2002). They have said repeatedly that if an activity or routine takes too much preparation time or time to implement, they will not use it. Therefore, if an activity is put together for them so they can try it, they are more likely to do so. Both preservice and inservice teachers have asked for examples. As a corollary of this study, I put together instructional resources that can be found at [www.spencerart.ku.edu/resources/classroom](http://www.spencerart.ku.edu/resources/classroom).

Further support for the museum experience was found in PT requests for more time at the SMA. Also, without being solicited, 53% (27/51) of the respondents offered the information that "I fully intend to use a similar activity in my future classroom" (Maria).

Of course, such pledges begged the question: Do individuals continue these out-of-classroom practices once they get into their own classroom? In other words, was there any long-term effect of the SMA activity?

In a related study (Barry, 2010), those who had participated in this activity in previous years and were currently teaching were surveyed to see if there was carryover. Respondents reported that the SMA activity did lead to the use of art and a variety of museums in their current classrooms.

When considering use of a museum for a classroom connection, teachers can look to see if the institution is American Association of Museums accredited.

Accreditation ensures a set of standards. "However," the SMA's Public Program coordinator noted, "just because a museum is not accredited doesn't mean that it wouldn't be a good resource for teachers" (A. Martin-Hamon, personal communication, October 4, 2010).

The coordinator urged educators not to limit themselves to art museums, centers, or galleries. She advised educators to be open to other sources of art and visual culture, such as "historic houses, history museums, public art outside and inside buildings, local arts commissions, and art guilds." The overt desire to collaborate and form partnerships with schools at all levels has been present in museums across the United States for more than a decade (King, 1998). We educators are surrounded with possibilities.

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Barry is an associate professor at the University of Kansas, Curriculum and Teaching, Lawrence, Kansas, USA, e-mail abarry@ku.edu.

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- “Museum Literacies and Adolescents Using Multiple Forms of Texts ‘On Their Own’” by A. Jonathan Eakle, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, November 2009