The Thesis Committee for Samantha Rebecca Garfield
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

How Do Three Public School Art Teachers in Texas Use Art Criticism

and Discussion to Teach Contemporary Art in the K-12 Classroom

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor: _____

Christina Bain

_____

Paul E. Bolin

How Do Three Public School Art Teachers in Texas Use Art Criticism and Discussion to Teach Contemporary Art in the K-12 Classroom

by

Samantha Rebecca Garfield, B.A.

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2014

Dedication

To my mom and to Alex. Thank you both for countless hours, boundless enthusiasm, great questions, dance breaks, curiosity, and being proud of me. Your insights and encouragement were invaluable.

Abstract

How Do Three Public School Art Teachers in Texas Use Art Criticism and Discussion to Teach Contemporary Art in the K-12 Classroom

Samantha Rebecca Garfield, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Christina Bain

I conducted a case study to observe three art classes at various campuses throughout Austin, Texas in order to observe how art criticism methods were used to guide classroom discussions about contemporary art. By engaging in art criticism in the classroom, an instructor can ultimately enrich the teaching and learning of art. They can also assist students in learning to subjectively evaluate images from their everyday lives, reinforcing the value placed on thoughtful description through art education. Learning how to turn an evaluation from a judgmental and careless acceptance or dismissal into a thoughtful analysis can suspend indifference and re-invigorate the potential educational aspect of time spent in the art classroom and expand the scope of learning outside the arena of art. The value of using contemporary art for these evaluations, as opposed to more traditionally recognized artists, enables the art lessons to become integrated into a social and cultural context and can integrate social studies, political science, and any number of other concentrations into arts education.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Art instruction can be enriched by taking the methods commonly used in art criticism and employing them in an educational setting. Too often, art criticism is a term associated with negative commentary and critiques. When used as a supplement in the art classroom, criticism can be a tool to teach students how to subjectively evaluate images from everyday life and foster development of communication skills, critical thinking, and problem solving. According to Emery (2002), this type of postmodern environment encourages students to embrace multiple, even contradictory meanings simultaneously. When students learn to participate in art criticism as a conversation, "they actually participate in the making process by constructing new meaning" (Emery, 2002, p. 58). Learning how to turn an evaluation of an artwork from a judgmental and careless acceptance or dismissal into a thoughtful analysis can suspend a student's indifference and reinforce the educational aspect of time spent in the art classroom. Art criticism also places value on thoughtful description in art education.

In order to discover the best practices of using art criticism and discussion based techniques in the classroom, I conducted a case study in which I observed three public school art educators throughout Austin, Texas in order to observe how art criticism methods were used to guide and enrich student discussions while looking at contemporary art.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Often times only masterpieces from the art historical canon, such as VanGogh's *Starry Night* or Monet's *Water Lilies,* are introduced in art classrooms. As a consequence, "students are encouraged to study the work of accepted artists rather than unknown artists" (Emery, 2002, p. 24). While the wedding of popular art to historically significant art is being seen more and more in the k-12 art curriculum, according to Jagodzinski (1997) there are still countless lessons that have students creating emulations of well-known works of art. These lessons are often used as tools to teach art making techniques and the works are typically used for stylistic inspiration or to teach the elements and principles of art. As opposed to being imbued with meaning they are merely a vehicle for introducing factual and memorizable information without delving into a deeper context.

Learning about art in this way allows for a limited view of what meaningful personal expression can be. This narrow view can turn the evaluation of a work of art into a judgmental and thoughtless acceptance of what is considered tasteful by the viewer. Also common is the flip side of this coin, the thoughtless dismissal of the work and a general lack of appreciation or respect for art not made by recognizable artists. According to Whiteley (2004), when art is taken out of context it creates an unwelcome distancing effect which renders it less accessible and thus less useful to society. This has consequences beyond the classroom; too often we look at a work of art and quickly dismiss it as being one of two things: beautiful and something we could never do ourselves or something that even a child could make. Both these reactions are shallow and do not have very much to do with a connection to or understanding of the art itself.

For my research, I have chosen three art instructors to observe for a case study. These teachers use art criticism methods and discussion techniques while exploring contemporary art. The reasoning behind these criteria is that contemporary art often deals with current societal issues to which students may more easily relate. It can also empower them to make art relevant to their experience as is the practice of contemporary artists. I also chose contemporary art to fit certain techniques which are common to art criticism within their natural framework. Art critics are "generally and most often interested in contemporary art" (Barrett, 1994, p. xii). Studying the methods employed in art criticism provides an example of how to thoughtfully evaluate art while temporarily suspending judgment of the work. It can also help students learn how to discuss their own personal responses to works of art. This has the potential to not only enhance learning about art but also promote problem-solving and critical thinking in the classroom. Taking the practices used by critics and adjusting them to fit in an art classroom setting can reinforce the value placed on description and thoughtful consideration of personal interest and opinion in art education.

Cult of the Masterpiece

According to art critic Lawrence Alloway, "when we say so-and-so is a masterpiece, we not only promote our own superior powers of recognition but an act of rudimentary simplification is made" (Kalina, 2006, p. 21). Revere for one exceptional work of art rarely takes into consideration the greater body of the artist's work that led to the "masterpiece" being created or other artists of the time that influenced the creation of

the famous work. Alloway viewed the notion of a few central "masterpieces" as unnatural. Furthermore, this reverence was only developed and encouraged in order to augment popular critical arguments. "There is a tendency to view the reactions of art critics to works of art as signs of the real meaning" (Kalina, 2006, p. 5), and hence as more true than lay reactions. When a single work of art is touted as a masterpiece, as stated by Alloway, the "possibility of art being a complex signifier related to the artist and the artist's cultural context" (Kalina, 2006, p. 21) is no longer possible. This "cult of the masterpiece," which we find in many art classrooms, does not follow Alloway's approach that encourages the lay person to explore their own insights on works of art and add to the conversation of art criticism instead of blindly accepting what others have said. When the value is placed solely on critical acclaim and popularity, art becomes isolated from the rest of culture and accepted as the only possibility of what good or great art can be. One of the objectives of using methods commonly found in art criticism in k-12 art classrooms will be to put art works into a more meaningful context so they can be evaluated by the viewer instead of blindly accepted or dismissed.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

This research was conducted in response to the following question: How do three public school art educators in Texas use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

DBAE stands for discipline based art education. Curriculum based on this curricular approach combines experiences from four disciplines in the study of art: Art production, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics.

Modernism as an art movement emphasizes formal qualities expressed in abstract or non-objective styles and encourages a neutral and objective position. Individual creative conceptions free of societal influence were favored.

Postmodernism in relation to the art world is the acceptance of a multiplicity of perspectives. With this view there can be no singular perspective on truth. Claims to truth must be deconstructed and understood as only one subjective opinion amongst many feasible options. Community, subjectivity, and relativity play an important role.

Zone of Proximal Development has been defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Common Core is a set of academic standards in mathematics and language arts. These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level.

21st Century Skills are a list of skills commonly associated not only with academic success but social and personal success as well. Schools are beginning to try to align

classroom environments with real world environments to better prepare students for college and a globally competitive workforce. This new skill set includes creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, communication, collaboration, information and communications technology (ICT), citizenship, life and career, and personal and social responsibility.

MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

In fall 2003 I switched my undergraduate studies from studio art to art history after completing an introduction to art history course during my freshman year in college. I loved the way the classes helped me put the visual imagery that I saw everyday into a relatable context and made the past come alive with new information. In addition, I loved the subject and ended up pursuing my Bachelors of Fine Arts degree in art history. Through leading tours of school aged children around the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and tours for all ages at the Blaffer Museum on the University of Houston campus, teaching others about what I found interesting in the arts became a passion of mine and I decided to pursue becoming an art teacher.

In 2011 I began work as a substitute teacher for the Austin ISD. At one point I accepted a substitute position as a middle school art teacher. The teacher for whom I was subbing had left instructions on the board letting the students know that if they misbehaved while she was away they would have to study art history for the rest of the week as punishment. It made me very sad to see the subject I love so much degraded in this way. I was disappointed that the instructor was not able to use art history as a tool

to encourage a love of the arts in her students and was not able to make the subject come alive for them as my first art history teacher had done for me. While this experience frustrated me, it did not dissuade me. On the contrary, it reconfirmed that I was on the correct path given my interests and passions and I was inspired to learn how make this subject more enjoyable for others.

During my second year as a graduate student at The University of Texas at Austin (UT) I took an art history class that covered art from the 1950s through the 1980s. In this class I studied the critical writings of Lawrence Alloway and instantly knew that this was the direction that teaching school age students about art history should take. Alloway viewed art as part of a network that also included movies, advertising, graphics, product design, and fashion, rather than as a separate and supposedly higher entity which was "distinguished by aesthetic timelessness and disinterested experience" (Rice, 2009). This was a radical outlook in the 1960s when it first emerged and it signaled an initial art critical shift from Modernist to Postmodernist thought, though it was not labeled as such at the time. This change in critical perspective from form to content and from aesthetic to socially defined relevance was just one example of the way Alloway brought topicality and personal interest into the arena of art criticism. I believe that the Postmodern approach to art criticism that Alloway advocated could make a difference in the art classroom; instead of studying art based on its formal qualities, thus removing entire realms of its impact, art could be made relevant to students through their societal and emotional needs, suspending their indifference and

providing for a broader range of understanding and acceptance both artistically and societally.

RESEARCH METHOD

Case Study

For this study, I was primarily interested in the best practices of art educators who used discussion and art criticism to teach their students about contemporary art. To learn from this phenomenon, I conducted this qualitative research by opting to use the case study as my primary methodology. In order to gather my data I interviewed three instructors in Austin and then observed their classrooms during a time when this phenomenon took place. For my research I explored the instructional practices of these three selected art instructors while they used art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their students about contemporary art. In keeping with the definition of a case study as explained by Creswell (2008), the cases were bounded by time and activity as I only observed the instructors for one class session. These observations were pre-arranged based on when each instructor planned to conduct discussions about contemporary art with their students. The three cases are best practice examples of art instructors who teach in Texas public schools each of whom instruct at different campuses and teach different age levels. Karen Hughes[1] teaches at an elementary school, Felicia Smith a middle school, and Elisabeth Daniels at a high school. Detailed information was gathered

---

[1] The names of the teachers as used in my research are pseudonyms in order to protect the privacy of the participants.

"using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" (Creswell, 2009, p. 13).

Data Collection

My main goal in collecting data was to record an accurate reproduction of the phenomenon and to ask if the results were typical of each instructor's experience with using art criticism and discussion when teaching about contemporary art to their students. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative observations are those in which the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site (p. 181). In order to collect data on the behavior and activities of the participants, I audio recorded each interview and class I observed. Using this approach as my guideline, I attempted to illustrate a detailed portrayal of the way a small group of art educators in Texas use art criticism techniques to teach their students about contemporary art.

Interviews

In order to better understand each unique classroom context that I would be observing and the goals of each participant, I conducted a semi-structured interview before each observation took place. I also followed each observation with a second brief semi-structured interview to enable the participant to discuss thoughts and impressions of how the class went and if the results of the lesson were typical for that group of students. In these interviews I was able to learn about a variety of art criticism and discussion methods and activities that each participant has used in order to engage students in

discussion about contemporary art. I also learned more about the way that the participants found information about contemporary artists and their selection process when deciding which artists to focus on in the classroom.

Observation

My observations were of three art instructors who indicated that they knowingly used art criticism methods in their art classrooms and frequently used this approach to teach their students about contemporary art. All three instructors were selected from a teachers panel held at The University of Texas at Austin during a student-teaching class meeting that took place in March 2013. The instructors were selected because they had indicated that in their art classrooms students discuss social and personal implications within the context of the work, as opposed to merely focusing on art history and formal elements of art or having no discussion at all.

I conducted one observation of each of the three instructors in their classrooms at pre-arranged times. Each observation was preceded and followed by a semi-structured interview about their procedures, expectations, and the way they prepared for instruction. All interviews and observations were audio recorded and transcribed.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

For this study, I conducted qualitative research by adopting case study as my methodology. According to Creswell (2009), "particularity is the hallmark of qualitative research" (p. 193). Fitting with Creswell's assertion, the scope of my research topic "how three public school art educators in Texas use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art" was very particular. This narrow focus

made my research not generalizable to all art educators or even to all Texas art educators. Another factor contributing to the limitations of the study was the fact that my sample size was very small. I used only three participants in this study. My own personal bias in selecting these instructors is also a limitation placed on the study since I pre-selected my participants from a small pool that I was able to identify as meeting the requirements of fitting within my research topic, as opposed to selecting them randomly. All participants taught art in Texas public schools, claimed to use art criticism or discussion techniques in their classrooms, and taught their k-12 students about contemporary art.

I was able to record the discussions that took place with the entire class and the presentations, but I was not able to record or hear in detail the smaller group discussions that took place. I did not walk around the classroom and interact with the students as these discussions were taking place. I felt that this action would have changed my role as researcher from observer to participant and may have intimidated the students from speaking freely amongst themselves.

The limitations to this study were that it focused on only three pre-selected instructors and it did not measure any feedback directly from the pupils during their interpersonal discussions.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

According to Wolff (1997), if our interests are developed out of a history of rewarding personal experiences, "we can expect that any future interest in art that students develop will come about in the same way" (Wolff, 1997, p. 177). The word "criticism" can be associated with judgment and lack of approval. Art criticism has the

reputation of being mostly a method of critiquing and finding fault with works of art. "Some educators have equated art criticism with having teachers and students make negative remarks about works of art but if this were actually what criticism was about, one could readily understand a reluctance to use it in the classroom" (Wolff, 1997, p. 134). Criticism, with its commonly associated negativity, is not the form of art criticism that would be of use to art educators, especially not in a classroom intended for k-12 students because the fear of being criticized and critiqued can be stifling in an artistic capacity. "One of the major reasons art criticism is brought into the classroom is to help students learn not only how to come to their own conclusions about art but also how to feel secure enough to defend them if challenged" (Wolff, 1997, p. 112).

In its most useful capacity, art criticism is not actually about criticizing but more about discussion, evaluation, and working towards having an understanding about works of art. When used this way, art criticism strategies can be an important developmental tool. For example, it can teach students how to empathize with and respond intelligently to works of art. Furthermore, it is not necessary to limit the use of art criticism to discussion of students' own work in the art classroom. Art criticism in the k-12 classroom does not need to be a tool primarily used for artistic improvement. Therefore, art criticism should be reconceptualized as a means to facilitate meaningful engagement with art.

Art criticism, by its very nature can help teachers facilitate the development critical thinking skills in students that reach beyond the art classroom. For example, connections can be made to other subjects, the workplace, and more.

The synergy of the common core and real world skills intended to prepare students for the workforce are being incorporated into the classroom in order to facilitate the learning of 21st century skills. Critical thinking and problem solving are included in the 21st century skillset, thus further embedding skills taught through art education within the standards of the current educational framework. According to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills as listed on the partnership for 21st century skills (p21.org), these skills include creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, communication, collaboration, information and communications technology (ICT), citizenship, life and career, and personal and social responsibility. Therefore, art education easily lends itself as an essential part of developing 21st century skills.

Using art criticism to discuss contemporary art encourages a broader definition of art. For example it motivates students to explore lesser known artists including contemporary artists not commonly included in the art historical canon, female artists and multi-cultural artists who explore different societal aspects including current events. Studying contemporary art can increase the likelihood of students finding appeal in the subject matter as it relates directly to their worldview and experiences. Furthermore, it also facilitates integration with other subjects such as social studies, political science, anthropology, etc.

CONCLUSION

Too often, criticism in an art classroom setting can be associated with negative commentary and critiques. However, when used as a supplement in the art classroom, criticism can be a tool to teach students how to subjectively evaluate images from

everyday life and foster development of communication skills, critical thinking, and problem solving. There is a need for art criticism to be reconceptualized as a means to facilitate meaningful engagement with art, as opposed to being a method of finding fault with works of art. In order to discover the best practices of using art criticism and discussion based techniques, I conducted a case study to observe three art classes throughout Austin, Texas in order to observe how art criticism methods are used to guide and enrich student discussions while looking at contemporary art.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Research for this study explored literature that focused on the following topics: the effects of Modernism and Postmodernism in art education, Postmodern art criticism, art criticism models, and the value of art criticism in an educational setting.

MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism in Art Education

In the 1940s, America emerged from WWII with an art scene at the forefront of the world. New York City had become the headquarters for a new art movement called Abstract Expressionism, which took the art world by storm. With its free, formless structure and an emphasis on the individuality of the artist, it "proved to be ideologically advantageous in promoting the cold war rhetoric during this post-WWII period" (Jagodzinski, 1997, p. 140). This "rhetoric" encouraged Modernist principles such as the promotion of individual creativity, freedom of thought, and democracy. Implementing these practices into the public school system was one of the ways to promote this cold war rhetoric and create a culture of democracy and creativity, principles that were the antithesis of the authority which had crumbled Europe and set America apart during this time. According to Jagodzinski (1997), the field of art education has been caught in the confines of these Modernist principles since then even though the greater art world has moved on.

According to art educator and critic Terry Barrett, Modernism promoted artistic ideals such as "belief in the uniqueness of the individual, creativity, originality, and artistic genius; a respect for the original and authentic work of art and the masterpiece"

(1994, p. 117). Individuality became one of the foremost concerns to Modernist artists. Art was considered to be an individual innovation; this view largely excluded representational art, appropriation, and kitsch from the arena of fine art because it was not the imaginings of the artist but rather it was thought to be nothing more than mimicry and copying. This Modernist-style was formalistic in its approach and proponents did not take into account the greater visual culture from which works of art grew, and "often avoided discussing concomitant views of culture and meaning" (Emery, 2002, p. 31). Narratives, representations, and deeper meanings were not part of the Modernist agenda. Through this world view, often described as art for art's sake, was the chosen method of creating and appreciating. Abstract Expressionism was the preferred artistic style of this time because it met all the criteria to be considered fine art by the critics of the era. In the domain of Modernism, popular art styles and visual culture (film, advertising, fashion, etc.) were "seen as second rate in relation to fine art… Art that draws on popular stereotypes is often regarded as the antithesis of real art" (Emory, 2002, p. 23). While Modernism does promote individual creativity and innovation, it can also be exclusionary to any other mode of expression. In a Modernist learning environment, this restricts the definition of art to a very narrow and formal point of view. When art is removed from the continuum of visual culture and isolated into the smaller category of "fine art," it becomes less accessible and less representative of the community needed to grant it validation.

Modernism was also very influential to the field of art education. Without the greater social implications, art was merely examined from a formalized aesthetic point of

view, devoid of cultural impact and without relation to other areas of study. According to Jagodzinski, "in the classroom art could be stripped of all radical potentiality" (1997, p. 140). With a specific focus on creativity and individualism, Modernism was interwoven into the general undercurrents of American culture. At a time when "art education was first viewed as a means for developing the democratic personality in children" (Freedman, 1987, p. 25), art instead became an object of elitism that could alienate artists whose work did not fit into these strict criteria. In this situation, art has very little social function or need thus is easily rendered unimportant, less beneficial in an environment which fosters learning and sometimes removed from the curriculum entirely. In an educational setting the ability to learn is restricted to one arena and art is learned only for the sake of conveying factual information such as art history, art techniques, and art terminology. These facets of art education are not taught to convey greater meaning but only as a means to an end. This approach is known as art for art's sake. It has the potential to render art classes less meaningful and can result in its removal from the curriculum. "Art is not conceived as a political arena and issues such as gender, culture and race are issues to be dealt with in other areas of the curriculum" (Emery, 2002, p. 32). This isolates the art classroom from the other core subjects taught in school and instead of cross over between different subjects, which would allow each classroom to bolster the other, the art room remains isolated. In order to overcome the isolation that Modernism can bring, a change needs to be made to provide for more inclusiveness: "The answer to this dilemma probably resides in the recognition that the Postmodern world incorporates both Modernist and Postmodern ways of working" (Emery, 2002, p. 3).

17

Postmodernism, rather than being a cohesive movement, is more of a break with Modernism. Inherent acceptance and multiple viewpoints related to cultural, social, and gender issues, can tend to be seen as a "huge range of incoherent and conflicting practices…. It is hard to know what postmodernism is" (Emory, 2002, p. 8). In the art classroom, the Postmodern paradigm can provide multiple, and even contradictory meanings, simultaneously. According to Barrett (1994), interpretation of any artwork can generate multiple acceptable interpretations about its meaning. Moreover, these interpretations are not exhaustive of the meanings that are discoverable in works of art. Postmodernism allows for the potential to take a wider range of beliefs and worldviews into account, thus, creating greater accessibility, accountability, and representation. One of the manifestations of a Postmodern art classroom is the encouragement of students to learn about all types of artists. To contrast, in art classrooms heavily influenced by Modernism, students are more generally taught information about famous artists. When learning about art history, "students are encouraged to study the work of accepted artists rather than unknown artists of lesser importance" (Emory, 2002, p. 24). In Postmodern art classrooms, the notion of narrative as opposed to mere chronology is introduced. Students learn about many artists from the same time period instead of studying famous but decontextualized artists and works of art. Students are encouraged to have a more holistic view of the culture surrounding the artists in order to gain a broader sense of the culture from which the art grew. Narratives enable not only famous artists to be studied but "postmodern art-teachers direct students to art by lesser known artists in addition to well-known artists. Students examine why some artists become well known and others

not" (Emery, 2002, p. 64). Narrative also takes the focus off the chronological art history time line. This stops the sequential time-based progression of art movements from being seen as improved styles or better. It helps to initiate the learning and appreciation of the cultural context as well as the art and artists.

Discussion, art criticism, and collaboration are also a bigger part of the Postmodern art classroom than in classrooms based only in Modernism. Students are encouraged to pull inspiration from other works of art that range from both well-known artists to obscure artists. According to Gude (2004), the potential of Postmodernism in art education expands the definition of art so that a wider audience can benefit from it and contribute to it.

ART CRITICISM

Art criticism can be easily misunderstood as more negative than it really is since the word "criticism" is synonymous with disapproval, highlighting mistakes, and disparagement. Though this approach is not always outside the scope of art criticism, a more common approach to criticism is focused on description, interpretation, highlighting noteworthy aspects of a work of art, and either creating or furthering the discourse about a work or works of art. Though art criticism deals with the appraisal of art objects, and is therefore objective, what art means to each individual is a subjective matter and can be deeply personal. Though art history and aesthetics can play a role in art criticism, providing important background information which enables a greater understanding of art, it is not what art criticism is. According to Wolff, "every responsible art critic draws more or less explicitly on aesthetics and art history, these disciplines are not central to

what art criticism does: analyze, describe, and evaluate specific works of art" (1997, p. 70). This view of art criticism removes the notion of value, judgment, and pronouncement and can render the art more of an open ended conversation "meant to further rather than end discourse about art; you want to further the discussion by inclusion rather than dismissive exclusions" (Barrett, 1994, p. 147).

One of the most important and central components of art criticism is description. In fact, description is a large part of criticism; more so than judgments about whether a work of art is good or bad. The word "criticism" may often be problematic. It can give art criticism the reputation of being judgmental and negative. "Although a popular misconception about art criticism is that it is primarily judgmental and negative in tone, in actuality, most of the words written by critics are descriptive and interpretive rather than judgmental, and positive in tone" (Barrett, 1994, p. 22). Through description, critics are able to highlight aspects of the work in order to provide a more detailed inspection. When writing or discussing visual art, especially when this art is not present, thorough description becomes even more necessary. Description is commonly one of the beginning steps of evaluating a work of art because it is necessary to become familiar with the work of art before evaluation can begin. Description can also be useful to someone who may not know what to think about a work of art. Creating an inventory of the components of a work of art may enable the viewer to notice things in the work that they had previously missed, thus changing their understanding and appreciation of the work. It would be difficult to explain an incomplete perspective of a work based on incomplete information and come up with holistic ideas.

In art criticism, description naturally leads to interpretation and at times can be combined with it. Every person who looks at a work of art is able to view it with a different perspective and different ideas about what the artist was trying to convey. Art criticism implies that communicating through art is not always clear or successful, however, "artwork is not necessarily about what the artist wanted it to be about" (Barrett, 1994, p. 75). The unique perspective of an art critic is no more or less valid than that of someone who does not consider themselves an art critic or an artist. According to Jagodzinski (1997), it becomes necessary to use our own words to convey what we think an artist has communicated. It further implies that we should interpret, to see beyond the specific images we see for deeper and more personal meanings.

However, closer inspection is often necessary in order to begin to interpret a work of art. Just a cursory glance at a work of art does not provide the information necessary to evaluate and understand the meaning of the work. This is one reason why the role of art criticism can be useful for anyone looking at a work of art and not just for professional art critics. While there is a tendency to view the reactions of art critics to works of art as the real meaning and as more true than lay reactions, according to Kalina (2003), in actuality art criticism can be a model for the personal experience of each spectator. Art criticism is concerned with meaning at a social or academic level as shareable commentary. While art critics may have a more informed opinion, artwork is still highly subjective and open to multiple interpretations. As such, these multiple interpretations do not pre-empt other readings but rather co-exist with them. Art, with its multiple interpretations and meanings, can be problematic and difficult to understand. It is

possible that an artist intended something different than what is understood by the viewer. It is also possible that two people understand the same work of art to mean completely different things.

Humility, an important part of criticism, reminds the art critic to not make final judgments as to whether a work of art is successful or unsuccessful. It is not necessary to make a judgment in order to understand a work of art, to know whether or not the work is good or bad, and that judgment is almost impossible to make without further information. In addition, since appreciation of art is subjective, judgments of good and bad are not universal and do not assist with interpretation. As Wolff has stated, "a critic simply cannot be that final. Critics can advise and recommend; they can and should alert readers to new talent, introduce them to new trends or ideas, and point out exceptionally brilliant or tawdry painterly performances" (1997, p. 35) but the need to create a final judgment is unnecessary to art criticism. Criticism is widely viewed as something that should open up a dialogue about a work of art as opposed to a final judgment that shuts down further interpretation. This view of art criticism can lead to personal and meaningful understanding of works of art. The need for art criticism to be right is less important than the need for criticism to be meaningful, enlightening, and informative. In the words of Wolff, "art criticism is only informed opinion. No matter how wise or brilliant a critic's opinion may be, it is still only an opinion and not an infallible, scientifically established judgment" (1997, p. 77).

A popular misconception about art criticism is that it is judgmental, dismissive, "primarily judgmental and negative in tone" (Barrett, 1994, p. 22). Of course, critics

differ on the importance they place on value judgments but this only further reinforces the fact that there will be multiple perspectives of a work of art and that they can all be valid and worthwhile to explore. "Judgments without interpretations are irresponsive to the artwork and perhaps irresponsible to the reader" (Barrett, 1994, p. xii). A distinction between preference and value is an important notion to keep in mind for most things we encounter; art work is no different.

> That is, a work I like may not be as good as another artwork I don't like. I may understand that one work of art is better than another, but I may still enjoy the former more than the latter. I can like whatever I want to like. If we hold our preferences with confidence, then we might be in a better psychological position to critically and appreciatively attend to works that are beyond our range of tolerance. (Barrett, 1994, p.107)

If understanding is the desired goal of art criticism, then personal response is an important component. Description and interpretation are steps necessary to obtaining that understanding: "Finding personal significance or meaning for one's life in a work of art is one of the many benefits of contemplating art" (Barrett, 1994, p. 77). Ideally, the understanding will not be final and will grow and change based on further understanding of art and other people's opinions.

Postmodern Art Criticism

During the 1960s, the professional and critical view of what was considered art underwent a radical change. The predominant attitude coming out of WWII was that of a Modernist approach which emphasized formal qualities expressed in abstract or non-objective styles. Modernism focused on and favored works that were the individual conceptions of the artist. In the 1940s, with Europe in ruins, America emerged as the

23

cultural capital of the world. Abstract Expressionism promoted the American cold war rhetoric of individualism and glorified the individualistic approach of the artist, contrary to the tenets of the Fascist regime. This novel style was one of the "key movements which embodied the modernist drive for free expression and liberation from orthodoxy in art" (Emery, 2002, p. 17). While some movements such as the dada and pop artists challenged the notion of originality in art, the general thrust of progressive, and even isolated, individualism continued.

Modernist Art Criticism

Two eminent art critics who embody the changing views that describe the shift in artistic values which occurred in the 1960s were respectively Clement Greenberg and Lawrence Alloway. Greenberg was one of the most influential art critics of the 20th century and a champion of Abstract Expressionism. Greenberg and the Abstract Expressionist artists were enormously influential during their time and "in tandem are generally credited with moving the center of the high art world from Paris to New York" (Barrett, 1994, p. 114). Greenberg's formalist approach to art criticism was generally associated with a disdain for popular culture. He favored observing art from a formalized aesthetic point of view more concerned with the elements and principles of art and the mediums used to create it. One of the fundamental tenets of Greenberg's version of art criticism that set the tone of the art world during the mid-1900s was that "art must be an autonomous aesthetic object that is beheld in such a way that something happens to the beholder, otherwise it is prone to what Michael Fried called theatricality, non-art and bad art" (Jagodzinski, 1997, p. 141). Modernism strove to thwart "ever present danger that art

24

may be reduced to decoration or wallpaper" (Jagodzinski, 1997, p. 141) thus removing kitsch, advertising, and popular imagery from being used in the realm of fine art.

The Switch to Postmodern Art Criticism

When taking a formalistic approach to criticism, "form is the only criterion by which art should be judged. In this view, the realms of art and social concerns are by their natures distinct, and the artist is alienated or separated from society" (Barrett, 1994, p. 103). With a more accepting and open view of art perpetuated by art critic Lawrence Alloway, Pop Art brought to light that the notion of applying values of traditional philosophy to art born of modernity was no longer appropriate. Pop Art was not only reflective of the dominance of mass culture and consumerism in postwar American society, but also as a commentary on worldviews and the factors necessary for the formation of these views.

The imagery of pop art grew out of everyday life, a subject that was anathema to Formalists. Pop Artists such as Roy Lichtenstein used comic book imagery to make art with important narrative content, a concept that formalists felt should be banished from painting. According to Barrett (1994), by placing their versions of comic strips, soup cans, and cheeseburgers in galleries and art museums, pop artists sought to erase the boundaries between high art and low art and between an elite and a main stream audience. This less formalist approach began with a greater focus on society. Through this Postmodern lens, art was not considered a distancing object of elitism, but was on a continuum which took into account what had previously been considered high art and low art. On this continuum, rather than viewing art as a separate and supposedly higher

entity, Alloway viewed art as part of a network that also included movies, advertising, graphics, product design, and fashion.

Alloway also minimized the critic's role as judge. He stressed description and interpretation over critical evaluation which assigned value, stating that his was "an approach that does not depend for an existence on the exclusion of most of the symbols that people live by" (Kalina, 2006, p. 52). Alloway's criticism was descriptive and interpretive, about a wide range of artists and movements, and "politically pro-active in its inclusion of under-represented populations of artists and its placement of art works in historical and cultural contexts" (Barrett, 1991, p. 172). Alloway brought topicality into the arena of art criticism. His was a radical outlook that signaled a shift from Modernist to Postmodernist thought although, at the time, it was not named as such. This change in critical thinking began mid-twentieth century, however, was not named until much later.

Though Postmodernism does chronologically come after Modernism, it is not a term which refers to a style or movement after Modernism. As opposed to the later Postmodernist approach which links the artist to society, "art in modernist terms is concerned with finding the link between feeling (the sensate experience) and form (the medium)" (Emery, 2002, p. 31). In fact, the diversity of Postmodern art presents a huge range of incoherent and conflicting practices. As opposed to a cohesive and easily identifiable movement, "postmodernism is more a split with modernism, a stated break with all, most, or some (depending on how radical the view), modernist theories" (Emery, 2002, p. 37). The shift in critical perspective went from form to content and from aesthetic to socially defined relevance.

26

ART CRITICISM MODELS

There are many different models of art criticism and interpretation. The underlying theories behind these methods are meant to empower individuals and to foster their reflective and critical capacities. According to Hamblen (1991), art criticism does not need to be a concise evaluation or answer specific questions though many models provide such specifics. Criticism also has the capacity to be a verbalization of the process of making personal meaning out of art objects. This is the capacity which I believe is most useful in the art classroom setting and is most beneficial to the field of art education.

Formal Analysis

The most commonly used method of art criticism is the Feldman model which provides for a more formal analysis of art objects. This formulaic approach offers a guideline for interpreting works of art based primarily on formal properties inherent in the work. The four main tasks of the Feldman model are to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate or judge. This focus of this approach can be limiting because the emphasis is still directed primarily toward the formal qualities of the work as opposed to personal understanding or universal experience. The Feldman model has the intended purpose of taking the individual "away from the language and associational meanings of his/her everyday life" (Hamblen, 1991, p. 9). This distance can make these methods less accessible in an educational setting or to those not accustomed to interpreting art. It can result in less personal meaning making and connection to the work of art being evaluated. Since the focus of this model is on formal properties, there is little room for personal

interpretation. If art is assessed on its formal properties, the art viewing experience is less likely to vary from person to person based on their unique perspective. Feldman (1994) maintains that the best interpretation of art is that which uses the most evidence from the work. Freedman (2003) criticizes this approach saying that these types of interpretations are merely "pseudoscientific investigations that imply the achievement of a preconceived, best outcome" (p. 92). However, there are useful applications of the Feldman model as it relates to understanding the formal qualities of a work of art: "More than any other approach formal analysis will help to develop your "eye" for art. There is no substitute for the careful, systematic observation of the work of art that this approach provides" (Gill, 1993, p. 95).

When describing a work of art using the Feldman model, the focus is on the visual qualities of the work. This includes content and subject matter in representational works and abstract elements in nonrepresentational pieces. This stage is akin to taking inventory, the viewer lists everything they see in the work. The next step is analysis. This step focuses on the formal elements of art such as principles of design and other formal considerations. Questions such as "how does the use of color impact the overall effect of the work?" or "how does the use of the elements and principles of art enhance the image?" are also part of the analysis stage of the evaluation. The next step is interpretation. Here the viewer proposes ideas for possible meanings of the work based on evidence seen in the image. This step allows for questions such as "what does it mean?" or "what was the artist trying to convey?" The last step of the Feldman model is judgment or evaluation. The nature of the order of these steps is intended to "postpone

judgment until the work has been studied" (Freedman, 2003, p. 90) and the viewer can discuss the overall strengths/success/merit of the work after understanding more about it. This step is usually about personal perspective and breaks with the intention of the rest of the model during which the formal properties and artists intentions are evaluated. This reflecting activity is the culmination of the evaluation and is derivative of the previous steps. This personal response section of the Feldman model is almost an after-thought since the formal evaluation leads to this evaluation.

Harry Broudy's aesthetic scanning approach (1987) is very similar to the Feldman model in that the aim is describing, analyzing, interpreting, and making judgments about works of art. The idea is to enable the viewer to analyze and talk about the sensory, formal, technical and expressive properties of a particular work of art. The first step of this method is to discuss the sensory properties of the art, which are the elements of line, shape, texture, color, etc. The formal analysis provides for attention to the way the art work is organized. When using aesthetic scanning, discussions of principles of art such as unity, repetition, balance, contrast, and rhythm are the initial focus of the evaluation. The expressive properties are the mood and feeling or philosophical concepts of the work. The expressive properties in aesthetic scanning are very much like interpretation in the Feldman model. The technical properties are how the work was created such as the medium, tools used, and the method used to make the work. This method, like the Feldman model, leaves personal responses until the very end of the evaluation and also only deal with what can be found in the image as opposed to exploring social, contextual, and personal connections. The ability to complete the steps of both the Feldman model

and aesthetic scanning requires that the viewer using these methods have command of technical art ideas and terminology. These models do not provide for one not versed in art vocabulary to come to a fuller appreciation of works of art when using these methods.

The Liz Lerman (2003) critical response process is more about critiques of works in which the artist is present. However, this approach can also be used in the same capacity as the Feldman model and aesthetic scanning. This process was originally created for dance but can work similarly with many forms of artistic expression. This model places two responsibilities on the viewer: not to bring their own agenda to the work they are responding to, and have a desire for the artist to do their best work. It is important for responders to not bring their own bias and expectations to the process. Like the approaches of Feldman and Broudy, there are four steps in this criticism model. The first step in Lerman's critical process is affirmation and observation. Viewers give the artist positive feedback about the work and discuss what it meant to them: "The critical response process begins with the philosophy that meaning is at the heart of an artist's work, and to start with meaning is at the heart of the artistic act" (Lerman, 2003, p. 19). The next step in this critical process holds the artist as a questioner in which they ask the viewer questions about their work. This is a way to understand if their intentions were successfully conveyed. Questions can range anywhere from general to specific.

> No prescription dictates which kind of questions will be the most effective. Artists can consider several factors in formulating their questions: Where am I in the process of developing the work? Working from the base of information I've heard in step one, where would I like to expand or focus the response? Do I want an

overall gauge of the work's effectiveness, or focused guidance about particular challenges? (Lerman, 2003, p. 20)

The third step is for the viewers of the art work to ask neutral questions of the artist. This neutrality ensures that the questions do not sound leading or judgmental. Questions can be asking for factual or explanatory information. If the viewer has an opinion it can be worded into a neutral question. For example, instead of stating a negative opinion such as "it's too blue," a more neutral way of asking this question would be "why did you use so much blue?" The last step in this process is permissioned opinions. The viewer first names the topic of their opinion and then asks the artist if it is ok to state it. The artist has the option of saying that they do not want to hear feedback about their work. If there is a criticism that can't be stated in the form of a neutral question, responders can express these opinions about the work to the artist after they have asked permission to do so. It seems redundant to continually have to ask for permission, however, this gives the artist control over this sensitive step in the critique process.

These forms of evaluation, when juxtaposed with more open ended methods of criticism, may be considered rather artless because they do not take into account the Postmodern ideals of context or multiple perspectives. As Oscar Wilde said, "The highest criticism is in its way more creative than the creation" (Grant, 2013, p. 1). The previous methods mainly focus on formal properties, moreover what is contained within the artwork as opposed to the person and culture that created it. When looking at these three criticism models, it is worth mentioning that each of the various models have different

aims. While the methods discussed so far aim for a formalized appraisal of works of art, there are Postmodern and multicultural lenses through which interpretation can occur.

Constructivist Methods

The focus of the criticism models previously discussed have been directed toward the art object and reasons motivating the decisions made by the artist. In the following method of analyzing art, the focus shifts to the viewer's personal reactions and moves away from formal interpretations. Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) were developed at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) by Philip Yenawine and Abigail Housen. VTS (2013) is a teaching strategy which has been implemented in schools and institutions and provides for an open-ended discussion of visual art in which the viewer constructs her/his own meaning of the work. This construction is based on observation and previous knowledge. However, it is not necessary that this previous knowledge include information or terminology specific to art.

The basis of VTS is to ask three central questions: a. What's going on in this picture? b. What do you see that makes you say that? And c. What more can we find? This style of questioning allows for those who are not as familiar with art terms or the elements and principles of art to find a point of connection and accessibility when analyzing a work of art that is more relevant to their knowledge base: "People with little contact with art apply what they know from their own lives to make sense of what they see" (Yenawine, 2013, p. 5). In order to answer this open ended question, "What's going on in this picture?" the viewer must take inventory of the work and identify different

aspects of it in order to make decisions about what they think it means. This line of questioning is also intended to reassure the viewer that there is no right or wrong answer but that the interpretation is one of many different possibilities. The next question "What do you see that makes you say that?" asks for reasoning and a defense of viewpoint. This question is also a clarifying of the first step, the viewer has already been using their eyes to decide what narrative they believe is taking place in the work and this step is a verbalization of that process. The last question of "What more can we find?" asks the viewer to continue looking at the work to find more information. Short attention spans and an unwillingness to continue with the same image may be of concern, however, according to Yenawine (2013), "given something worthwhile to examine and pertinent prompts to follow, students will examine a subject for longer than most teachers have time" (p. 26).

This open ended form of questioning, conducted when analyzing a work of art, is influenced by constructivist learning theories. Proponents of this theory suggest that people come to understand new information and approach the world through accessing previous knowledge:

> In other words, an expressive object, regardless of the meaning of the production for the artist, does not have inherent meaning; the experience of an audience with visual culture makes it meaningful. More recently, cognitive scientists have shown this experimentally and demonstrated the importance of previous knowledge in the construction of knowledge. (Freedman, 2003, p. 69)

Putting imagery into personal context can prove to be a powerful tool when a student is attempting to appreciate a work of art. Since this constructivist approach is rooted within a person's own experience and associations, it can lead to a greater capacity

33

for art appreciation and can make it easier to find works more understandable and relatable. This can provide for greater retention of learning which, according to Yenawine (2013), was one of the main reasons this method was developed.

What Lev Vygotsky called the Zone of Proximal Development is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In this view, the meaning of a work does not reside within its form but rather is constructed in the context of the viewer's cultural, historical, and social experience.

If the ways in which we make associations to form new ideas have their origins in sensory experience as well as reflections on that experience, then both the formative and constructivist methods of evaluation are useful to the learning process. Cognitive theory researchers generally agree on the importance of prior knowledge in learning and specifically most of the learning that occurs in life is either incorporated within prior knowledge or modifies prior knowledge. As a result, from an educational perspective "interpretation must include critical reflection. The infusion of critical analysis and interpretation when making and viewing visual culture leads to learning conceived as a highly interactive process" (Freedman, 2003, p. 76).

ART CRITICISM IN EDUCATION

Art criticism can be an important tool used not only for developing informed opinions about art, but also for helping students find their own critical voice. This is beneficial to the field of art education because it can add depth to the art classroom by

teaching skills other than art production techniques. This is why the prevailing view of art criticism needs to be transformed away from both negative commentary and mostly formal analysis.

Changing the Way Art Criticism is Perceived

According to Wolff (1997), if our interests are developed out of a history of rewarding personal experiences, then "we can expect that any future interest in art that students develop will come about in the same way" (Wolff, 1997, p. 177). The word "criticism" can be associated with judgment and lack of approval. Art criticism has the reputation of being mostly a method of critiquing and finding fault with works of art. "Some educators have equated art criticism with having teachers and students make negative remarks about works of art but if this were actually what criticism was about, one could readily understand a reluctance to use it in the classroom" (Wolff, 1997, p. 134). Criticism, in the definition it is most associated, is not the aspect of art criticism that would be of use to art educators, especially not in a classroom intended for k-12 because the fear of being criticized and critiqued can be stifling in an artistic capacity. "One of the major reasons art criticism is brought into the classroom is to help students learn not only how to come to their own conclusions about art but also how to feel secure enough to defend them if challenged" (Wolff, 1997, p. 112).

In its most useful capacity, art criticism is not actually about criticizing but more about discussion, evaluation, and working towards having an understanding about works of art. When used this way, art can be an important developmental tool. It can teach students how to empathize with and respond intelligently to works of art which according

35

to Wolff (1997) is at the heart of the creative experience. Though it has its place, it is not necessary to limit the use of art criticism to discussion of the student's own work in the art classroom. It does not need to be a tool primarily used for artistic improvement. Therefore, art criticism should be reconceptualized as a means to facilitate meaningful engagement with art.

Developing the Critical Voice

Art critic and educator Wolff asks the question why is it important to be able to respond to and analyze works of art. One of the answers is because "being able to empathize with and respond intelligently to works of art goes to the very heart of what creative, responsive, art experiences are all about. Not to be able to do so, on the other hand, is to be able to respond only to art already labeled, judged, and acclaimed" (Wolff, 1997, p. 67). An inherent aspect of evaluating works of art in this way is the Postmodern concept of the validity of multiple perspectives. In the educational setting as in a professional setting, "art criticism derived from one tradition will not meet the needs of all communities" (Blandy, 1991, p. 2). Every person responds to works of art differently. When students are told what to think about a work of art, such as in the labeling of certain works of art as masterpieces, the views of what good art can be become very narrow. Art critic and educator Terry Barrett (1994) supports diversity of views and states that "no single interpretation is exhaustive of the meaning of an artwork" (p. 77). This notion can be very empowering for students who "typically base evaluations upon a narrow set of value criteria" (Wolff, 1997, p. 146). This narrow criteria is at least partially due to their lack of experience in exploring personal meaning in art and also, to

some extent, because of the way that art criticism is commonly approached in schools. It will be easier to teach a broader viewpoint of a work of art, even of the most established works, when using art criticism because one of the current models of art criticism is to include multiple viewpoints.

Skills Learned

When critical inquiry is used in art education in this capacity, the art classroom has the possibility of being more than just an environment wherein to learn art production skills. Lessons in anything from social interaction to meaning making are explored. Some examples of these skills, which are not exclusive to arts based education, are listening skills, confidence, analytical skills, and knowledge of current events.

In class discussions students must listen to what other students say regarding works of art, and respond thoughtfully to what has been said by their peers. This creates a necessity to not only pay attention but also to listen and consider personal responses to the opinions of others. By incorporating personal responses to works of art, classroom discussion becomes more of a conversation that students can engage in rather than struggle to regurgitate information.

Students will find confidence by becoming more familiar with how to clarify their ideas in order to respond and communicate with thoughtfulness. Evaluation and discussion can help students feel less inhibited as they are encouraged to express their opinions and recognize that not only are differences in opinion acceptable and anticipated, but shifts in opinion should happen as perspectives change. Using art

criticism as a way to facilitate discussion in a classroom can help students see themselves as both creators and consumers of art.

Art criticism not only equips students to analyze difficult works of art, but also activates a greater awareness of critical inquiry: "Higher level thinking depends on the development of analytical skills and an understanding of contexts of analysis" (Efland, 1996, p. 118). These analytical skills can acquaint students not only with ways to form questions about works of art but are also applicable outside the classroom. For example, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills Organization asserts that every student needs 21st century knowledge and skills to succeed as effective citizens, workers, and leaders.

Becoming proficient in the skills necessary to participate in these art criticism activities can arm students with a better ability to assess current issues that effect the society in which they live. An awareness of the fundamental relevance of culture to artistic production and appreciation is vital to this understanding. Engaging students in art critical discussion methods "exposes students to different points of view, giving them the opportunity to reflect on their attitudes and values on important social issues" (Wolff, 1997, p. 182).

With the push to incorporate 21st century skills into the school system (Khadaroo, 2009), when using art criticism and discussion in this way, the art classroom becomes even more indispensable. 21st century skills are a list of skills commonly associated not only with academic achievement but social and personal success as well. Schools are beginning to try to align classroom environments with real world settings to better prepare students for college as well as a globally competitive workforce. This new skill

set includes creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, communication, collaboration, information and communications technology (ICT), citizenship, life and career, and personal and social responsibility. Changing the role of art criticism in the classroom is one way to better align art education with these new educational values and expectations.

Art Making

The creation process is deeply personal. When art is connected to personal relevance it creates a more unified art experience. With personal relevance the art experience can make more sense to the artist from a production standpoint and can strive for a greater sense of empowerment. The lives and artwork of world renowned artists such as Picasso, Monet, and Van Gogh are frequently introduced into k-12 art curriculum. A few standard popular images such as Van Gogh's *Starry Night* and Monet's *Water Lilies* are integrated in many art lessons and introduced as stylistic inspiration or to teach about the elements and principles of art. As opposed to teaching about the meaning associated with the works, they are merely a vehicle for factual and memorizable information. Typical art lessons rarely delve into a deeper context about the works. Treating art like any other subject and expecting rote memorization is sometimes a tactic used in art education. However, this tactic does not work toward a deeper understanding of the material and does not translate naturally into the production of art: "Making and discourse are seen as co-dependent ways to construct meaning in art programs" (Emery, 2002, p. 61). For this reason students must engage in both of these processes in order to understand artistic meaning, which comes from both what is made

and what is said about it. Meaning is socially constructed, therefore, discussion is an important factor in learning.

Enhancing Art Appreciation

If students are sometimes puzzled by a work of art and realize that they lack relevant understanding about it, more often than not they believe what they observe is the only way to see and understand that work. A discussion based evaluation of a famous work of art will be more meaningful to a student than exclusively learning an established view point, because they have opportunities to express their own ideas and insights. One of the ways to encourage students to begin interpreting art work is to have them find personal relevance within art: "Works of art frequently affect viewers in more personal ways. In prompting them to reflect upon their own life situations, art can contribute to the development of a person's attitudes and personality" (Wolff, 1997, p. 171). Generally, people tend to like works of art because of personal reasons; it is either relevant to their lives or it is not. When a student seeks to find relevance in a work of art, critical inquiry has begun. Finding personal significance or meaning related to one's life in a work of art is one of the many benefits of engaging in thorough discussion and production of art. In fact, coming to understand a work of art results in personal experience and once the process of critical inquiry has been learned, this process may be applied to other imagery the student will be confronted with both in and out of the classroom. Art will become more accessible through the analytical methods learned in the process of critical thinking.

Facilitating Discussion and Art Criticism Techniques

There are a variety of methods to accomplish the goal of integrating art criticism into the k-12 art classroom. These goals are more easily reached when teachers can step out of the role of lecturer and ease students toward uncovering a more personally relevant understanding of the works of art:

> Personal experience with works of art is the beginning of critical inquiry; this experience is not passive but involves an active search for meaning. Teachers can assist students in this search by first eliciting spontaneous and genuine responses to works of art and then having a class reflect upon the adequacy of those responses. (Wolff, 1997, p. 175)

Encouraging the students to look at a work of art and make sense of it on their own prior to an instructor's contribution is a way to enable students to begin to build personal meaning in relation to the works of art. This creates a sense of appreciation instead of rote memorization of formally established ideas. By this guideline, it would make sense to provide opportunity for students to respond to a work of art before presenting facts about the work to them.

Depending on the number of students a teacher has, whole class discussions are a very good way to promote skills that reach beyond merely learning how to look at a work of art:

> Whole class discussion is one of the most important and useful ways of introducing critical inquiry. As class size grows beyond fifteen students, teachers will find it increasingly difficult to involve everyone. More vocal students will tend to dominate, and those who are shy or timid are likely to be overlooked. Small group discussion is one way to ensure the participation of all students. (Wolff, 1997, p. 210)

41

One option when conducting small group discussions of three or four students is to ask for stream of consciousness talking. Each student takes turns speaking "for three or four minutes, spontaneously describing their thoughts and feelings as they scrutinize a work of art" (Wolff, 1997, p. 211). The other students in the group listen and can even take notes on any part of this that resonates with them or that they would like to further discuss. After each student in the small group has expressed themselves, each group can present the main ideas of their group discussion to the whole class. Introducing art in a way that challenges students to react to works of art and compare their reactions to the responses of others can engage students. Students can also compare and contrast works of art, as opposed to comparing reactions to a single work. While interpretation of art work can be achieved by writing, discussions are advantageous because talking is faster than writing and it may provide for more rapid dissemination of ideas amongst the group.

Teachers can best promote discussion by letting the students talk about the works of art. Keeping the questions open ended as opposed to asking for correct yes or no questions keeps discussion going. In doing so, students are less afraid of being wrong or not knowing the answer because they do not have the necessary information.

Art criticism can be an important tool used not only for developing informed opinions about art, but also for helping students to find their own critical voice. This is beneficial to the field of art education because it can add depth to the lessons that are taught and learned in the art classroom. It can also introduce skills and knowledge other than art technique, rendering the arts even more invaluable in the k-12 education setting. This is why the prevailing view of art criticism needs to be changed from something

42

negative, to being an important tool that can go hand in hand with meaningful art making

and discussion.

Chapter 3: Methodology

INTRODUCTION

For this study, I conducted qualitative research by adopting case study as my methodology. Using this approach as my guideline, I began to illustrate a portrayal of the way three public school art educators in Texas used art criticism techniques and discussion to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art. In order to accomplish this I diligently transcribed all interviews and observations. I gathered data from interviews and observations in order to triangulate the data and find themes to help me answer my research question and I maintained qualitative validity in several ways such as voice recording and accurately transcribing the semi-structured interviews with the participants before and after observing their classrooms in which the phenomenon took place. Though many of these factors are limitations to my study, my scope is also specific to the techniques used by only three educators working in similar demographics which, according to Creswell (2009), is typical of qualitative research.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

For this study I conducted qualitative research by adopting case study as my methodology. "Qualitative observations are those in which the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site" (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). Using this approach as my guideline, I began to illustrate a portrayal of the way three public school art educators in Texas commonly used art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art.

CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Case study is the qualitative form of research that I used for this investigaton. "Case studies are a (qualitative) strategy in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2009, p. 227). This was the best option for conducting research on this topic because the data obtained from the observations were intrinsic to answering the research question. Ultimately the researcher must make choices regarding how the data is collected because all information is filtered through the eyes and ears of the researcher. This method of research is adaptable to the researcher and there are many choices and different ways of documenting evidence. I focused on grasping the methods and techniques of these art educators, identifying the implementation of art criticism and discussion techniques, and pulling commonalities and themes from the data. In addition to this, descriptive, person-centered data was more in fitting with my case study instead of capturing data through numbers as is common through quantitative research. The sites of my research were schools around the greater Austin area in two different school districts, specifically a middle school, elementary, and high school art classroom. The cases are limited to the art educator's techniques of using art criticism and discussion to teach their students about contemporary art and were designed to study the art educator's methods and techniques in this specific situation. The importance of being able to observe this phenomenon firsthand made me choose case study as my research method. By studying how art educators utilize these techniques, I attempted to gain an understanding of the phenomena that would help me answer my research problem. Creswell (2009) defines case study as

"bounded by time and activity," and researchers "collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" (p. 227).

The reason why I adopted case study as my research method is because observing the phenomenon in action was fundamental to my research topic in which I wanted to find out how public school art educators in Texas used art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art. I wanted to focus on the phenomenon as it is manifested in a public school art classroom setting. I understood that the contextual information such as setting, arrangement of classroom, and participant information must be interwoven into the descriptions of the phenomenon in order to generate a thorough explanation of the case.

PARTICIPANTS

A primary reason for selecting to conduct my research at these three particular schools is because of convenience sampling. I already had information regarding the educational goals and processes of these three art instructors. I met these teachers and was able to question them about their use of art criticism and discussion in the classroom while attending a teacher's panel they participated in as guest speakers at The University of Texas (UT) during the spring semester 2013. Several local art educators discussed their experiences teaching art in the classroom. The student teachers asked the teachers questions at the end of the presentation. My question was if any of these teachers used art criticism or discussion to facilitate learning about contemporary art in their classrooms. Several of the teachers said they did use these criticism and discussion techniques in their classroom and that they did teach their students about contemporary artists. They also

described these situations and a few of their experiences while doing so. Since my research would involve human subjects, I was required to propose my research to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before beginning. Before beginning the IRB and school district IRB process I spoke personally with these instructors and asked if they would concede to be participants in my research. Luckily they were all interested in doing so.

According to Creswell (2009) purposefully selecting participants to best help the researcher understand the research problem "does not necessarily suggest random sampling or selection of a large number of participants and sites" (Creswell, 2009, p. 128). The way in which I hand-picked my sample to observe reveals a potential bias in the study, however based on the nature of qualitative research this sample would best help me as the researcher come to understand my research question of how public school art educators in Texas use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art. Since I personally selected the participants these results are not generalizable as a standard for art classrooms in Texas. According to Creswell (2009), participant observation can be obtrusive and invades the life of the informant; sensitive information is frequently revealed. Also, in order to protect the privacy of the participants, it is necessary to mask names of people, places, and activities. Therefore all the names of the participants and the locations in which they teach have been changed.

Karen Hughes at Spring Lake Elementary School

The first instructor I interviewed and observed was Karen Hughes who worked at Spring Lake Elementary School just north of Austin, Texas. Spring Lake Elementary school has an enrollment of 823 students from Kindergarten through fifth grade. Karen is

in her fifties and has taught kindergarten through fifth grade elementary art for 22 years. Her classroom was very inviting and beautifully decorated with a *Starry Night* mural painted on one wall and the tinkling of wind chimes as you walked in the door. She had short brown hair and dressed in art inspired clothing. When I came to observe her class she was wearing knee high *Starry Night* socks to match the mural in her art room. She explained it was crazy sock day at the school.
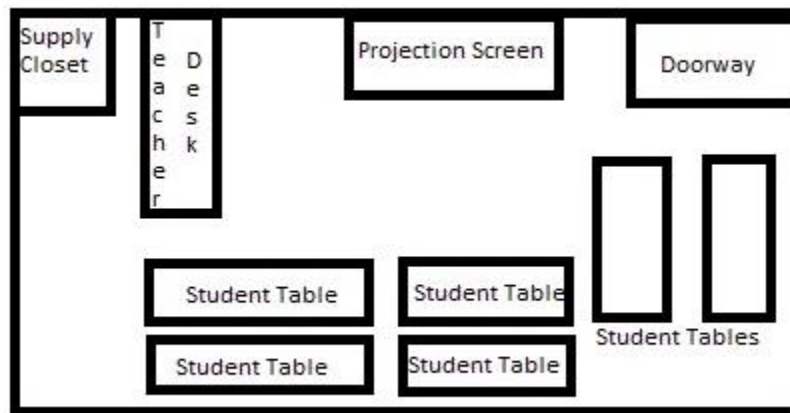
Figure 1: Karen Hughes Classroom

There were several tables (See figure 1) in Karen's room which enabled 3 or 4 children to be seated at each table. On the day of my observation there were 25 students present in her class. Her desk was located in the back corner of the classroom facing out towards the students. Behind her desk in the corner was the supply closet. The projector screen was located centrally in the classroom between her desk and the entrance so that all the desks were arranged in front of it for easy viewing. During my observation of her class she spent most of her time standing near this projection screen in front of all the students. Near the projector was an easel with a large print of Leonardo DaVinci's Mona

Lisa with the words "show me your Mona Lisa" printed across it. During our interview she pointed it out to me explaining that a particularly useful call and response exercise she likes to use to get the attention of her students is to say "Mona" to which her students respond "Lisa," and then students know it is time to pay attention. This interview was the first time I visited Karen's classroom and we chatted about methods that she has used to teach her students about contemporary artists. I was excited to hear that her examples were adapted to suit a wide range of students. While we discussed my research topic at length, we also chatted casually about her daughter's wedding and she gave me advice on contemporary artist lesson plans for younger students for my immediate use, since I had just gotten a job in early childhood art education. By the end of the interview we hugged goodbye because it seemed like we were old friends.

Elisabeth Daniels at Forest Ranch High School

Elisabeth Daniels has been teaching art for 30 years and was currently in her 7th year of teaching at Forest Ranch High School, which has a large student population of 1778 students. She is the department chair and teaches advanced drawing. She is in her fifties. Her students vary between grades 9 through 12. As with Karen Hughes, the first time I came to Elizabeth's classroom was in order to conduct a semi-structured interview before the observation took place. Her classroom was full of several large tables and many cabinets were arranged along the perimeter of the room (See figure 2). The day of my observation the class size was small; there were only 14 students present. Her desk was situated in the back corner of the classroom but she did not spend much time at it. In

between her desk and the door into the classroom was the projector screen. On the wall

facing the screen was a large white board.
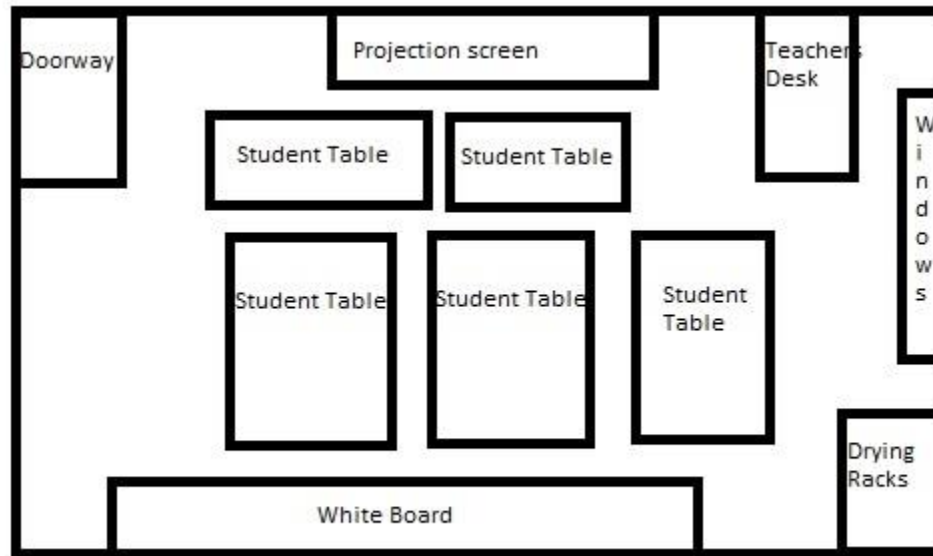
Figure 2 Elisabeth Daniels Classroom

During my observation I sat next to the white board in front of the drying racks in

the other back corner in order to be out of the way. There was a large AC unit inside the

room in front of an equally large window that took up the greater part of the back wall of

the classroom. Unfortunately, whenever the AC unit came on it was a bit difficult to hear

the audio recording from my observations.

Felicia Smith at Creek Bed Middle School

Felicia Smith has been teaching art for three years at Creek Bed Middle School. I

previously met her in a graduate level class that we enrolled in together at The University

of Texas at Austin (UT). She has blonde hair and, in her late 20s, is the youngest of the

participants in this study. Her classroom had 9 tables organized into two rows oriented between the back of the classroom and the entrance (See Figure 3).

Figure 3 Felicia Smith's Classroom
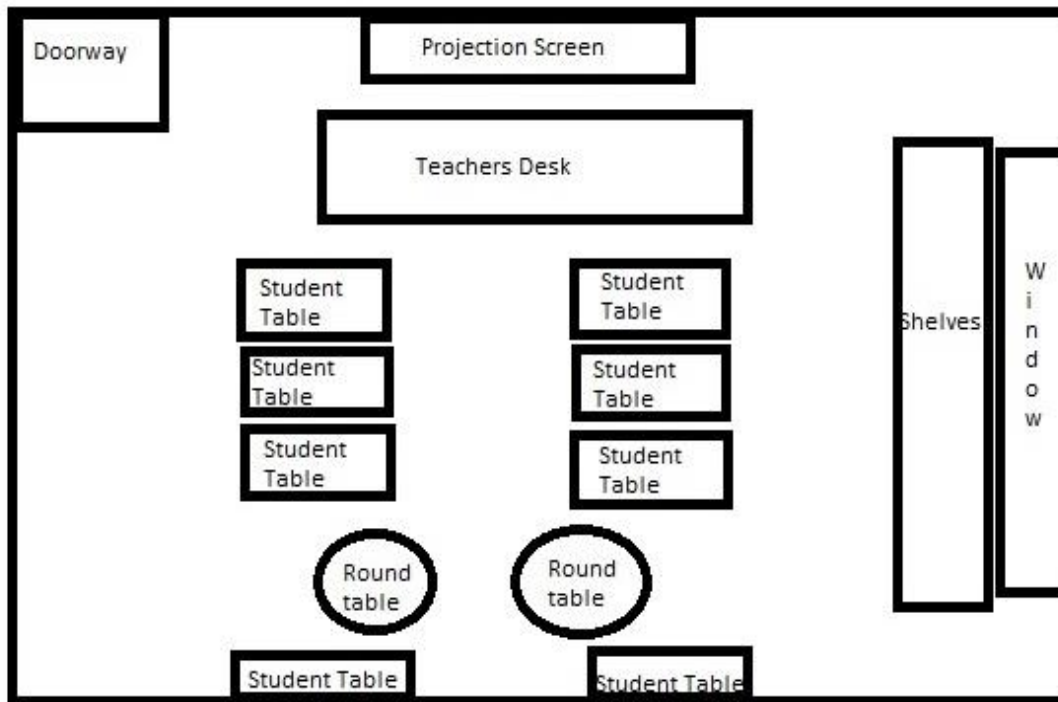
Figure 3 Felicia Smith's Classroom

Each table could accommodate 4 students, though some had a smaller group since the class only had about 25 students that day. Felicia taught grades six althrough eight although the class I observed was all 8th graders. Her desk was at the front of the classroom to the left as you walked in, and the projector screen was behind her desk. While observing I sat on a stool in front of the supply closet off to the side of the classroom so as not to interfere. However, she let me know that she had discussed my presence with her students and they were wary of me being there because they had few

outsiders in the classroom. Across from me was a wall of windows with shelves in front of them used to hold art supplies such as paper and extra pencils, art objects such as small sculptures, and objects that were probably used for still-lifes. In the middle of the room dividing the rows of tables were two round tables. These tables are usually for holding the necessary items that will be used during the class period. On the day I was in her classroom, these round tables had objects on them intended as still-life subjects that were used after the discussions took place. There were enough objects that each table of students could have one object to share amongst themselves. There was a high heel shoe, a leather-bound travel diary, a wooden fish, a silver dish, and a few other items.

DATA COLLECTION

The data collected for this study came from semi-structured interviews and observations. This aligns with case study data collection techniques because answering my research question of how Texas public school art instructors use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art could best be accomplished by observing the teachers in their classrooms. In addition to observations, I interviewed each art instructor both before and after each observation. The interviews were semi-structured and happened face-to-face.

Prior to collecting my data, I went through The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board (IRB) process during May and June 2013. I also went through the Round Rock Independent School District IRB to gain access to one of the campuses on which I planned to conduct my research. The third school district, Leander ISD did not have an IRB process. IRB approval is required when working with human subjects.

This is important because the researcher has a responsibility to maintain the privacy and security of any participants involved.

The University of Texas IRB also required that I send several forms to each participant, including an official letter asking the instructors to be participants in the study (Appendix A), an "assent for participation" letter (Appendix B), and a letter to be sent home to the parents of the students in the classes I would be observing (Appendix C). The official letter to the participants was intended to re-introduce myself and gain written confirmation that they would be willing to participate in my research and allow me to come to their classrooms to observe. The "assent to participate" letter (Appendix B) included a brief abstract of the study and information about what would be required of them as participants, the risks involved in the study, compensation, a guarantee of confidentiality, the steps I would take to maintain confidentiality, and their right to end involvement with the study at any time. The letter to the to the parents of the students (Appendix C) was intended to explain my role as researcher to the parents of the children in the classes I would be observing, and to tell them that I would not be interacting with their students or using any personal information in my research. I included my contact information in case parents had any questions. I gave a copy of this letter to each of the participants to pass out to their students, since I would not have any interaction with them.

After gaining approval from the IRBs, I began setting up appointments with the participants in order to interview them and acquaint them with my research topic. My data collection occurred between August 12, 2013 and December 5, 2013.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

I met separately with each of the three art instructors in order to conduct two semi-structured interviews with each participant. One interview took place before the observation and one took place after. There were six interviews total. Semi-structured interviews "involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). The semi-structured interview was most appropriate for my study because the interviews were intended not only to acquaint the participants with my research topic but also to find out the different analytical and discussion based techniques they use to introduce contemporary art to their students. Though the observations were very important to answering my research question, I wanted to find out activities and methods they have used in addition to what I would be observing. The structure of the interview evoked the participants to feel free to elaborate on their answers as necessary. This qualitative interview style enabled the participants to convey their lived experience effectively and mention relevant information that may not have otherwise been discussed if we had stayed with only pre-planned questions. It also provided opportunity for me to ask follow up questions for clarity.

The open ended questions that I asked the art instructors during the initial, pre-observation semi structured interviews are as follows:

1. How many years have you taught art?

2. Which contemporary artists have you included in your classroom lessons?

3. What format do you present the contemporary artists to your class?

4. Is there a time when you break the class into groups to discuss and research works of art? [Yes or No]

5. Is there a time when you keep the class in one large group for the discussions?

6. How do you prompt the students into discussion about the work of art?

7. What are the discussion points in a typical lesson about contemporary art?

8. Do your students participate in accompanying art activities to complement the discussions on contemporary artists? List examples:

9. Do you employ any art criticism techniques in the classroom?

The format of the semi-structured interviews enabled me to maintain a general guideline for questions to ask my participants while providing opportunity for natural deviation from those questions. The interviews with Karen and Felicia were very quick and only lasted thirty minutes while the interview with Elisabeth lasted an hour. Though I received a lot of helpful information from all three participants I made sure that all my previously prepared interview questions had been answered before concluding the interview.

OBSERVATIONS

While observing the participating art instructors as they used art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their students about contemporary artists, I audio recorded each session. According to Creswell, "Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where the participants experience the issue or problem" (2009, p. 175). These recordings included the discussions and the methods of questioning that the participants used in the classroom. In order to perform these observations, IRB requested

that I send a letter home to the parents of the students, letting them know that I would be observing the instructor but not interacting with the students and my research was about the instructor's methods and would not include any personal or identifying information about the students. For the most part the students were very soft spoken and my audio recording device did not pick up their voices. In my observations of Felicia's middle school class and Elisabeth's high school class, students worked in groups around the room so I was not only not able to capture these conversations since I was not interacting with the students, but the ambient noise of all the group discussions taking place at once drowned out individual voices.

During the observations I was a non-participant in the classroom. According to Creswell "qualitative observations are those in which the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site…Qualitative observers may also engage in roles varying from a non-participant to a complete participant" (2009, p. 181). Because of the letter that was sent home with the students (Appendix C), the students were aware I was going to be in their classroom but that I would not be interacting with them.

DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis and interpretation are closely linked. According to Creswell "qualitative research is interpretive research" (2009, p. 177). Interpretation can stem from past experiences as much as from analysis of the recorded data. The informal aspect of qualitative data analysis has raised ethical concerns about case study research: "In particular case study evaluation is what Guba and Lincoln refer to as unusual

56

problems of ethics. An unethical case writer could so select from among available data that virtually anything he wished could be illustrated" (Merriam, 1998, p. 42). As a qualitative researcher I understood that I would employ inductive data analysis in which I "build patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information" (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). As the students made interpretations of artworks, I also made my own interpretations of my findings.

The purpose of my research was to examine how the three participants used art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art. It was an investigation focused on the instructional techniques the teachers used, rather than to tabulate the results of each observation. Though I found it very interesting, I did not focus on the reactions of the students to the lessons, however this could be a possible future research topic. I used coding as the tool to perform content data analysis for both the interviews and the observations. This process was adopted in the analysis since it is "systematic, comprehensive (searching all the data until the categories are saturated) and cumulative, gradually building understanding or explanations" (Simons, 2009, p. 121).

After transcribing the audio-recorded interviews and observations, I read over the text several times. I began by writing down the big and small ideas from each observation in the margins of the transcriptions. These ideas included moments of discussion, contemporary artist names, and questions the instructors used. After writing this information in the margins, I compiled summaries of each of the observations as they related to my research topic. I omitted aspects of the class that were unrelated to how each of the participants used art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their

students about contemporary art. I compared and contrasted this material into similarities and differences in order to connect them into a meaningful and realistic analysis. The similarities that I identified between the observations and interviews produced a framework that helped me answer my research question as themes began to emerge from the interpretive process.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

For this study, I conducted qualitative research by adopting case study as my methodology. According to Creswell (2009) "particularity is the hallmark of qualitative research" (p. 193). Fitting with Creswell's assertion, the scope of my research topic "how public school art educators in Texas use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art" was very specific. This particularity made my research not generalizable to all art educators or even to all Texas art educators, but is, rather, a documentation of how these three teachers conceptualize best practices. Another factor contributing to the limitations of the study was the fact that my sample size was limited. I used only three participants in this study. My own personal bias in selecting these instructors is also a limitation on the study since it was partially based on a convenience sampling: I had to be able to drive to their schools. All participants indicated that they taught art in Texas public schools, used art criticism or discussion techniques in their classrooms, and taught their k-12 students about contemporary art. Due to time constraints I was not able to perform member checks in which I sent the transcripts of the interviews and observations to the participants for their endorsement.

VALIDITY

"Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Some of these procedures described by Creswell (2009) include documenting as many of the procedures as possible, checking the transcriptions for mistakes, triangulation, rich descriptions, personal comments about my own interest in the topic, and my background.

When I began triangulating information I started by comparing summaries of each of my observations and choosing themes from the three different experiences. I created a chart comparing each participant's techniques in the classroom. Between the six interviews, one before and one after each of the three observations, the themes were reinforced in different ways by each participant thus adding to the validity of the study. I used rich and detailed descriptions of the settings in which my observations took place, the participants, and my experiences with these participants. According to Creswell "when qualitative researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting, or provide many perspectives about a theme, the results become more realistic and richer" (2009, p. 192). In order to do this, I reported as many details of my findings and diligently documented the way I conducted my research from beginning to end. In order to make sure that my interpretations of the research were consistent I thoroughly checked my transcriptions for accuracy. Another way to ensure validity is by maintaining a level of transparency: "Good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background (Creswell,2009, p.192). In order to ensure all aspects of my interpretation of the data were able to be

considered, I discussed limitations to my research, bias in the data collection, and my interest and reasons for choosing the topic of how art educators are using discussion and art criticism techniques to teach school aged children how to interpret contemporary art. "Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research" (Creswell, 2009, p. 192), because many of the safe guards against it are intrinsic to the process of the research itself. These safe guards include a variety of methods to ensure that the views of the researcher and the subject are aligned and true. Validity in qualitative research includes honesty, attention to detail, and perseverance.

CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the steps I took while conducting qualitative research and adopting case study as the methodology employed. Using this approach as my guideline, I began to illustrate a portrayal of the way three public school art educators in Texas use art criticism techniques and discussion to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art. Case study was the best option for conducting research on this topic because the data obtained from the observations in their classrooms were intrinsic to answering the research question. I focused on grasping the methods and techniques of three practicing art educators, identifying the implementation of the art criticism and discussion techniques that they used, and identufying commonalities and themes within the data. In order to do this, and still maintain validity for my qualitative research, I diligently transcribed all interviews and observations. One of the main reasons why I chose to conduct my research at these particular three schools is because I already had information regarding the educational goals and processes of the art instructors. I knew that based on

the nature of qualitative research, this sample would best help me as the researcher come to understand answer to my research question. I gathered data from interviews and observations in order to triangulate this information and find themes to help me answer the research question, and I maintained qualitative validity in several ways such as voice recording and accurately transcribing the semi-structured interviews with the participants before and after observing their classrooms in which the phenomenon took place. I also audio recorded and transcribed each interview. Though many of these factors are limitations to my study, my scope is also very specific, which according to Creswell (2009) is typical of qualitative research.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I give an overview of my experiences during each of the observations with the participants, and discuss the themes that emerged from triangulating the data. These themes that emerged help to answer my research question of how do three public school art educators in Texas use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art? According to Creswell (2009), participant observation is obtrusive and invades the life of the informant and sensitive information is frequently revealed. When discussing a sensitive topic, it is necessary to mask names of people, places, and activities. Therefore, all the names of the participants and the locations in which they teach have been changed to ensure privacy. I conducted one observation for each participant. After writing summaries of each of my observations (Appendix D) I was able to see some major commonalities as well as differences between the participants in the way they approached using art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their students about contemporary art. The themes that emerged from the analysis of my research were: (a) working in groups; (b) looking at multiple art images; (c) art production; (d) describe, analyze, interpret, evaluate; (e) contemporary art discussion to introduce a project; and (f) beginning with a familiar work of art before introducing a new artist. This case study focused on the best practices of three Texas public school art educators who use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art.

OBSERVATION THEMES

        After writing summaries of my observations I was able to chart themes and similarities between each of the participants when using art criticism and discussion methods to teach their students about contemporary art (see figure 1).

Participants	Karen-3rd grade	Felicia-8th grade	Elisabeth- 9th-12th grades
Techniques	Art making Large group discussion with teacher	Art making Small group discussions amongst students followed by a large group discussion Use of Feldman model	Mixture of small group discussions and large group discussion Use of Feldman model

Figure 4 Common themes from observations

The themes that emerged from the analysis of my research were: (a) working in groups, (b) looking at multiple art images, (c) art production, (d) use of the Feldman model, (e) contemporary art discussion to introduce a project, and (f) beginning with a familiar work of art before introducing a new artist.

Working in Groups

        One of the themes that emerged was the way the instructors divided their students into groups. Two of the three participants segmented their classes into groups in order to engage students in art criticism discussions while they looked at contemporary art. The way the participants organized the groups varied. Felicia broke her 8th grade middle school students into seven groups, which contained combinations of either 3 or 4 students. These groups were based on the class seating arrangement. Students who were

sitting at a table together ended up being in the same group. Each table had an image by the artist Robert Jackson (Appendix E), which the students discussed for two minutes. At the end of two minutes, each group would rotate to the next table and discuss the next image for two minutes. There were eight tables with art images by the contemporary artist Robert Jackson, so this rotating discussion process lasted for 16 minutes as well as additional time spent rotating between images. Students spoke amongst themselves about the images at each table but did not interact with the other groups until after the activity was complete. After the small group discussions, Felicia addressed the students as an entire class and asked for volunteers to share what they discovered during the exercise. Few of them were willing to speak, except two students who separately shared which images they liked the best. However, neither of these students offered reasons for their preferences.

Elisabeth divided her high school students into groups by using a note card system. She passed out notecards which had both a large and small image on them. The initial groups were based on students who received cards with the same large image. This created two groups of seven students. Elisabeth gave each group three images and told them to place the images as a group into chronological order of when the students believed the art works were created. After the students had completed this, she dissolved the groups and had all fourteen students in the class work together to place the six images (Appendix F) in chronological order, explaining that if they disagreed with each other they must support their view and convince the rest of the group in order to change the order of the images.

After students had completed the ordering of the six images, Elisabeth divided them again into different group configurations. These new groups were arranged based on the smaller images on these cards. This created six small groups of only 2 or 3 students. Each of these small images that divided the students were from the chronology that they had just worked on together. The purpose of these smaller groups was for a more in depth research of the images that they had just worked with (Appendix F) followed by group presentations of these images. Much like Felicia's 8th grade class, after all the students had finished their group work and all six presentations had been completed there was a class-wide discussion. This discussion consisted of comparing one of the contemporary images with one of the traditional images the students had just studied and presented.

While the secondary teachers used small groups, Karen Hughes kept her elementary school class as one large group during the entirety of the discussion. During the interviews she indicated that she often kept them in one class group rather than dividing them into smaller groups during discussion. Based on this information, my observation was representative of her usual methods. I note this deviation from the theme of dividing students into groups to discuss contemporary art because, according to Creswell (2009), for the sake of validity it is important to present discrepant information that runs counter to the themes. "Real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce" (p. 192). I observed Karen's 3rd grade class. These elementary school students were younger than the students in Felicia's middle school class and Elisabeth's high school class which may have been a factor in deciding to keep them

together as a group. Karen also only had a thirty minute period rather than the hour and a half long classes available to both Felicia's middle school class and Elisabeth's high school class. Karen indicated that she used Friday class time primarily for discussion since class time was so brief.

Dividing students into groups is an important aspect to consider when using discussion methods to teach students about contemporary art. Various scenarios and activities work better with different student configurations. Keeping the students as one large group during discussions enables them to learn from each other, rather than dividing them into smaller groups that do not interact well with each other. It also takes less time to begin the discussion since students do not have to settle into new arrangements.

Dividing students into smaller groups also has its advantages and can accomplish things that a larger group of students cannot. For instance, a smaller group of students can conduct more in depth conversations that a larger group would not be able to accomplish without excluding some of the group. Writing assignments and presentations are much more feasible with a small group, as opposed to using larger groups because there will be more of an opportunity to for everyone in the group to contribute to the conversation. Participants also told me of other grouping configurations they have used in the past. For example, Elisabeth has had her high school students work in groups of two, pretending that one of them is an artist trying to sell their work to a museum. One student plays the role of the artist and looks at the work and describes it in detail to the student who pretends to be the museum worker interested in buying the art. The student must give enough information about the work of art to convince their partner in this exercise to

be intrigued by the work of art, even though they cannot see it. All the methods used by the participants in organizing the students into various group arrangements during the discussion about contemporary art were effective and worked within the various limitations or advantages of the class such as time constraints, table arrangements, and age range.

Looking at Multiple Images

Another common theme that emerged from all three of the participants was using multiple images for discussion. Elisabeth Daniels showed six images (Appendix F), evenly divided between contemporary Japanese works of art and traditional Japanese works of art, to her high school students on the day of my observation. Students participated in three previously discussed activities with these images. The images (Appendix F) included in these activities were: *Slash with a Knife* by Yoshitoma Nara, *727* by Takashi Murakami, *The Blue Dragon* by Gajin Fujita, *53 Stations of the Tokaido Road* by Ando Hiroshige, *A Farewell for Surimono* by Ichikawa Danjuro, *The Great Wave at Kanagawa (from 36 views of Mount Fuji)* by Katsushikia Hokusai. The purpose of using these multiple images was not only for comparison but to see and discuss the artistic tradition of appropriation. Students found difficulty in arranging the art into chronological order because of the contemporary Japanese art pieces, *727* by Takashi Murakami and *Slash with a Knife* by Yoshitoma Nara. Both these artists appropriated imagery and themes from traditional Japanese art works and the students had difficulty placing these pieces in a chronology with the pieces from which the appropriation had been taken. Another reason that Elisabeth used multiple images to show her students was

67

for the purpose of comparison and to view examples of how multiple artists explored an artistic concept. Elisabeth showed her high school students multiple images to explore the artistic tradition of appropriation in works of art.

Felicia Smith showed her middle school students multiple images (Appendix E) by the contemporary artist Robert Jackson. She began by displaying the image *Still Might Need* More by Robert Jackson during the introductory activity at the beginning of the class period. In this activity students sketched while looking at the image. For the next activity, Felicia placed one printed image on each of the eight tables where students were sitting and had them rotate from table to table discussing these images for two minutes at a time. The printed images used were all still lifes by the artist Robert Jackson. These images included: *The Beast, Drum Roll Please, The Critic, Splatter, Pop, Soon to be Hosed, Trojan Horse,* and *Crossing*. The purpose of using multiple images in this activity was to not only acquaint students with the work of this contemporary artist but also to show students several examples of unexpected and humorous still life examples. The students indicated that they were familiar with the notion of a still life as being comprised of flowers or fruit, but had never seen any with what they considered interesting subject matter. Since the students were about to begin a project in which they would choose a personal object that tells a story about themselves, Felicia wanted them to see examples of the objects in a still life, hinting at a larger story.

Karen Hughes showed her elementary school students multiple images by the contemporary artist Lordy Rodriguez (Appendix G). Students looked at and answered questions about the images *Texas, Nebraska,* and *Untitled 350*. All these images are maps

made by the artist Lordy Rodriguez. These maps were not factual and the artist had rearranged the shapes of the states and the locations and had included made up cities and bodies of water. One of the discussions that Karen initiated while looking at the work of the artist was how to approach these works for the purpose understanding. She asked students to image that they were seeing this art work in a museum for the first time without having any information about the artist or what his intentions were. She asked if it would be ok to walk past one of his works of art quickly, make disparaging comments, and accept that they have a lack of understanding about what the work means. The students responded that this is not the way to approach any art in a museum. Karen asked them what a more appropriate way to speak about this art would be, to which one of the students responded "you should look at it for a while. Look at how he made it with the different shapes and textures" (Personal communication, October 25, 2013). One of the reasons that Karen showed these images was to reinforce thoughtful and empathetic evaluations of the images that students may encounter not only in the classroom but in life. According to Emery (2002), art teachers are seen as "significant players in the field of cultural production because they have the responsibility of defining art for young people who will then become viewers, consumers, and artists" (pp. 39-40). Karen not only exposed her students to the way that contemporary artists grapple with personal experiences but she also exposed them to how to try to appreciate a work of art instead of dismissing it just because they do not understand it right away.

Showing multiple images during a discussion can be used to accomplish a variety of purposes. The use of this method by the three participants in my study varied though

was effective in every situation. Multiple images were used to acquaint the students with the work of the artist in more of a context than if students had just been introduced to one image. According to Kuspit (2006) when one work of art is separated and analyzed:

> A bit of the artist's work has been isolated and a superior value conferred on it… The trouble though, is that there is usually no sudden and discontinuous boundary that separates the masterpiece from the rest of an artist's work. Usually an artist's work as a whole holds more meaning than any single summarizing work within it, and the work of the artist viewed as a whole is damaged if one piece is isolated… To assign to a single tradition dominance over all other possibilities, or to pretend that there are great moments in an artist's life that produce unique masterpieces, are both harmful to any organic apprehension of art as a whole. They both impair the possibility of art being a complex signifier related to the artist himself and to his cultural context. (p. 21)

According to Kuspit (2006), when a work of art is totally removed from the context in which it was created, it becomes meaningless. While the labeling of a work of art as a masterpiece can retroactively define an artist's career, it is not a realistic portrayal of the body of work produced by an artist and presents an unrealistic view of artistic culture and creativity.

Art Production

Another major theme that emerged from the data was that the participants engaged their students in art making activities during the class to supplement the discussion. Karen's elementary level students spent roughly 20 minutes of class time on discussion and spent the remaining ten minutes of class doing an art making activity which was related to the discussion. Karen introduced art by the contemporary artist Lordy Rodriguez to her students for discussion. The images (Appendix G) were of personally made maps that did not make sense. For instance, the elements of a map were

present such as topographical variations, longitude and latitude lines, labels, and shapes, however, everything was mislabeled. Students most readily identified that a map labeled Texas looked nothing like the actual state of Texas and that this state does not border New Jersey as Rodriguez had indicated that it did in his maps. The art making activity during the last ten minutes of class engaged the students in making a map of their school. Karen showed them an aerial satellite image which the students were able to identify as their school. The instructions of the art assignment were for students to draw only the major landmarks of the map that alerted them to the fact that this was an image of their school. Students could then add color and write labels as they chose and as time permitted.

Felicia's middle school class began by sketching from observation of a work by the contemporary artist Robert Jackson, who they would discuss later. The painting *Still Might Need More* by Robert Jackson showed hundreds of Oreos stacked around a jug full of milk. Students spent five minutes observing the painting on the projection screen while drawing. Felicia introduced this image to the students as an introduction to the art (Appendix E). She also used this exercise as an opportunity to discuss the artistic principle of proportion. After students were done drawing she asked them if they were to stack multiple gallon milk jugs like what is depicted in the image on top of each other, how many would it take to reach the top of the stack of Oreos? Two students raised their hand to answer Felicia's question. The first student answered three and a half milk jugs and the second student answered three and a quarter milk jugs. Felicia conceded that the answer would be somewhere between three and four. She then brought up that as students

71

were drawing the milk jug and the stacks of Oreos they should keep this in mind while they were deciding on the height to make each of these parts of the picture.

Felicia's middle school class took part in another art making activity aside from the five minute sketch of *Still Might Need More* by Robert Jackson. During the last 30 minutes of the class period, students drew still lifes. In the middle of the classroom there were two round tables full of objects provided by Felicia. Students were still in their initial groups that they had been in while discussing the art of Robert Jackson. Felicia instructed that one student from each table should retrieve an object from the round table and bring it back to their group for everyone to draw in their sketch books. She advised students to begin drawing by finding "the general basic shapes. Look for ovals, look for squares, and look for rectangles and triangles. Look for the basic shape so you can then go back and make it more realistic" (Personal communication, December 5, 2013).

Not in keeping with this theme, Elisabeth's high school students did not make art on the day of my observation. She informed her students that the discussion would segue into the next art project they would be making in class, but the entire hour and a half long class period was dedicated to discussion. I present this contradictory information because, according to Creswell (2009), discussing contrary information adds validity and credibility to an account since all information, even contradictory information, is being presented to the reader.

All participants handled the issue of balancing art production and discussion within the constraints of one class period differently. While only the discussion aspect of learning about contemporary art took place in Elisabeth's high school classroom during

72

my observation, Felicia began and ended her classroom discussions with art production while Karen's elementary school class began with discussion but finished with art production. Art making can be another important way for students to connect with and learn from a work of contemporary art by putting to practice the techniques and ideas used by contemporary artists.

Use of the Feldman Model

Another theme that emerged from the data was the use of the Feldman model of art criticism which prompts the viewer to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate works of art. Both Felicia and Elisabeth used this model with their students. They both lectured prior to the class discussion activities with in depth information about what was necessary to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate before allowing the students to begin. In addition to verbal explanation, Elisabeth provided a handout (Appendix H) for her high school students to reference during the activity. This handout explained what each of these steps entailed in case they were not able to remember the verbal directions. The assigned activity required students to fill out a worksheet (Appendix I) in which they described, analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated a work of art in writing. Two of the groups were not able to complete the last evaluative step, even though they had both verbal explanation and an accompanying handout detailing how to do this. Felicia had a similar worksheet on the projector during the discussion activity with her middle school students. It also explained what each of the four steps of the Feldman model entailed. In addition she talked in depth about describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating a work of art but there was no tangible way to evaluate whether or not the students were

able to complete these steps as they spoke for two minutes about each of the eight pieces of art and I was not able to record the data. During the full class discussion after this activity was completed, however, none of the students offered any insights or discussion topics from their group discussions. Two students shared which works were their favorite but did not give a reason as to why this was so.

Contradictory to this theme, Karen did not expressly talk to her 3rd grade students about the Feldman model. However, her students did describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate the works of art throughout the course of the discussion. I note this information because, according to Creswell (2009), for the sake of validity it is important to present discrepant information that runs counter to the themes "because real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce" (p. 192).

According to Terry Barrett (1994), "critics engage in one or more of four central activities: they describe, interpret, judge, and theorize" (p. xiii). While this way of evaluating and coming to understand a work of art is a standard art criticism technique, it may be too rigorous for students who have not internalized what this terminology means. The majority of students were unable to or unsure of how to complete the step of "evaluation," which had to do with personal preference and the reasoning behind it:

> Maintaining a distinction between preference and value can be liberating. That is, a work I like may not be as good as another artwork I don't like. I may understand that one work of art is better than another, but I may still enjoy the former more than the latter. I can like whatever I want to like. If we hold our preferences with confidence, then we might be in a better psychological position to critically and appreciatively attend to works that are beyond our range of tolerance. It is also important not to confuse preference with value. Statements of preference are personal, psychological reports made by the viewer. Value statements are much

stronger and need to be defended. There is no need to defend preferences. (Barrett, 1994, p. 107)

Though art critics do have a prescribed method of evaluating works of art, "what is learned from critics must be translated into educational terms before it can be applied in the classroom" (Wolff, 1997, p. 11) and made relevant to student understanding.

Beginning with Familiarity

Another theme that emerged from the data collected was the way in which some of the participants began with something familiar for the students to discuss before moving into the new information. This combining of the familiar with the unfamiliar created what is called an educational scaffold. Scaffolding refers to a variety of instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward a better understanding of the material being taught. Like physical scaffolding, the supportive strategies are removed when they are no longer needed. According to Phillipe Yenawine (2013):

> All of us have the capacity to engage with the unfamiliar. We do it often --- for example, picture yourself in a city you've never visited. You're not going to leave your hotel totally bewildered. You'll look around, take in the scene, and head out, making sense of what catches your attention because of past experience… You start using your own resources—exactly what any of us needs to do when we encounter art that strikes us as strange. (p. 2)

Both Karen and Felicia compared the work by the contemporary artists they were discussing to related works that the students had already studied and with which they were already familiar. This scaffold not only eased the transition into the new works of art, allowing the students to reacquaint themselves with previously learned information,

but it also showed possible influences and artistic traditions. Karen began by discussing Jasper Johns with her elementary school students. They had studied him previously and were excited to be able to recognize his work. She began with showing her students some map images made by Jasper Johns and then had the students compare them to maps (Appendix G) made by contemporary artist Lordy Rodriguez who was the subject of the lesson.

In Felicia's middle school class, after the students sketched from an image by contemporary artist Robert Jackson, she discussed proportion with the students to help them with their sketches. She referenced work by the artist Renee Magritte to further explain what she meant by proportion. Many of the students responded to questions about the works by Magritte that they had seen and were able to understand the discussion on proportion better because of this comparison.

Contrary to this theme, Elisabeth did not introduce contemporary art to her high school art class by beginning with familiar imagery that the students had seen and studied before. She did indicate that they had enough knowledge of art historical styles to be able to relate to them and find a chronology of the pieces (Appendix F) that she presented to them. I acknowledge this information even though it is contradictory to this theme because, according to Creswell (2009), to present discrepant information that is not within the scope of the themes adds validity to the argument because real life situations are composed of different perspectives.

One of the reasons to introduce new information by scaffolding it with old information is because "students learn by restructuring information they encounter in

relation to their previous knowledge. Such restricting influences the processes used to learn further information" (Freedman, 2003, p. 76). When new information is scaffolded with previously learned information this previously learned information can often bridge the gap between what the student does and does not know and make the new information more accessible.

Discussion Used to Introduce a New Project

The last major theme that emerged from both Elisabeth's high school class and Felicia's middle school class was that both participants used their discussion of contemporary artists to introduce a new art project the students were about to begin. Felicia talked about contemporary artist Robert Jackson's original still-life compositions (Appendix E) to her middle school students as a way to introduce a project the students would start the following week. The project would be a still-life of a personal object that would hint at more meaning than what was shown in the drawing.

Elisabeth planned to begin her high school students on a mash-up assignment in which they would use stenciling, spray paint, text, and some of the other artistic references from the contemporary images (Appendix F) they had discussed during my observation.

Contrary to this theme, Karen did not utilize the classroom discussion of contemporary artist Lordy Rodriguez to introduce a larger art project to her elementary school students. There are a few reasons for this, one of which is that the class I observed took place on a Friday, which means that Karen's classes lasted for only thirty minutes each. The art project that the students engaged in at the conclusion of the discussion was

77

a quick sketch rather than a larger project. I bring up this deviation from the theme of using discussion of contemporary art to introduce a project because, according to Creswell (2009), real life is composed of different perspectives and acknowledging them adds validity to an account. Bringing contrary evidence to this theme creates a more realistic portrayal of my experience as a researcher.

Data Analysis

For my analysis I recorded and transcribed each observation and then wrote summaries of the observations (Appendix D) as they related to my topic. I also constructed a chart listing each commonality the instructors had in their classes (Figure 1). The data analysis revealed that there were more fundamental commonalities than differences between each classroom, especially between the two secondary classrooms. According to Barrett (1994), a popular misconception about art criticism is that it is primarily judgmental and negative in tone. However, the three participants in this study used art criticism as enrichment to their art classrooms and to engage students in evaluative discussions so that they are better able to understand art.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I gave an overview of my experiences during each of the observations with the participants and the themes that emerged from triangulating the data. These themes answered my research question on how do three public school art educators in Texas use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art. The themes that emerged from the analysis of my research were: (a) working in groups; (b) looking at multiple art images; (c) art production; (d) describe,

analyze, interpret, evaluate; (e) contemporary art discussion to introduce a project; and (f) beginning with a familiar work of art before introducing a new artist. This case study focused on the best practices of three Texas public school art educators who use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art.

Chapter 5: Discoveries and Conclusion

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to learn how three public school art educators in Texas use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art. The characteristics of this study were typical of a case study as described by Creswell (2009) because the research took place in the natural setting, and relied on the researcher as the instrument for data collection. In order to better understand best practices of these teachers, I observed them during one class while they used art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their students about contemporary art. I interviewed each participant separately before and after I observed a class in which this phenomenon occurred. During the interviews and the observations I used a voice recorder for documentation and transcription purposes. From the data I was able to find similarities and differences in the way these teachers utilize discussion and art criticism techniques. This qualitative case study examined the best practices of three art educators in Texas and the range of attitudes and perceptions associated with art criticism.

THE RESEARCH

Creswell defines a case study as a "qualitative strategy in which the researcher explores a program, event, activity, or one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2009, p. 227). This method fit the needs of investigating my research topic as I was trying to discover the best teaching practices regarding how a limited group of art educators utilize art criticism techniques in order to interact with contemporary art. My research took place in two school districts around the greater Austin area, specifically at a middle school,

elementary school, and high school art classroom. The cases were limited to the art educator's techniques of using art criticism to teach their students about contemporary art and was designed in order to study the art educator's methods and techniques in this particular situation.

To achieve this goal as a researcher, I arranged to observe the classrooms of three art educators while they were conducting a lesson about contemporary art using art criticism and discussion techniques. I audio-recorded the classes and transcribed the conversations and then picked out the major themes that emerged from the data. In order to better understand which aspects of my observations fell within the scope of my research topic, I summarized each observation (Appendix D), omitting extraneous information that did not clarify how they used art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their students about contemporary art.

THEMES

After writing the observation descriptions, through inductive analysis I charted the larger themes and similarities employed by each of the participants when using art criticism and discussion methods to teach their students about contemporary art (see figure 5).

Participants	Karen-3rd grade	Felicia-8th grade	Elisabeth-9th-12th grades
Techniques	Art Making Looking at multiple images Group discussions with teacher	Art Making Looking at multiple images Small group discussions Use of Feldman Model	 Looking at multiple images Mixture of small group discussions and large class discussions Use of Feldman Model

Figure 5 Common Themes from Observations

The six themes that emerged from the analysis of my data were: (a) working in groups, (b) looking at multiple art images, (c) art production, (d) use of Feldman Model, (e) contemporary art discussion to introduce a project, and (f) beginning with a familiar work of art before introducing a new artist.

Working in Groups

One of the commonalities found in the analysis of my research data was the way in which the instructors divided their students into groups. Two of the three participants divided their classes into groups in order to engage students in art criticism discussions while they looked at contemporary art. The way the participants organized the groups varied. Felicia broke her 8th grade middle school students into seven groups which

contained combinations of either three or four students. These groups were based on the class seating arrangement. Students who were sitting at a table together ended up being in the same group. Each table had an image by the artist Robert Jackson (Appendix E), which the students were meant to discuss for two minutes. At the end of two minutes each group would rotate to the following table and discuss the next image for two minutes. There were eight tables with art images by contemporary artist Robert Jackson, so this rotating discussion process lasted for 16 minutes, not taking into account time spent rotating. Students spoke amongst themselves about the images at each table but did not interact with the other groups until after the activity was over. After the small group discussions Felicia addressed the students as an entire class and asked for volunteers to elect to share what they discovered during the exercise. Few of them were willing to speak, except two students who separately shared which images they liked the best. However, neither of the students offered reasons for their preferences. According to Wolff (1997), "Art criticism is only informed opinion and not an infallible, scientifically established judgment" (p. 77). Perhaps if students were encouraged to begin the analysis with their own opinions, as opposed to the Feldman model style of withholding opinion until the end of an evaluation, they may have felt like they had more to say about the works of art.

In contrast to Felicia's method, Elisabeth took a more interactive approach. She divided her high school students into groups by using a note card system. She passed out notecards which had both a large and small image on them. The initial groups were based on students who had the same large image. This created two groups of seven students.

Elisabeth gave each group three images and told them to place the images as a group into chronological order. After the students had completed this task she disbanded the groups and had all fourteen students in the class work together to place the six images (Appendix F) in chronological order, explaining that if they disagreed with each other they must support their view and convince the rest of the group in order to change the order of the images.

After students had completed this first activity Elisabeth divided the students again into different group configurations. As was previously mentioned Elisabeth had passed out note cards with two images on them. Initially the students were divided into two groups that were based on the larger image from these cards. These new groups were arranged based on the smaller images on these cards. This created six small groups of only 2 or 3 students. Each of these small images that divided the students were from the chronology that they had just worked on together. The purpose of these smaller groups was to provide for a more in-depth research of the images they had just worked with (Appendix F), followed by group presentations of these images. Much like Felicia's 8th grade class, after all the students had finished their group work and all six presentations had been completed there was a class-wide discussion. This conversation consisted of comparing one of the contemporary images with one of the traditional images that the students had just studied and presented.

One of the participants handled dividing their students into groups differently than the above mentioned two participants. Karen Hughes kept her elementary school class as one large group during the entirety of the discussion. During the interviews Karen

indicated that she often kept them in one large group rather than to divide them into smaller groups during discussion. Based on this information my observation was representative of her usual methods. I note this deviation from the theme of dividing students into groups to discuss contemporary art because, according to Creswell (2009), for the sake of validity it is important to present discrepant information that runs counter to the themes "because real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce" (p. 192). I observed Karen's 3rd grade class. These elementary school students were younger than the students in Felicia's middle school class, and Elisabeth's high school class which may have been a factor in deciding to keep them together as a group. Karen also had only a thirty minute period and generally used Fridays primarily for discussion since class time was so brief.

Dividing students into groups is an important aspect to consider when using discussion methods to teach students about contemporary art. Various scenarios and activities work better with different student configurations. Keeping the students as one large group during discussions enables them to learn from each other as opposed to dividing them into smaller groups that do not interact with each other. It also takes less time to begin the discussion since students do not have to settle into new arrangements.

Dividing students into smaller groups also has its advantages and can accomplish things that a larger group of students cannot. For instance, a smaller group of students can conduct more in-depth conversations that a larger group would not be able to accomplish without excluding some of the group. Writing assignments and presentations are much more feasible with a small group, as opposed to using larger groups because

there will be more of an opportunity to for everyone in the group to contribute. Participants also told me of other grouping configurations they have used in the past. For example, Elisabeth has had her high school students work in groups of two, pretending that one of them is an artist trying to sell their work to a museum. One student plays the role of the artist and looks at the work and describes it in detail to the student who pretends to be a museum worker interested in buying the art. The student must give enough information about the work of art to convince their partner in this exercise to be intrigued by the work of art even though they cannot see it. All the methods used by the participants in organizing the students into various group arrangements during the discussion about contemporary art were effective and worked within the various limitations or advantages of the class, such as time constraints, table arrangements, and age range.

Looking at Multiple Images

Another common theme that emerged from all three of the participants was the utilization of multiple images for discussion. Elisabeth Daniels showed six images (Appendix F) evenly divided between contemporary Japanese works of art and traditional Japanese works of art to her high school students on the day of my observation. Students participated in three previously discussed activities with these images. The images (Appendix F) included in these activities were: *Slash with a Knife* by Yoshitoma Nara, *727* by Takashi Murakami, *The Blue Dragon* by Gajin Fujita, *53 Stations of the Tokaido Road* by Ando Hiroshige, *A Farewell for Surimono* by Ichikawa Danjuro, *The Great Wave at Kanagawa (from 36 views of Mount Fuji)* by Katsushikia Hokusai. The purpose

of using these multiple images was not only for comparison but to see and discuss the artistic tradition of appropriation. Students found difficulty in arranging the art into chronological order because of the contemporary Japanese art pieces *727* by Takashi Murakami and *Slash with a Knife* by Yoshitoma Nara. Both of these artists appropriated imagery and themes from traditional Japanese art works, and the students had difficulty placing these pieces in a chronology with the art works from which the appropriation had been taken. Another reason that Elisabeth used multiple images to show her students was for the purpose of comparison and to view examples of how multiple artists explored an artistic concept. Elisabeth showed her high school students multiple images to explore the artistic tradition of appropriation in works of art.

Felicia Smith displayed multiple images by the contemporary artist Robert Jackson to her middle school students (Appendix E). She began by showing the image *Still Might Need More* by Robert Jackson during the introductory activity at the beginning of the class period. In this activity students sketched while looking at the image. For the next activity, Felicia placed one printed image on each of the eight tables where students were sitting and had them rotate from table to table discussing these images for two minutes at a time. The printed images used were all still lifes by the artist Robert Jackson. These images included: *The Beast, Drum Roll Please, The Critic, Splatter, Pop, Soon to be Hosed, Trojan Horse,* and *Crossing*. The purpose of using multiple images in this activity was to not only acquaint students with the work of this contemporary artist but also to show students several examples of unexpected and humorous still-life examples. The students indicated that they were familiar with the

notion of a still life as being comprised of flowers or fruit, but had never seen any with what they considered interesting subject matter. Since the students were about to begin a project in which they would choose a personal object that tells a story about themselves, Felicia wanted them to see examples the objects in a still-life, hinting at a larger story.

Karen Hughes showed her elementary school students multiple images by the contemporary artist Lordy Rodriguez (Appendix G). Students looked at and answered questions about the images *Texas, Nebraska,* and *Untitled 350*. These images are all maps made by the artist Lordy Rodriguez. These maps were not factual and the artist had rearranged the shapes of the states and the locations and had included made up cities and bodies of water. One of the discussions that Karen initiated while looking at the work of the artist was how to approach these works for the purpose of appreciation. She asked students to imagine that they were seeing this art work in a museum for the first time without having any information about the artist or what his intentions were. She asked if it would be permitted to walk past one of his works of art quickly, make disparaging comments, and accept that they have a lack of understanding about what the work means. The students responded that this is not the way to approach any art in a museum. Karen asked them what a more appropriate way to speak about this art would be to which one of the students responded, "You should look at it for a while. Look at how he made it with the different shapes and textures" (Personal communication, October 25, 2013). One of the reasons that Karen showed these images was to reinforce thoughtful and empathetic evaluations of the images that students may encounter not only in the classroom but in life. According to Emery (2002), art teachers are seen as "significant players in the field

of cultural production because they have the responsibility of defining art for young people who will then become viewers, consumers, and artists" (pp. 39-40). Karen not only exposed her students to the way that contemporary artists grapple with personal experiences but she also exposed them to how to try to appreciate a work of art instead of dismissing it just because they do not understand it right away.

Showing multiple images during a discussion can be used to accomplish a variety of purposes. The use of this method by the three participants in my study varied though was effective in every situation. Multiple images were used to acquaint the students with the work of the artist in more of a context than if students had just been introduced to one image. According to Kuspit (2006) when one work of art is separated and analyzed,

> A bit of the artist's work has been isolated and a superior value conferred on it… The trouble though, is that there is usually no sudden and discontinuous boundary that separates the masterpiece from the rest of an artist's work. Usually an artist's work as a whole holds more meaning than any single summarizing work within it, and the work of the artist viewed as a whole is damaged if one piece is isolated… To assign to a single tradition dominance over all other possibilities, or to pretend that there are great moments in an artist's life that produce unique masterpieces, are both harmful to any organic apprehension of art as a whole. They both impair the possibility of art being a complex signifier related to the artist himself and to his cultural context. (p. 21)

According to Kuspit (2006) when a work of art is totally removed from the context in which it was created, it become meaningless. While the labeling of a work of art as a masterpiece can retroactively define an artist's career, it is not a realistic portrayal of the body of work produced by an artist and presents an unrealistic view of artistic culture and creativity.

Art Production

Another major theme that emerged from the data was that the participants engaged their students in art making activities during the class to supplement the discussion. Karen's elementary level students spent roughly 20 minutes of class time on discussion and spent the remaining ten minutes of class doing an art making activity which was related to the discussion. Karen introduced art by the contemporary artist Lordy Rodriguez to her students for discussion. The images (Appendix G) were of personally made maps that did not make sense. For instance the elements of a map were present such as topographical variations, longitude and latitude lines, labels, and shapes however, everything was mislabeled. Students most readily identified that a map labeled Texas looked nothing like the actual state of Texas, as this state does not border New Jersey as Rodriguez had indicated it did in his maps. The art making activity during the last ten minutes of class engaged the students in making a map of their school. Karen showed them an aerial satellite image, which the students were able to identify as their school. The instructions of the art assignment were for students to draw only the major landmarks of the map, which alerted them to the fact that this was an image of their school. Students could then add color and write labels as they chose and as time permitted.

Felicia's middle school class began by sketching from observation a work by the contemporary artist Robert Jackson who they would later be discussing. The painting *Still Might Need More* by Robert Jackson showed hundreds of Oreos stacked around a jug full of milk. Students spent five minutes observing the painting on the projection screen while drawing. Felicia introduced this image to the students as an introduction to the art

(Appendix E). She also used this exercise as an opportunity to discuss the artistic principle of proportion. After students were done drawing she asked them if they were to stack multiple gallon milk jugs like what is depicted in the image on top of each other, how many jugs would it take to reach the top of the stack of Oreos? Two students raised their hand to answer Felicia's question. The first student answered three and a half milk jugs and the second student answered three and a quarter milk jugs. Felicia conceded that the answer would be somewhere between three and four. She then brought up that as students were drawing the milk jug and the stacks of Oreos they should keep this in mind while they were deciding on the height to make each of these parts of the picture.

Felicia's middle school class took part in another art making activity aside from the five minute sketch of *Still Might Need More* by Robert Jackson. During the last 30 minutes of the class period students drew still lifes. In the middle of the classroom there were two round tables full of objects provided by Felicia. Students were still in their initial groups that they had been in while discussing the art of Robert Jackson. Felicia instructed that one student from each table should retrieve an object from the round table and bring it back to their group for everyone to draw in their sketch books. She advised students to begin drawing by finding "the general basic shapes. Look for ovals, look for squares, and look for rectangles and triangles. Look for the basic shape so you can then go back and make it more realistic" (Personal communication, December 5, 2013).

Changing up this theme, Elisabeth's high school students did not make art on the day of my observation. She informed her students that the discussion would segue into the next art project that they would be making in class but the entire hour and a half long

91

class period was dedicated to discussion. I present this contradictory information because, according to Creswell (2009), discussing contrary information adds validity and credibility to an account since all information, even contradictory information, is being presented to the reader.

All participants handled the issue of balancing art production and discussion within the constraints of one class period differently. While only the discussion aspect of learning about contemporary art took place in Elisabeth's high school classroom during my observation, Felicia began and ended her classroom discussions with art production while Karen's elementary school class began with discussion but finished with art production. Art making can be another important way for students to connect with and learn from a work of contemporary art by putting to practice the techniques and ideas used by contemporary artists.

As Elisabeth Daniels demonstrated, art criticism techniques and open ended discussion format can occur without any art production. In essence these techniques are a way to come to an understanding about a work of art but these techniques can be used in many other contexts to understand a variety of other things. For example, Terry Barrett used art criticism techniques about dance performance. There is a lot of potential for art criticism to be used in other subjects and to be an asset to not just art education, but for it to be integrated into the common core.

Use of the Feldman Model

Another theme that emerged from the data was the use of the Feldman model of art criticism which prompts the viewer to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate works

of art. Both Felicia and Elisabeth used this model with their students. They both lectured prior to the class discussion activities with in depth information about what was necessary to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate before allowing the students to begin. In addition to verbal explanation, Elisabeth provided a handout (Appendix H) for her high school students to reference during the activity. This handout explained what each of these steps entailed in case students were not able to remember the verbal directions. The assigned activity required students to fill out a worksheet (Appendix I) in which they described, analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated a work of art in writing. Two of the groups were not able to complete the last evaluative step even though they had both verbal explanation and an accompanying handout detailing how to do this. Felicia displayed a similar worksheet on the projector during the discussion activity with her middle school students. It also explained what each of the four steps of the Feldman model entailed. In addition, she talked in depth about describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating a work of art but there was no tangible way to evaluate whether or not the students were able to complete these steps as they spoke for two minutes about each of the eight pieces of art and I was not able to record the data. During the larger class discussion after this activity was completed, however, none of the students offered any insights or discussion topics from their group discussions. Two students shared which works were their favorite but did not give a reason as to why this was so.

Contradictory to this theme, Karen did not expressly talk to her 3rd grade students about the Feldman model. However her students did describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate the works of art throughout the course of the discussion.

According to Terry Barrett (1994), "critics engage in one or more of four central activities: they describe, interpret, judge, and theorize" (p. xiii). While this way of evaluating and coming to understand a work of art is a standard art criticism technique, it may be too rigorous for students who have not internalized what this terminology means. The majority of students were unable to or unsure of how to complete the step of "evaluation," which had to do with personal preference and the reasoning behind it:

> Maintaining a distinction between preference and value can be liberating. That is, a work I like may not be as good as another artwork I don't like. I may understand that one work of art is better than another, but I may still enjoy the former more than the latter. I can like whatever I want to like. If we hold our preferences with confidence, then we might be in a better psychological position to critically and appreciatively attend to works that are beyond our range of tolerance. It is also important not to confuse preference with value. Statements of preference are personal, psychological reports made by the viewer. Value statements are much stronger and need to be defended. There is no need to defend preferences. (Barrett, 1994, p. 107)

Though art critics do have a prescribed method of evaluating works of art, "what is learned from critics must be translated into educational terms before it can be applied in the classroom" (Wolff, 1997, p. 11), and made relevant to student understanding. If students begin an evaluation with exploring their own personal opinions in addition to ending an evaluation with their own personal opinions, they can measure how their appreciation and understanding of a work of art has matured and changed. They evaluation will more likely be made meaningful since it began with meaning. It appeared as though many students were unenthusiastic to even begin the process of evaluation since they were not encouraged to express themselves from the beginning. When students begin an evaluation with something they already feel comfortable discussing, such as

personal opinion, it is easier to begin to form an understanding about what they have not yet realized about works of art, as is explored in the following section.

Beginning with Familiarity

Another theme that emerged from the data collected was the way in which some of the participants began with something familiar for the students to discuss before moving into the new information. This combining of the familiar with the unfamiliar created what is called a educational scaffold. Scaffolding refers to a variety of instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward a better understanding of the material being taught. Like physical scaffolding, the supportive strategies are removed when they are no longer needed. According to Phillipe Yenawine (2013):

> All of us have the capacity to engage with the unfamiliar. We do it often --- for example, picture yourself in a city you've never visited. You're not going to leave your hotel totally bewildered. You'll look around, take in the scene, and head out, making sense of what catches your attention because of past experience… You start using your own resources—exactly what any of us needs to do when we encounter art that strikes us as strange. (p. 2)

Both Karen and Felicia compared work by the contemporary artists they were discussing to related works that the students had studied previously and with which they were already familiar. This scaffold not only eased the transition into the new works of art, enabling the students to reacquaint themselves with previously learned information, but it also showed possible influences and artistic traditions. Karen began by discussing Jasper Johns with her elementary school students. They had studied him previously and were excited to be able to recognize his work. She began with showing her students some map

images made by Jasper Johns and then had the students compare them to maps (Appendix G) made by contemporary artist Lordy Rodriguez, who was the subject of the lesson.

In Felicia's middle school class, after the students sketched from an image by contemporary artist Robert Jackson, the teacher discussed proportion with the students to help them with their sketches. She referenced work by the artist Renee Magritte to further explain what she meant by proportion. Many of the students responded to questions about the works by Magritte they had seen and were able to understand the discussion on proportion more fully because of this comparison.

Contrary to this theme, Elisabeth did not introduce contemporary art to her high school art class by beginning with familiar imagery that the students had seen and studied before. She did indicate that they had enough knowledge of art historical styles to be able to relate to them and find a chronology of the pieces (Appendix F) that she presented to them. I acknowledge this information even though it is contradictory to this theme because according to Creswell (2009) to present discrepant information that is not within the scope of the themes adds validity to the argument because real life situations are composed of different perspectives.

One of the reasons to introduce new information by scaffolding it with old information is because "students learn by restructuring information they encounter in relation to their previous knowledge. Such restricting influences the processes used to learn further information" (Freedman, 2003, p. 76). When new information is scaffolded with previously learned information this previously learned information can often bridge

the gap between what the student does and does not know, and make the new information more accessible.

Discussion Used to Introduce a New Project

The last major theme that emerged from both Elisabeth's high school class and Felicia's middle school class was that both participants used their discussion of contemporary artists to introduce a new art project the students were about to begin. Felicia talked about contemporary artist Robert Jackson's original still life compositions (Appendix E) to her middle school students as a way to introduce a project the students would start the following week. The project would be a still-life of a personal object that would hint at more meaning than what was shown in the drawing.

Elisabeth planned to begin her high school students on a mash-up assignment in which they would use stenciling, spray paint, text, and some of the other artistic references from the contemporary images (Appendix F) they had discussed during my observation.

Contrary to this theme, Karen did not utilize the classroom discussion of contemporary artist Lordy Rodriguez to introduce a larger art project to her elementary school students. There are a few reasons for this, one of which is that the class I observed took place on a Friday. For this reason each of Karen's classes lasted only thirty minutes. The art project students engaged in at the conclusion of the discussion was a quick sketch, rather than a larger project. This approach was different from what occurred at the other observation sites. The diversity of instructional approach creates a more realistic portrayal of my experience as a researcher.

DISCOVERIES

This research was conducted in order to discover the best practices of public school art educators in Texas, and to determine how three teachers used art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their students about contemporary art. In addition to the six major themes that emerged, I made some unexpected discoveries. During the interviews, each participant provided rich examples of art criticism activities, including information that is in keeping with many of the six major themes I described above. During these preliminary, semi-structured interviews all three participants spoke about the various ways they have divided the students when conducting a class discussion on contemporary art; viewing multiple art images for the sake of comparing and contrasting; tieing discussions about contemporary art to art making projects; and using the Feldman model to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate a work of art. However, most of the participants also indicated that they did not really use art criticism when teaching in their classrooms. When asked specifically about her use of art criticism with her high school students, Elisabeth indicated that she sometimes had students do self-reflections and critiques on their own work, which she considers art criticism, as opposed to the discussion elements that she had been describing in which she frequently engages students. She indicated a lot of frustration and weariness when attempting to engage in art criticism activities stating that,

> Art criticism is one part of the total art package that a lot of art teachers experience a lot of anxiety when facing. Probably some of my most uncomfortable moments as an art teacher are discussion about why non-objective or abstract art is worth a lot of money because kids just don't see it as valuable. (Personal Communication, August 30, 2013)

98

Though she frequently engages students in discussion of the monetary worth of famous works of art, she did not label these discussions as being part of art criticism in the classroom. Felicia Smith also indicated that in her middle school art classroom she does not use any art criticism techniques. During our semi-structured interview, when asked if she used any art criticism techniques in the classroom, Felicia responded that she does not use any models: "I have been given a lot of handouts that other teachers have used. And I've tried to make conscious effort but I can't say that I have" (Personal Communication, September 5, 2013). I next asked her what she has tried in her classroom that she does consider art criticism, to which she responded that somebody gave her a handout that included information pertaining to the Feldman model of how to analyze the work through its formal elements. She said that she "sometimes makes an effort to use handouts in class that other teachers have used which relate to the evaluation of works" however "nothing really extensive" (Personal Communication, September 5, 2013). Both Felicia and Elisabeth interpreted my request to observe a class in which they included art criticism and contemporary art in this formalized way. Both teachers used the Feldman model.

When using art criticism or discussion techniques to teach contemporary art, I was expecting to find many different methods in which the participants engaged their students. For instance, I was hoping to find open ended questions, which gradually lead the students to their own conclusions about the work of art. Based on my research, this approach is what I consider to be the optimal methodology of using art criticism and

discussion to teach students about contemporary art. Prior artistic information, such as knowledge of the elements and principles of art, should not be a pre-requisite to being able to become involved in these open ended interpretations. The handouts (Appendix H) provided did not appear to help students be able to complete the evaluative process. Providing all the information pertaining to how to describe, interpret, analyze, and interpret a work of art also did not help the students find their own meaning and connections to the works. A common problem in Elisabeth's class, in which she lectured about how to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate, was that a majority of the students were unsure of how to evaluate the works of art. This rigid formal structure may not be well suited to an educational setting in which the teacher seeks constructivist approaches to learning. While all these steps are important they can be achieved through different methods such as open ended questioning or VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies). These open ended discussions enable students to answer simple questions while still benefitting from the elements of the Feldman model such as to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate.

Another important discovery was that language and speaking can be an important tool for student learning. Based on the depth of interactions that occurred during the times when ideas were shared as a group, students who did not get to speak as much during the class period did not seem to fully understand how to interpret the art beyond personal preference. In both Felicia's middle school class and Elisabeth's high school class, each instructor explained every step in the process of understanding a work of art. They each spent time explaining what the steps of the Feldman model entailed. They also

provided handouts (Appendix H) for students to reference in order to refresh their memories if they did not know how to complete one of these steps. At least half of the groups in the high school class had difficulty completing the final evaluation of the art work and indicated that they did not know how to do it even though the instructor had explained it to them before they got started and they had a supplemental handout explaining what to do. While these evaluative steps were not new to either the high school students or the middle school students, both participants indicated their students had engaged in this style of evaluative activity infrequently.

In Felicia's middle school class, students discussed the works of art in small groups after Felicia had finished explaining how to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate a work of art. I was not able to hear if students used the suggested Feldman model for interpreting the art, but in the group discussion at the conclusion of this activity only two of the students felt comfortable saying which work of art they enjoyed the most without further explanation. In Karen's elementary school class, she engaged the entire class as a group in discussion through the evaluation process and prompted them with open ended questions, which many of the students were eager to answer. Students vied for the opportunity to talk about the art and seemed excited when sharing their observations and insights. There was no lecture on behalf of the instructor and the opportunities to speak appeared to be evenly divided between Karen and the students. The students freely brought up their own insights and I was able to witness discussion between them as they worked together to come to an understanding with each other. I also witnessed this mutual understanding and discussion during the activity in Elisabeth's

high school art classroom when she had the students decide as a group the chronology of the art works. More research is needed in order to determine if this happened because of ages of students or because of the approaches and questions used by the teachers.

Since the most student involvement and comprehension happened without the instruction of the Feldman model of describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate, I am led to conclude that in the context of the classes I observed, the Feldman model is more constricting to students who are not already comfortable with the concept of how to look at and interpret a work of art.

The last important discovery of this study demonstrates that discussion of art can be a vehicle for socialization. Art discussion is another way that pupils share interactions as they discuss the qualities and characteristics of art:

> While we engage in discussions about art, it's hard not to bond with those with whom we are sharing our ideas. We are talking about an art object but revealing what it means to us. It works in two directions: as we listen to others, we learn about them. As we share observations and meanings, the respectful way we engage in meaningful conversations with peers often makes many other communications easier and more productive. (Yenawine, 2013, p.134)

None of the students in all three of the classes I observed were familiar with any of the artists introduced to them during these classes. As they attempted to make sense of what they were seeing, the interactive conversations nurtured the process of creating meaning about art while reinforcing stronger social bonds and friendships because of the sharing of ideas that takes place during these discussions. Many social interactions can occur through the process of making and discussing art. More importantly, when discussion and

thought are attached to the art making process, it has the potential to imbue the experience with cultural meaning.

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD OF ART EDUCATION

Significant findings show that adding the element of discussion into the art classroom via art criticism can create more personal resonance within the arena of art making and can help students not only with art understanding but can assist in the interpretation of our media and advertising saturated culture. The element of discussion spans the boundaries between art education in schools and art education in museums and can provide for much collaboration and interaction between the two worlds. This means that art can be understood in a variety of ways. As art critic Terry Barrett says, "no single interpretation is exhaustive of the meaning of an artwork" (1994, p. 77). Using art criticism methods, especially with open ended questions, enables students to more deeply explore these lenses. This can make interpreting works of art problematic since it invites multiple interpretations that ideally require justification. The very nature of art criticism develops critical thinking skills in students. These skills can expand beyond the art classroom to other subjects, the workplace, and more.

The synergy of the common core and real world education intended to prepare students for the workforce is what 21st century skills are being incorporated into the classrooms to accomplish. Critical thinking and problem solving are included in the 21st century skillset, thus further promoting for art education's potential as being a major contributor in teaching and supporting the standards of the current educational framework. These skills include creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, decision

making, communication, collaboration, information and communications technology (ICT), citizenship, life and career, and personal and social responsibility. Art education is an essential part of developing 21st century skills. Furthermore, according to Wolff (1997),

> art criticism can help everyone to engage, discuss, evaluate, and write intelligently about works of art in all media and styles, regardless of how shocking, inartistic, or reactionary they might at first appear. That is what art criticism is uniquely qualified to do, and it is what differentiates it from other disciplines. (p. 67)

Using art criticism in the art class challenges students to engage in critical reflection: "The infusion of critical analysis and interpretation when making and viewing visual culture leads to learning conceived as a highly interactive process" (Freedman, 2003, p. 76). Further, using art criticism to discuss contemporary art calls for a broader definition of art because it embraces the investigation of lesser known artists including women, folk artists, and everyday objects. This broader definition would also include contemporary artists not commonly used in the art historical canon taught in the classroom. Contemporary artists explore different societal aspects and current events, which increase the likelihood of engaging the students and expanding the scope of educational possibilities in the art classroom. Furthermore it also integrates learning with other subjects such as social studies, political science, anthropology, etc. when integrated across the k-12 curriculum. There are many different approaches to arts integration, one such approach preferred by the Kenedy Center is that arts integration is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area

104

and meets evolving objectives in both. This idea of "evolving objectives" is very similar

to *Art21*'s view of contemporary art education. *Art21* is an organization that encourages

art educators to engage students in learning about contemporary art using contemporary

approaches. While these approaches are not specifically outlined, they include learning

about contemporary artists in such a way that they can play a fundamental role in helping

students reimagine the possibilities to be able to see and think about themselves, their

relationship to the world, and how they participate in daily life:

> Artists today work across disciplines to deal with urgent (as well as timeless)
> concerns in ways that support the skills an education should ideally instill:
> original and critical thinking, problem solving, self-expression, innovation,
> collaboration, creativity, compassion, empathy, risk taking, discipline, and
> curiosity. (Hamlin, 2013)

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While answering my research question that drove this study, I began to have

many questions that fell outside the scope of my question of how public school art

educators in Texas use art criticism and discussion techniques to teach their k-12 students

about contemporary art. For instance, many art educators collaborate with museum

education programs to deepen the arts program. This is useful because collaboration

between schools and museums greater resources become available to both schools and

museums. A closely related topic would be to investigate how schools that have a closer

collaboration with a museum than the schools where my participants are employed use

art criticism techniques. Related to this question is if schools in a city with a strong

museum culture are more likely to use art criticism techniques when learning about contemporary art than schools not in a city with a strong museum culture.

One of the discoveries I made during the course of my research was that the term "art criticism" was a problematic term and was frequently interpreted as either primarily formalistic or negative in tone. A related but different approach to my research would be to change the questions I ask the participants during the initial interviews. For example, instead of combining questions concerning art criticism and discussion and using these terms interchangeably, a different approach would be to separate the interview into segments. I would first question participants about their use of art criticism and then transition into questions about discussions that they hold in class in order to better understand if they view discussion and art criticism as separate or one in the same.

SUMMARY

For this study, I conducted qualitative research by adopting case study as my methodology. Using this approach as my guideline, I began to illustrate a portrayal of the way three public school art educators in Texas use art criticism techniques and discussion to teach their k-12 students about contemporary art. Case study was the best option for conducting research on this topic because the data obtained from the observations were intrinsic to answering the research question. I focused on grasping the methods and techniques of practicing art educators, identifying the implementation of these art criticism and discussion techniques, and triangulating commonalities, differences, and themes from the data. In order to do this and still maintain validity for my qualitative research, I diligently transcribed all interviews and observations. One of the main reasons

why I chose to conduct my research at these particular three schools is because I already had information regarding the educational goals and processes of the art instructors. I knew that based on the nature of qualitative research, this sample would best help me as the researcher come to understand the answer to my research question. I gathered data from interviews and observations in order to triangulate and find themes to help me answer this topic. I maintained qualitative validity in several ways such as voice recording and accurately transcribing the semi-structured interviews with the participants before and after observing their classrooms in which the phenomenon took place which I also audio recorded and transcribed. When discussing sensitive topics, it is necessary to mask names of people, places, and activities. Therefore all the names of the participants and the locations in which they teach have been changed. After writing summaries of my observations (Appendix D) I was able to see commonalities between the participants in the way they approached using art criticism techniques to teach their students about contemporary art. Though many of these factors are limitations to my study, my scope is also very specific, which according to Creswell (2009) is typical of qualitative research.

The themes that emerged from the analysis of my research were: (a) working in groups; (b) looking at multiple art images; (c) art production; (d) use of the Feldman model; (e) contemporary art discussion to introduce a project; and (f) beginning with a familiar work of art before introducing a new artist. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that qualitative data analysis can be viewed as an artistic endeavor, with researchers following intuitive hunches to determine what the data mean. This research was meant to be an exploration of the way art teachers in Texas use art criticism to teach their students

about contemporary art. The data analysis was meant to find commonalities and differences between these instructors in order to learn the best practices of this topic.

This research has impacted my own practice as an early childhood art educator. When I interviewed Karen Hughes about her practice in using art criticism and discussion techniques with elementary school children in her art classroom, she mentioned that she ties every lesson to art history or an artist otherwise the lessons are not as full, with too limited connections to other information and subject content. I was afraid to conduct lessons without these connections until I realized that for my classes, it was just the lack of discussion that made a lesson less fulfilling for both me and my students. There is always something to talk about even if it is not related to an artist. There needs to be something to tie the lesson to the students' personal experience and make it relevant to them. There will be more experience taken away if they can think of it in terms of familiarity. I always try to talk and let them decide how to relate to it before interjecting my own knowledge into the lesson. Additionally, if a class does not start with some sort of discussion the students are in a different frame of mind than if it had started this way. Discussion makes them more thoughtful than they would be otherwise.

This research has also changed my own art viewing experiences. As a museum attendant, I no longer rely on information provided by the gallery showing the art work. I remember a particular visit some years ago to the Menil Gallery in Houston, Texas. I was frustrated because the accompanying wall panels provided little to no information about the art. At the time I felt like a deeper knowledge of the art movements, artists, and

techniques was needed in order to truly appreciate and understand what the museum had to offer. In my more recent visits to museums, even if a museum offers information on works of art in which I find myself interested, I do not desire to read more about them. My lack of factual knowledge no longer hinders my ability to appreciate and come to an understanding about works of art.

Appendix A: Letter to Participants

My name is Samantha Garfield and I am a grad student at UT in art education. My thesis topic is how teachers use art criticism to teach contemporary art in the classroom. I am looking to conduct a case study of this and your child's art teacher has been identified as a candidate who fulfills the criteria and has agreed to participate in the study. I will not be interacting with your child however I will be observing the normal interaction between your child and their art teacher during a time that this specific activity takes place. Observation should only consist of one regular length class period. If you have any questions regarding the study or your child's involvement please contact me at Samantha.garfield@gmail.com.

Sincerely,
Samantha Garfield
Office of Research Support
The University of Texas at Austin
(512) 471-8871
orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu

Appendix B: Assent for Participation in Research

Title
 How Do Art Teachers Use Art Criticism to Teach Contemporary Art in the Classroom

Introduction
You have been asked to be in a research study How Art Teachers Use Art Criticism to
Teach Contemporary Art in the Classroom. By taking methods commonly used in art
criticism and employing them in an art classroom, an instructor can ultimately enrich the
teaching and learning of art and assist students in learning to subjectively evaluate images
from their everyday lives. Learning how to turn an evaluation from a judgmental and
careless acceptance or dismissal into a thoughtful analysis can suspend indifference and
re-invigorate the potential educational aspect of time spent in the art classroom. This
method reinforces the value placed on thoughtful description in art education. I am
conducting a case study to observe three to five art classes at various campuses around
Austin, Texas in order to observe how art criticism methods are used to guide discussions
between students in order to interpret contemporary art.

What am I going to be asked to do?
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to
•   Allow 1 to 2 class-long observations in your classroom during a time when you
will be conducting discussions on contemporary art/artists.
•   Two brief interviews before and the immediately after the observation(s). These
interviews will last approximately 15 to 30 minutes each.
 This study will take one to two class periods and the time it takes to conduct two loosely
structured interviews about the procedures and outcomes of the observation and there will
be two to three of other people in this study.

What are the risks involved in this study?
The potential risk to the participants is no greater than everyday life

Do I have to participate?
You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at
any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The
University of Texas at Austin in anyway.
If you would like to participate please sign and return this form by email to
Samantha.garfield@gmail.com or mail it to: Samantha Garfield, 4502 Bennett Ave,
Austin TX, 78751. You will receive a copy of this form so if you want to you can look at
it later.

Will I get anything to participate?
You will not receive any type of payment for participating in this study.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?
The records of this study will be kept private. All research will be stored electronically and password protected.

What are my confidentiality or privacy protections when participating in this research study?
This study is anonymous. Anonymity will be protected by not using participant names in the study.
If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only the research team will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for 12 months and then erased. The data resulting from your participation may be used for future research or be made available to other researchers for research purposes not detailed within this consent form.
Audio recordings will be labeled:
Participant X Interview 1, Participant X Interview 2, Participant X Observation.

If you are willing to participate please email Samantha.garfield@gmail.com

Appendix C: Letter to the Parents of Students in the Classes of the Participants

My name is Samantha Garfield and I am a grad student at UT in art education. My thesis topic is how teachers use art criticism to teach contemporary art in the classroom. I am looking to conduct a case study of this and your child's art teacher has been identified as a candidate who fulfills the criteria and has agreed to participate in the study. I will not be interacting with your child however I will be observing the normal interaction between your child and their art teacher during a time that this specific activity takes place. Observation should only consist of one regular length class period. If you have any questions regarding the study or your child's involvement please contact me at Samantha.garfield@gmail.com.

Sincerely,
Samantha Garfield
Office of Research Support
The University of Texas at Austin
(512) 471-8871
orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu

Appendix D: Observation Summaries

Karen Hughes observation at Spring Lake Elementary School

Karen chose Lordy Rodriguez as the contemporary artist that she introduced to her students. She began the class by showing the students images by Jasper Johns, an artist that the students were already familiar with, and then compared Lordy Rodriguez to Jasper Johns, making the contemporary artist relevant to the student's knowledge base. She chose Jasper Johns not only because the students were already familiar with his work, but also because his series of maps were easily relatable to the fictionalized maps made by Lordy Rodriguez.

Karen began by asking the students what about the imagery looked familiar to them. They talked about colors, shapes they could identify, they attempted to decipher scrambled words and state abbreviations, and soon realized it was a map of the United States. Eventually Karen did a comparison of the images by Jasper Johns and Lordy Rodriguez. The transition between comparing and contrasting to discussing contemporary art began by talking about something familiar being changed into something unfamiliar. For example both artists used difficult to read, fictional maps in their art. Lordy Rodriguez used maps to reconfigure factual locations and create fictional art compositions.

Karen showed one of Lordy's maps of Texas which the students were able to easily identify that it did not look like Texas. She gave a bit of background information on Rodriguez and revealed that he immigrated to the United States. Karen led the class through a discussion of immigration and she tied in geography, showing how the maps

Rodriguez made did not reflect the actual maps of the United States. Not only were the surrounding states different, but the shapes of the states were changed as were the cities.

Students discussed how, even though they could identify that the map was inaccurate they still knew it was supposed to be a map. They listed visual cues such as longitude and latitude lines, colors, topography, and the colors of the water and land. Karen next showed them a google street view map of their own school. At first they could tell that it was a school and then after describing the different aspects of the map such as the building, the surrounding houses, and the track they identified it as their school.

Karen continued discussing more of Lordy's work with the class. They talked about museum etiquette, specifically how to take the time to look at a work of art and try to understand what it meant before dismissing it as "worthless." She asked students to pretend to see the image for the first time again as if it were in a museum and to try to visualize what they might say about it. After the discussion ended, Karen brought back the Google view of their school and gave them a piece of paper in order to let them draw a made up map of their school area based on what they saw in the Google view. She advised students to draw their maps based on streets and lines but not details. Approximately 20 minutes of class time was spent on discussion and 10 minutes was spent making art.

Felicia Smith's observation at Creek Bed Middle School

Felicia Smith started class immediately by having her students sketch while observing a work of art by the contemporary artist Robert Jackson. After five minutes of

sketching, Felicia began to lecture about still life. She talked about proportion since that was the biggest difficulty for the class during the five minute sketch. First, she tied it to prior work with which the students were familiar. In particular, she brought up the skewed proportions in the work of Renee Magritte. Next, she talked about proportion in relation to drawing from observation, which is what they were going to do in their next project that the day's activities would introduce. She asked students how many of the gallon milk jugs would have to be stacked up to be as tall as the stack of Oreos. A couple of students answered with their guesses but in general the students were very hesitant to talk and participate in the discussion.

Felicia asked would it have the same impact if the proportions were different in the work of art. She used this point to talk about using objects that tell a story. Her point was that "boring" objects in a still-life such as fruit or flowers do not always tell much of a story. Next Felicia introduced still-lifes by the artist Robert Jackson to her class. She explained that was a contemporary artist and making art was his only job. She points out that not all artists have the fame of Vincent VanGogh but can still be great and successful artists.

The exercise that Felicia used in class was discussion based and she lectured the students through how and what to discuss before helping them to start. She talked about how to "take it one step at a time" when looking at the art. First she asked the students to explain what the art looked like, describing it with facts not opinions. She asked them to pretend they were on the telephone with someone and had to describe it to them because they can not see it. Explain the colors, objects, and how they were arranged. The next

step in talking about art is analyzing. This is when Felicia wanted the students to talk about the elements and principles of art that they see in the piece. For a quick reference she reminded the students that the elements and principles were listed on the closet door. The next step for students to take was interpretation. This was the time when the students could discuss what they thought about the art. If they found it scary or if it made them happy or anxious. It is the student's personal opinion and they needed to be able to explain why they felt that way.

Next Felicia divided students into small groups and explained the exercise to them. She left examples of possible questions to ask about the art up on the board so students could reference it if they didn't know where to begin or find that they were out of ideas for what to discuss. They were able to talk for two minutes about the print on each table. There were eight pieces of art by Robert Jackson. She further discussed what to do if they didn't know what to say or were shy or someone if else dominated the conversation. In order to receive full points for participation the students must look like they were paying attention and keep their eyes on the art and the people talking.

As the students discussed, Felicia walked around and interacted with the different groups to either help or keep them on track. After the students rotated through all 8 pieces of art she led a very brief group discussion and asked if anyone had a favorite. A few students spoke up and the general consensus was that their favorite pieces were either funny or they liked the story it told. After this activity was over the students then practiced drawing still lifes with various objects.

Elisabeth Daniels observation at Forest Ranch High School

Elisabeth Daniels began her class by passing out a note card to each student with two pictures on it, one small picture and one bigger picture. During the observation she conducted a discussion for the students which was meant to segue into the next class project.

Elisabeth divided students into groups based on what the bigger picture on their note card was. The students had either a fish or a mountain for their bigger picture and they separated into two groups. She gave each group three prints of art work and instructed students to arrange them into chronological order from oldest to most recent. In order to accomplish this, students needed to work together in a group and problem solve. After this was accomplished the two groups put the six images in order from oldest to newest. Students who disagreed with each other's decisions were required to give reasons why they disagreed with the group decision. Elisabeth had to keep prompting the other students to see if they agreed with the chronology of the art work that the others had decided was correct. There was a lot of shuffling of the order of images before they settled on an agreement at which point Elisabeth went through each image and talked about the actual dates and re-arranged them in the actual chronological order. The oldest piece was from 1831 and the most recent was from 2007; they were all works of art from Japan.

Next Elisabeth divided the students into groups by the smaller image that they had on their note card. Students with matching images formed six groups and they each had an image from the chronological line up that the students had just worked on. She handed

out an "art criticism worksheet" which prompted the students to list the artist, title, date, and medium of the work and then asked the students to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate the work. She also handed out an accompanying worksheet that further explained how to accomplish these tasks. She explained that this was a method that could be used for all works of art not just in art history but our on personal art work and the work of others from any time period. She also gave the students a packet of information about the image that they had on their cards. Each handout had two different works of art from one artist and students needed to decide which work of art to critique. Before encouraging students to begin their analysis of the images, she gave a brief rundown of what each step of an analysis entailed. She talked about how describing the art is not about opinion but more fact based. Colors and materials the artist used are something that can be noted when describing works of art. Next she explained how to discuss the elements and principles in the work of art when in the analysis stage which was more about the formal properties. The next step of the work sheet asked for interpretation. Elisabeth explained that this was what the mood of the work was and what they think it meant or what the intent of the artist was. Evaluation is opinion based to which Elisabeth explained she wanted the students to ask themselves if it was good art and if they liked it. For this they could use their own background knowledge and personal opinions.

After the students spent some time doing this activity they went group by group and introduced their images to the class in a short presentation in which they told the results of the group work in talking about description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. In general the activity was a success, but a few of the groups did not know

119

how to complete the evaluation step of the critique. After all the students had presented their works of art from the 1800s through 2007 they began as one large group to compare one image from the Eddo period to one of the contemporary pieces. Together, the students decided that the contemporary piece, which visually referenced the older work of art, was both celebrating and mocking it at the same time.

Appendix E: Art Images by Robert Jackson

Which Were Used in Felicia Smith's Middle School Class

Still Might Need More Milk
http://www.robertcjackson.com/pages/paintings/still-might-need-more-milk.html

The Beast
http://www.robertcjackson.com/pages/paintings/the-beast.html

Drum Roll Please
http://www.robertcjackson.com/pages/paintings/drum-roll-please.html

The Critic
http://www.robertcjackson.com/pages/paintings/the-critic.html

Splatter
http://www.robertcjackson.com/pages/paintings/splatter.html

Pop
http://www.robertcjackson.com/pages/paintings/pop.html

Soon to be Hosed
http://www.robertcjackson.com/pages/paintings/soon-to-be-hosed.htm

Trojan Horse
http://www.robertcjackson.com/pages/paintings/trojan-horse.html

Crossing
http://www.robertcjackson.com/pages/paintings/crossing.html

Appendix F: Art Images Used in Elisabeth Daniel's High School Class

Traditional and Contemporary Japanese Art by various artists

CONTEMPORARY:
Slash with a Knife by Yoshitoma Nara
http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/reviews/robinson/Images/robinson10-22-3.jpg

 727 by Takashi Murakami
http://deplatayexacto.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/727-727-takashi-murakami-2006.jpg

The Blue Dragon by Gajin Fujita
http://www.lalouver.com/html/gallery-history-images/large/gajin-fujita-print-high-voltage-II.jpg

TRADITIONAL:
53 Stations of the Tokaido Road by Ando Hiroshige
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7d/Tokaido_Hoeido_26_Nissaka.png

A Farewell Surimono for Ichikawa Danjuro
http://www.britishmuseum.org/images/ps202912_m.jpg

The Great Wave at Kanagawa (from 36 views of Mount Fuji) by Katsushikia Hokusai
http://bento.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Great-Wave.jpg

Appendix G: Art Images by Lordy Rodriguez
Which Were Used in Karen Hughes Elementary School Class

Texas
http://lordyrodriguez.com/artwork/3162946_Texas.html

Nebraska
http://lordyrodriguez.com/artwork/3162171_Nebraska.html

Untitled 350
http://lordyrodriguez.com/artwork/3196985_Untitled_350.html

Appendix H: Art Criticism Handout used by Elisabeth Daniels

4 STEPS TO CRITIQUING ART WORK

DEVELOPED BY EDMUND FELDMAN

Description - Analysis - Interpretation - Evaluation

Describe

This stage is like taking inventory. You want to come up with a list of everything you see in the work. Stick to the facts. Imagine that you are describing the artwork to someone over the telephone. Express what you see in detail.

Analyze

Try to figure out what the artist has done to achieve certain effects. Consider different elements and principles used by the artist and why the artist might have chosen to incorporate these essentials.

• Questions to consider:

  o Use the vocabulary you learned in class. For example, if you're looking at mostly red, yellow and blue refer to the colors as primary colors.
  o How are the elements of art (color, shape, line, texture, space, form, value) and the principles of design (balance, harmony, emphasis, movement/rhythm, unity, variety) used in this artwork?
  o What do you notice about the artist's choice of materials?
  o What grabs your attention in the work, why?
  o Do you see any relationship to the things you listed during the description stage?

Interpret

Try to figure out what the artwork is about. Your own perspectives, associations and experiences meet with "the evidence" found in the work of art. All art works are about something. Some art works are about color, their subject matter, and

social or cultural issues. Some art works are very accessible — that is, relatively easy for the viewer to understand what the artist was doing. Other works are highly intellectual, and might not be as easy for us to readily know what the artist was thinking about.

• Questions to consider:

  o What is the theme or subject of the work? (What from the artwork gives you that impression?)
  o What mood or emotions does the artwork communicate?
  o What is the work about; what do you think it means or what does it mean to you? (What from the artwork gives you that impression?)
  o Why do you think that artist created this work?

Evaluate

This is a culminating and reflecting activity. You need to come to some conclusions about the artwork based on all the information you have gathered from your description, analysis, and nterpretation.

• Questions to consider:

  o What are your thoughts on the artwork based on the three steps above and why?
  o Why do you like or dislike the artwork (explain).
  o What have you seen or learned from this work that you might apply to your own artwork or your own thinking?

APPENDIX I: Worksheet Which Elisabeth Daniel's Students Completed

Art Criticism Worksheet

   Artist:

   Title:

   Date:

   Medium:

1. Describe (What can be seen in the artwork? Facts only)

 2. Analyze (What elements/principles are incorporated in the artwork, why?)

 3. Interpret (What is the meaning of the artwork, based on steps 1 and 2?)

4. Evaluate (What is your evaluation of the work, based on steps1, 2, 3?)

References

Barrett, T. (1994). *Criticizing art*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield
    Publishing Company.

Blandy, D., & Congdon, K. (Eds.). (1991). *Pluralistic approaches to art
    criticism*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular
    Press.

Clements, R. D., & Wachowiak, F. (2010). Appreciating art and visual culture:
    Art history, criticism, and aesthetics. In *Emphasis Art* (9th ed.),(pp.
    241-270). Pearson Education.

Cresswell, J. (2009). *Research design:qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods
    approaches.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Efland, A., Freedman, K., & Stuhr, P. (1996). *Postmodern art education: An
    approach to curriculum.* Reston, VA: The National Art Education Association.

Emory, L. (Ed.). (2002). *Teaching art in a postmodern world*. Australia: Common
    Ground Publishing.

Feldman, E. B. (1994). *Practical art critcism.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:
    Prentice Hall.

Freedman, K. (2003). *Teaching visual culture.* Reston, VA: The National Art Education
    Association.

Gaudelius, Y., & Speirs, P. (Eds.) (2002). *Contemporary issues in art education.* Upper
    Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Greenberg, C. (1961). *Art and culture: Critical essays*. MA: Beacon
    Press.

Gude, O. (2004, January). Postmodern principles. *Art Education*, 6-14.

Hewett, G. (1987). *Finding buried treasures: Aesthetic scanning with children.*

Jagodzinski, J. (1997). *Experifigural writings. Pun(k) deconstruction: Experifigural
    writings in art and art education.* Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Joo, E., & Ham-Roberts, J. (Eds.). (2011). *Rethinking contemporary art and multicultural education*. NY: Routledge.

Kalina, R. (Ed.). *Essays by Lawrence Alloway: Imagining the present*. London: Routledge.

Lippard, L. (1971). *Changing: Essays in art criticism.* New York, NY: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc.

Rice, S. (2009). Back *to the future: George Kubler, Lawrence Alloway, and the complex present. Art Journal* 68(4).

Sullivan, G. (2010). *Art practice as research: Inquiry in visual arts.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Vygotsky*, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Whiteley, N. (2004). Pop since 1949: Lawrence Alloway. *Artforum International,* 57(2).

Wolff, T., & Geahigan, G. (1997). *Art criticism and education*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Yenawine, P. (2013). *Visual thinking strategies.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.