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Pathways for Empathetic Understanding in Modern and Contemporary Art Museums

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Keywords Empathy; Pedagogy; Social Justice; Museum education; Empathy-building

Abstract In recent years, questions about our capacity for and ability to learn empathy have gained new social, educational, political, and philosophical traction. In 2017, the Minneapolis Institute of Art received a grant to study how museum-going can build empathy in visitors. Art and social studies educators have long considered how modeling empathy can affect students' behavior and ability to learn content. More recent scholarship has explored the empathy-building possibilities of history and science museum education. Despite these trends, little light has been shed on the ways in which modern and contemporary art museum educators incorporate empathy-building into their museum tours. If museums are fertile ground for fostering empathy and the art classroom has long been a haven for empathy-based pedagogy, what about the art museum?

Drawing on scholarship from the fields of museum education, art education, and philosophy, this paper considers the role of empathy in relation to the pedagogical frameworks used by modern and contemporary art museums and argues that these museums are fertile ground for changing the ways we emotionally understand one another and ourselves. Specific focus is given to New York City art museum educators and the ways in which they incorporate empathy into their tour programming for elementary school students. Direct observation and one-on-one interviews with educators helped guide the investigation of empathy-building practices and the consideration of the social justice implications of an empathy-centric pedagogy.

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Introduction

In recent years, questions about our capacity for and ability to learn empathy have gained new social, educational, political, and philosophical traction. The oft-quoted 2011 study, *Changes in dispositional empathy in American college students over time: A meta-analysis*, brought to light the notion that we are living in a time of decreased empathy. Specifically, it found that

the empathetic tendencies of college-aged students decreased significantly between 1908 and 2008 (Konrath et. al, 2011, p.181). In 2017, the Minneapolis Institute of Art used grant funding to study how museum-going can build empathy in visitors and established the first “Center for Empathy and the Visual Arts,” with a central aim “...to create strategies and tools to help museums around the world promote empathy” (Daly, 2017). Other publications have explored the ideas of how empathy can best be taught, and that the connection between art, museums, and empathy is not necessarily new.

Art and social studies educators have long considered how modeling empathy can affect students’ behavior and ability to learn content (Jones, et. al., 2014; Phillips, 2003; Stout, 1999; Yilmaz, 2007). Recent scholarship has explored the empathy-building possibilities of history, science, and civic museum education (Bader, et. al., 2016; Bader, et. al, 2015; Ivcevic, 2016). In 2018, new scholarship has started to scratch the surface of empathy in art museum education, considering how analogic thinking can play a role in empathy-building (Bowles and Crow) and examining how frequently educators encourage students to make human connections in one-off museum tours (RK&A).

Despite these trends, few writers have considered the specific ways in which modern and contemporary art museum educators incorporate empathy into their museum tours. In what ways do modern and contemporary art museum educators encourage empathy-building in their gallery tours with elementary school students, if at all? Considering the ways in which art museum educators foster empathy during one-off museum visits allows for a practical examination of the role empathy may have in modern and contemporary art museum education practice. Furthermore, examining the ways they incorporate empathy in their tours allows for exploration of the implications of an empathy-centric pedagogy. This paper positions museums as not solely spaces for discourse and learning, but for changes in the ways we emotionally interact with one another and ourselves.

Understanding Empathy

The term *empathy* has roots in art viewing, derived from the German word, “Einfühlung” which is defined as “feeling into” (Jeffers, 2009, p.2). In the early 1900s, the aesthetician Theodor Lipps popularized this concept, using the word to describe the ways in which we experience artwork and moments in nature (Krzniac, 2015, p.9). According to Lipps, these experiences are characterized by an emotional affinity, or a “projection of human feelings onto art objects” (Jeffers, 2009, p.3).

Empathy takes on a variety of meanings and associations depending on its context. Historians, for example, often refer to empathy as a practice of “historical imagination” or “the ability to see and judge the past in its own terms by trying to understand the mentality, frames of reference, beliefs, values, intentions, and actions of historical agents using a variety of historical evidence” (Yilmaz, 2007, p. 331). Similarly, empathy is tied closely to the practice of “perspective-taking...a process through which we imagine how another would feel in their situation” or when “...we imagine how we would feel in that other’s situation” (Simeone, 2016, p.12). Scholars and researchers across fields often distinguish empathy from both historical imagination and perspective-taking, calling it “a feeling of shared emotion with another person” (Bader et. al., 2016, p. 116). In other words, empathy may not solely be viewed as the process of cognitively understanding someone else’s feelings, choices, or emotions. To

some, empathy can be characterized by its affective nature: to be truly empathetic does not mean to simply understand another's feelings but to experience them yourself.

Neuroscience ushers forth another understanding of empathy. Researchers in the field point to the biochemical processes carried out by mirror neurons, which are specifically designed to fire when observing actions carried out by others (Jeffers, 2009, p.6). These biochemical processes have distinct connections to art and art viewing. In their discussion of the mirror neuron system, Jeffers (2009) posits that “[w]hereas objects of art may or may not be experienced as emotionally ‘moving,’ they always evoke ‘moving’ experiences, neurologically speaking” (p. 6). Because human beings are equipped with mirror neurons—which react in response to external, visual, or emotional stimuli—what we see visually, and the expressions and movements of others are “...experienced in and through the resonant body, constituting [a] kind of aesthetic-empathetic experience” (2009, p. 6). Viewing art, much like viewing a facial expression or a hand signal, light up specific neural pathways (Jeffers, 2009, p.9). Our capacity for emotional and physical understanding, then, is deeply rooted not only in our neurological capacities, but in our visual experiences of the world around us.

Scholars and researchers have explored the connections between the museum—which is experienced physically and visually—and empathy. In the introduction to his text, *Fostering Empathy Through Museums*, Gokcigdem (2016) states, “Empathy is not only how we instinctively connect with others through our mirror neurons, but also how we make sense of the complex, connected, and interdependent nature of our existence” (p. xxiii). He goes on to outline the ways in which empathy is used “as an educational, storytelling tool,” “as an integral element of a museum’s institutional values and behavior,” and “as a phenomenon that is worthy of exploration on its own” (Gokcigdem, 2016, xxvii). Similarly, within Gokcigdem’s (2016) volume, Bader et.al. (2016) explore the ways in which museum educators at the Tenement Museum, can use empathy and perspective-taking as an effective means for historic and civic education. Similar to Gokcigdem (2016), in his unpublished thesis, Simeone (2016) examines the connections between empathy, perspective-taking, and museum practice such as exhibition design, mission statements, and immersive exhibitions. Like Bader et. al. (2015), Simeone focuses exclusively on history and civic education museums like the Civil Rights Museum, Tenement Museum, and Museum of Tolerance. Similarly, Carfagno and Rozan (2016) argue for the value of placing empathy in the center of a museum’s core values and mission (pp. 201-204). Lvcevic et. al. (2016) explore how museum educators use art to address the questions of empathy-building at the Botín Center in Spain, where the curriculum explicitly focuses on building empathy and centers on social and emotional learning.

In his 2015 text, *Empathy: Why it Matters, and How to Get It*, Roman Krznaric’s definition of empathy and empathetic behaviors relates directly to common practices in art museum education and inquiry. For the purpose of this paper, I will be using Krznaric’s definition of empathy as “[t]he art of stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives, and using that understanding to guide your actions” (Krznaric, 2015, p. x). Krznaric (2015) breaks his exploration of empathy into habits of empathetic people, two of which have direct applications to common art museum education practices (p. xv). Among these, he highlights the “craft of conversation” which he defines as “fostering curiosity about strangers, radical listening and taking off our emotional masks” (Krznaric, 2015, p. xv). A central tenet of art museum education is to promote conversation

by asking questions, listening to each other, and fostering personal or emotional connections with artworks. Yet, in his discussion of ways to close the “empathy deficit,” Krznaric (2015) advocates for another practice that, as I will argue, resonates with common art museum education practice. Krznaric (2015) introduces the idea of “outrospection”—a practice counter to introspection or the examination of oneself, involving looking outward to further our own understandings of our lives and our places in the world (p. xxiii). Where better to do this sort of exploration—rooted in diverse perspectives, reliant on conversation, and with other people—than in museums?

Bowles and Crow (2018) offer explicit strategies for art museum educators, showcasing how modes of inquiry can help foster empathy through the use of analogic thinking. In their discussion, Bowles and Crow (2018) make connections between empathy-building strategies and the role of analogy in art museum education. By using analogies that are relevant to students’ lives, Bowles and Crow (2018) argue, art museum educators can help build a bridge between the art and art objects produced in the past and their contemporary students (p. 345). While they do not make direct correlations between the practices they advocate and the goals associated with history and social studies education, their discussion is tied to the idea of historical empathy—obtaining an understanding of the actions of past historical figures that is free from contemporary biases (Yilmaz, 2007, p.331). Furthermore, while they advocate for analogical reasoning’s role in museum education and in developing empathy for past societies and civilizations, their discussion is limited to working with ancient art.

Along these lines, RK&A’s (2018) recent impact study on one-time museum tours highlights human connections and empathy as student capacities that can be addressed during single-visit museum tours. They define these types of encounters as “connections to lived experience,” “connection to the artist,” and “connection to the self/community” (RK&A, 2018, p. 11). While they acknowledge that the idea of empathy and fostering “human connections” are of interest to art museum educators (RK&A, 2018, p. 10), the study ultimately concludes that promoting these kinds of empathetic connections happens less frequently on single-visit gallery tours than in the classroom (RK&A, 2018, p. 19). Through their impact study, RK&A found that when compared to classroom art exploration, personal and artist-based connections are not as likely to happen in the museum (2018 p. 20). Despite these relevant findings, the report does not go into explicit detail about what specific teaching practices fall under this established umbrella or expand upon the pedagogies to which they are referring within this category. In and of itself, it is significant that RK&A highlight “human connections” and empathy as possible impacts of one-off art museum tours (2018 p. 20). Yet, their discussion opens up further questions about what sorts of practices are being employed to foster “connect[ions] to human experiences across culture, time, and place” (RK&A, 2018, p. 20) and how these practices could be strengthened by museum educators.

Methods

Drawing from Simeone’s (2016) method of examining the institutional role of empathy in museum practice, this paper relies on in-person and email interviews with practicing art museum educators. To get an initial sense of how empathy may be incorporated by modern and contemporary art museum educators, an anonymous online questionnaire was distributed to establish preliminary information on how museum educators think about empathy, if at all. This questionnaire was sent via email to museum educators in my personal

network. Following RK&A's (2018) findings, it could not be assumed that all art museum educators are thinking about empathy or consciously incorporating empathy-building and perspective-taking into their tours. To get a better sense of how educators are defining and incorporating empathy, questions asked the participants to consider: (1) How would you define empathy? (2) Would you say empathy plays a role in your museum teaching? (3) What role does empathy play in your teaching, if any? and (4) To your knowledge, do you think you help students build empathy? How?

In addition to this survey, I observed five gallery tours at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, where I currently manage School, Youth and Teen Programs. Each tour ranged between 60 to 90 minutes and were designed for elementary school students grades three through five. Two tours were given to fourth graders, two to third graders, and one to a class of fifth graders.

To craft my observation protocol, I relied heavily on two definitions of empathy: (1) The definition provided by Krznaric (2015) as "[t]he art of stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives, and using that understanding to guide your actions" (p. x); and (2) the definition Yilmaz (2007) provides for historical empathy or "[t]he ability to see and judge the past in its own terms by trying to understand the mentality, frames of reference, beliefs, values, intentions and actions of historical agents" (p. 331). For my own observation purposes, I viewed artists as the "historical agents" to which Yilmaz refers. I also consulted the empathy-building habits Krznaric (2015) outlines as central to empathetic conversation (p. xv). Using these definitions of empathy and empathetic behaviors as frameworks for my observations, I considered the following questions while observing: (1) Does the educator incorporate empathetic habits (perspective-taking, empathetic conversation practices)? How? (2) Does the educator encourage students to explore the lives and perspectives of other people? How? (3) Does the educator encourage students to examine and connect with "past historical agents?" How? By relying on two clear definitions of empathy and outlining specific possible teaching behaviors, I was able to more clearly consider the ways in which educators are incorporating empathy-building in their modern and contemporary art museum tours.

Interviews were then conducted with four of the five educators observed. All of the interviewees currently teach at art museums with modern or contemporary art holdings in New York City (including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art). My interviews took place via email and in person, and centered around three main questions: (1) How do you define empathy? (2) What role do you think empathy does or does not play in your one-time gallery tours? (3) What would you say are the main goals for your tours?

Findings

Art museum educators not only think about empathy in relation to their work in modern and contemporary art museum education, but also consider it as a vital part of their pedagogy and practice. In response to the questionnaire, educators frequently highlighted empathy as a way to help students feel understood or as a vital tool in leading a successful inquiry with a work of art. As one educator wrote, "Empathy is primary to teaching from artwork. Inquiry in museum education is all about listening and responding to other perspectives to create a larger understanding based on collective voices." Another noted how important it is to use

empathy when leading an inquiry, responding: “The more I can make my guests/students feel like I understand them, the more comfortable they are sharing ideas and personal experience.” These responses articulate the ways in which empathetic behaviors are directly connected to existing museum pedagogies—such as open-ended inquiry centering around an art object.

When asked if they think they help students build empathy, educators said they aim to, with one respondent saying they think empathy-building is a “by-product of shared conversations” that occur on an inquiry-based museum tour. Yet, educators provided a wider range of responses when asked how they help students build empathy. Among the ways listed, educators mentioned “exposure to new cultures and ideas,” teaching from specific artworks that are more “powerful at building empathy,” activities centering around “team work,” “help[ing] to facilitate conflicting perspectives and navigate complex points of view,” by “modeling” empathy, and by introducing the “biography of the artist.” Modeling was the most frequent strategy highlighted by questionnaire respondents. One educator wrote, “[Students] see me giving a lot of positive feedback and connecting with their peers even when on occasion they’re giggling at someone’s remark or idea,” and another said, “I would like to think [empathy-building] is done indirectly by examples of kindness.” While the overwhelming takeaway from these responses is that empathy plays a clear role in educators’ museum tours, the responses did not provide a consensus about the strategies or ways in which educators are incorporating empathy.

Through observations, it was possible to construct a clearer picture of the central ways in which educators are incorporating empathy-related teaching techniques in their tours (Figure 1). I observed three main practices educators used throughout their tours, often in concert with one another: modeling empathetic behavior and conversation strategies, encouraging perspective-taking using information and inquiry through emotional inference questions, and fostering personal connections between the artists, the artworks, and the students. While modeling was most referenced by questionnaire respondents, other strategies used during the tours relied on perspective-taking through inquiry and creating personal links between students and the objects on view. Art museum educators may not know it, but empathy and empathy-building practices are woven throughout a variety of teaching techniques they currently use in one-off gallery tours.

Indicators of Fostering Empathy-Building	Observed Methods
Practicing empathetic conversation habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-evaluative language • Listening and asking clarifying questions • Repeating and paraphrasing
Exploring the lives or perspective of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating biographical and historical information for further inference • Asking students to consider the perspective of figures in artworks • Asking students questions around an artist’s processes and motivations
Examining “past historical agents” without judgement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking students to make personal connections to the artist • Asking students to apply observations and inferences to consider motivations related to their own lives

Figure 1. Outline of observation indicators and observed methods.

In all five observed tours, modeling was the most prominent strategy related to empathy-building. Educators consistently repeated student responses to better hear and understand students' ideas. One educator even told the students that she would be doing this at the very beginning of the tour, explaining that she might ask clarifying questions or repeat certain statements because, "I want to hear what you all have to say." Some of the clarifying questions consistently incorporated into inquiries with students were: "What makes you say that?" and "Why do you think that?" This tactic, which many educators employ to drive a conversation about a specific artwork forward, directly relates to one of Krznaric's (2015) highlighted strategies for empathetic conversation. In his discussion of empathy-based conversation strategies, Krznaric (2015) draws upon the psychologist Marshall Rosenberg's proposed methods for nonviolent communication and radical listening (p. 110). Krznaric (2015) advocates for "show[ing] our understanding of [conversation partners] by paraphrasing what they have just said, reflecting their message back to them in the form of questions that use neutral (non-evaluative) language" (p. 110). These strategies bear resemblances to common practices of inquiry in art museum education and were employed by all the educators observed.

Another way educators modeled empathy for students was by asking students to respond to each other's thoughts and ideas, opening the floor for nonjudgmental or "non-evaluative" (Krznaric, 2015, p. 110) additions to the conversation. After paraphrasing a student's response, educators opened the conversation up to the group by asking, "Does anyone agree or disagree?" In a follow-up email interview, one educator said this practice provides "opportunities for students to practice empathy by listening—acknowledging and relating to each other's experiences and insight." By asking students to elaborate on their own perspectives, and inviting them to consider how they might share viewpoints with their peers, the art museum educators modeled one of the most important aspects or characteristics of empathy: sharing and understanding others' perspectives.

Besides modeling these empathy-based conversation strategies, educators also directly prompted students to engage in the practice of perspective-taking. One way educators fostered this process was by asking students to consider how a depicted figure may feel or express themselves. When looking at a figurative painting by Picasso, for example, after students observed the figure's posture, pose, environment, and expression during an initial inquiry, one educator asked students what they think the figure would say. Another educator asked students to consider how they might describe the emotion depicted in Brancusi's *Muse* (1912) using one word. In these instances, the educator prompted students to consider the gesture, emotion, or posture of a figurative work of art in order to infer the emotional state depicted. Yet, educators encouraged another mode of perspective-taking more frequently. This type of perspective-taking often centered around the life and choices of artists.

During inquiries in front of art objects, all five observed educators shared biographical information about the artist, artist quotes, or images of the artist to prompt a deeper exploration about the artists' choices and lives. When discussing Frank Lloyd Wright's design for the Guggenheim Museum, for example, one educator shared that "Frank Lloyd Wright was from Wisconsin and connected to nature" before asking students to revisit their observations about the building and consider how nature may have influenced some of the design elements they previously observed. When introducing the artwork of the early modern Swedish abstract

painter, Hilma af Klint, one educator let students know that the artist thought a lot about different technology and scientific advancements as she was working during the turn of the century. After providing this piece of contextual information, the educator asked students to consider what types of technologies or inventions might have inspired the artist.

Asking questions after observing the work together, educators prompted students to consider the perspective of the artist using observational evidence and inference. In a follow-up email interview, one educator explained, “I think honing in on artists’ choices can help us understand the artist as another real person making meaning of the world in a way that may or may not have occurred to us”. This inquiry-based practice directly ties to a key tenant of empathy—learning to think outside oneself and consider someone else’s perspective and experience, even if it is very different from our own. As Krznaric (2015) writes, “The central meaning of empathy, for more than a century, has been about breaking out of the boundaries of the self and comprehending the feelings and perspectives of other people” (p. 128). In asking students to consider why artists like Wright, Brancusi or af Klint may have made certain choices regarding their artistic production, educators prompt students to infer outside their own experiences and consider the inner lives of modern and contemporary artists.

The third way educators fostered empathy-building during gallery tours was through the encouragement of personal connections between the students, the artists, and the materials and processes artists use to make their work. By orienting information about an artist around the students’ own lives, one educator continually established connections between the students and the artist. When discussing Picasso’s collages, for example, she told the students, “This man did something you may have done in your own life: gluing paper together.” Other educators ended their inquiries with a series of questions or activities prompting students to use new observations and inferences to form or share ideas about their own feelings, lives, and artistic choices. For example, when looking at a series of abstract artworks meant to represent different stages of human life, three of the observed educators asked students to make connections between these works and their own lives. Each of these educators asked their students to consider, “Which of these paintings best represents your stage of life?” after telling students the artist intended for each painting to represent a different life stage. One student pointed to a painting with bright colors and vibrant shapes, remarking that the work best represented his stage of life because “I’m all over the place and have a lot of energy.” After a tour centered around these works and focusing on how artists use color, one educator asked third-graders to consider what color they might use to represent how they are feeling in their current stage of life. When asked to share what colors they chose and why, students explained that they selected certain colors because they reminded them of feelings of joy, grief, and excitement they were currently experiencing. Through these activities and questions, positioned towards the end of the tour, students were able to apply new ideas about art and artists to their own lives, experiences, and perspectives.

Pathways for Empathetic Understanding

This notion of using new and learned perspectives to reconsider one’s own life directly relates to the idea of “outrospection” for which Krznaric advocates (2015). He describes the process as “discovering who you are and how to live by stepping outside yourself and exploring the lives and perspectives of other people” (Krznaric, 2015, p. xxiii). The educators used modeling, perspective-taking, and personal connections not only to encourage empathy and

empathetic behaviors, but to ultimately bring the students to a new understanding of themselves, their lives, and their choices in relation to others and the wider world. This pathway to empathetic understanding (Figure 2) always began with inquiry, grounding the conversation in observation of an artwork. After establishing students' observations and using this time to model empathetic conversation practices, educators often moved to step two: incorporating biographical information about the artist and historical context in order to deepen students' emotional understanding of the artist or artwork and to prompt further inferences. This process led to a place of empathetic understanding and ultimately, encouraged outrospection. Through framing personal and emotional connections between the artist, the artwork, and the student, educators could then ask students to apply these ideas and inferences to more deeply understand their own life.

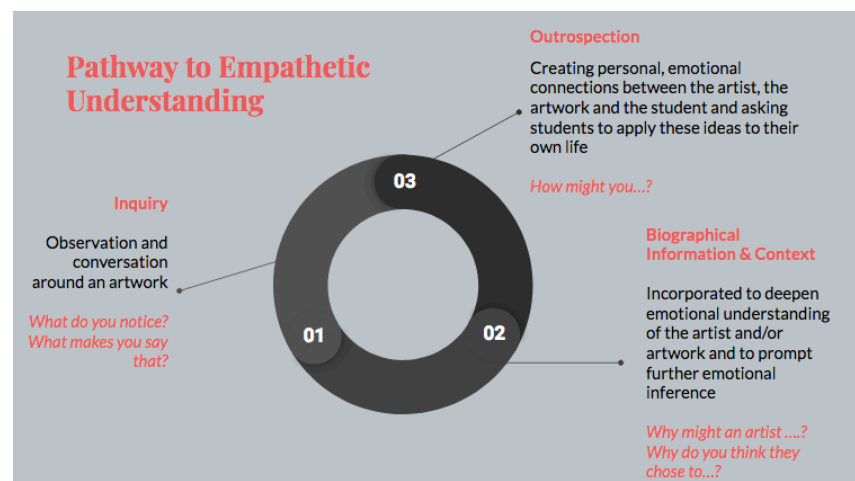


Figure 2. Visual representation of the pathway of empathetic understanding.

While the perspective-taking and personal connections educators encouraged on their tours are similar to the analogic reasoning Bowles and Crow (2018) advocate, there is a distinct difference in the ways the observed educators oriented their conversations. Unlike the analogic discussions of ancient art that Bowles and Crow (2018) highlight, where empathy can be fostered by connecting ancient art forms—such as arms and armor—with contemporary trends—like wearing sports gear—the educators I observed centered their conversations and inquiries around modern and contemporary artists as individuals, not around a historic trend or a civilization's practice (p. 345). Consistently, educators' conversations revolved around the specific qualities and conditions of one artist's life. Here, the artist's life is used as a center point not only for emotional inference and perspective-taking, but to foster an examination of an artist's thought process.

By asking students to think about artists' choices, educators primed students to think about their own choices (Ecker and Mostow, 2015). This relates to Ecker and Mostow's (2015) discussion of motivational questions in gallery and studio programs, where a student's art-making is tied to their viewing a museum object through a motivation question beginning with, "How might you...?" (p. 210). In these instances, after considering how artists use color in their work, for example, students were asked to think about how they might use color to reflect something about their own lives. Then, they were asked why they made the choices they made. This creates a pathway not only for empathetic understanding, but for metacognition wherein

students thought more deeply about artists' thinking in order to more critically consider their own thinking.

This process creates a bridge between the maker and the viewer. As one educator stated in a follow up email interview: "I do not think we study art because art is amazing or famous or beautiful or important in history or culture ONLY (though these things may be true). We study art because art is part of human experience, and we are human. As people, we represent our experience to understand it, to make sense of ourselves and others, the world, existence—that is why we study art." They continued, "Demystifying famous artists by pointing out they struggled, or were vegetarian, or had kids, etc. is crucial to my practice and, I believe, empathy-related." By sharing information about the artist and prompting students to think more deeply about their own experiences and choices, the educator can show the student what "the artist" really is: human.

Along these lines, one questionnaire respondent wrote, "Often, the art that touches or moves us speaks directly to human conditions we can all identify with. This is a natural way to build empathy by breaking the sense of isolation and demonstrating our connection to others; our interdependence." In this way, the strategies employed by museum educators to encourage empathy-building and perspective-taking are part of a much loftier process of inviting students to consider their own role in the world. As Gokcigdem (2016) states, giving empathy a space in museums can help us better make sense of what it means to be human and to live complex and interconnected lives (p. xxiii). In presenting artists as people, asking students to identify with artists through empathetic inferences, and encouraging students to think about their own lives through similar lenses, we are showing each student that—just like artists—they are individuals with specific ways of thinking, expressing themselves, and relating to the wider world, whether or not they identify as an artist.

Further Implications

Positioning artists as a means through which students can participate in emotional inference, empathy-building, and ultimately, a process of "outrospection" (Krznaric, 2015, p. xxiii), brings new and important considerations to light. As the observed and interviewed educators pointed out, perhaps exploring the work and life of individuals different from ourselves can prompt students and viewers not to bypass or ignore our differences, but to see ourselves as part of a common experience. This speaks to the potential empathy holds as an important tool in social change, an idea many writers and scholars have explored (Krznaric, 2015; Murawski, 2016; Ng et. al., 2017).

As Ng et. al. (2017) assert, empathy is central to any diversity or inclusion-centered teaching practice, allowing educators and museum professionals to serve as allies to diverse communities and visitors of diverse backgrounds. As Murawski (2016) points out, empathy allows visitors to see museums not as unapproachable institutions, but as places "made of people." In order for museums to thrive as approachable places of outreach and learning, it is essential not only for visitors to understand they are places "made of people," (Murawski, 2016), but also filled with objects *made by people*. By following the pedagogical pathway to empathetic understanding more deeply explored in this paper, educators' work in museum galleries may help lead students towards this democratizing notion.

With this in mind, it is important to consider the possible implications of placing the artist at the center of this pedagogy. If artists are used as a center point for empathy-building practices in the art museum—oriented as historical agents whose art and lives can offer students chances for emotional inference and personal reflection—it becomes even more important for educators to teach from artwork created by diverse individuals with multifaceted ethnic, racial, sexual, and economic backgrounds. If students can engage in empathy-building practices after learning more about the biography and processes of artists, it is essential for the artwork on display in museums to reflect a wide range of individual experience and showcase the rich and diverse texture of human life.

List of Figures

Figure 1. Outline of observation indicators and observed methods.

Figure 2. Visual representation of the pathway of empathetic understanding.

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