An Exploration of Self-Identity Oriented Teen Programming within the Museum

Thesis

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Abstract

This research addresses the question: How can museums utilize identity theory in the creation and implementation of teen programming? In doing so, I investigate the current climate of teen writing programming within two Greater Columbus area institutions: Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts. Interviewing administrative representatives from both institutions and analyzing documentation, including program evaluations, website content, and social media content, I aim to understand the goals of teen programming through its creation, implementation, and evaluation. I use these goals and cases to demonstrate how identity theory is prevalent within existent museum programming and to suggest how it can be used further within museum settings.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background to Study

“We know what we are, but know not what we may be.” - William Shakespeare

(Shakespeare, trans. 1992, 4.5.43-44)

The above quotation captures my initial inquiry into the concept of identity and its creation and subsequent adaptability. The excerpt, from Shakespeare’s Hamlet, suggests an ever-changing nature of the self. As identities are constructed, it seems that exterior influences aid in the molding and restructuring of these identities throughout a person’s lifetime (Falk 2009). In acknowledging this psychological phenomenon, I am concerned with the creation and affirmation of identity within teenage populations visiting cultural institutions. Narrowing my focus to this specific exterior influence in identity formation, I strive to understand the museum’s possible effect on identity construction. As teenagers begin to frequent the halls of cultural institutions, like museums, individuals who run them must begin to create and evaluate programming that suits the interest of this specific visitor population (Arias & Gray 2007). Professionals aiming to develop sustainable programming for the teenage population may benefit from understanding theories surrounding identity construction and its importance for this particular audience.

The impetus for this study stems from my own personal experiences at the museum. As an adolescent, I visited museums and other cultural institutions as a means to assert my identity as a culturally aware student; however, I often found myself desiring
acknowledgement within the institutional space. From a lack of programming targeted at my age group to a seemingly fearful regard for my adolescent “recklessness,” cultural institutions in my past were hardly teen friendly. However, as these museum spaces move toward an extended inclusivity of all populations, including teens, my previous personal experiences can act as a springboard in delving into issues of identity construction and its relevance and importance within the institutional context.

In order to explore identity construction within the museological context, I utilize the concept of identity theory introduced by scholar Sheldon Stryker. Stryker (2000) acknowledges a goal of identity theory research to be the ability “to understand and explain how social structures affect self and how self affects social behaviors” (p. 285). In using this theoretical approach, I aim to understand the effects of the museum on the creation and affirmation of teens’ identity and thus the possible effects this development may have on social behavior. I specifically strive to understand further the effects these institutions have on the teenage population because this audience faces a central task of developing a sense of identity (Head 2002). Investigating at multiple museums, including Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts, I inquire about the existing teen programs available and the structure and goals of such programs. I want to learn how museum teen programs utilize identity theory through practice either through conscious planning or unconscious outcomes. I believe that making such identity related goals and practices a conscious effort of cultural programming, museums may find the relatability and popularity of their spaces rise within this visitor population.
In the text, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, Falk (2009) describes identity theory as postulating “that the more salient an identity is to an individual, the more sensitive that individual should be to opportunities that allow him or her to enact behaviors that confirm that identity and the stronger his or her motivations would be to actually perform such behaviors” (p. 76). If teenagers utilize the space of cultural institutions to construct and affirm their identities, then this population may be more likely to perform these identities within these spaces in the future thus allowing museums to establish a relationship with a new generation of visitors and patrons. While I understand that museums and other cultural institutions are not the only leisure spaces vying for the attention and time of teens, these cultural spaces may play a role in the discovery and construction of self-identity and thus should recognize and utilize this opportunity. Furthermore, museums should not only capitalize on their identity building space as an opportunity to establish a future pool of visitors but also, these institutions should assist this demographic in the identity process as a means to achieve public value with the surrounding community.

I argue for conscious acknowledgement of identity theory within the museum context, specifically within teen programming. Utilizing such theory, especially amongst the identity constructing teen population, may be useful in fostering sustainable relationships and rapport with a new generation of visitor. This approach also has the potential of affecting the social behavior of teens and encouraging them to continue to visit cultural institutions throughout their lifetime. Focusing on identity potentially gives teens access to envisioning who they may be.
Statement of Problem

After reviewing the literature and observing teen programming through multiple internship opportunities within the Columbus area, I found that identity seems to be an underlying yet unspoken theme throughout these activities. In understanding that an identity focus is an important component of the museum and visitor relationship (Falk, 2009), I find that this focus is peripheral compared to other programmatic goals of the institution. Therefore, in my study, I examine the importance of consciously including identity related goals within programming specifically targeted toward teen populations in order to garner a stronger relationship with this often marginalized group within the museum. In order to understand its prevalence in current museum programming within the Columbus area, I will explore area institutions and their teen programs in order to navigate the opportunities available for teens of the region. Through my research, I will gain information that may allude to the necessity of including identity related programming for teens within these institutions.

Primary Research Questions and Sub-Questions

For this study, my central question is: How can museums utilize identity theory in the creation and implementation of teen programming? In addition to investigating this question, I will address several sub questions, including:

• What museum programming for teens is available in the Columbus area?
• How does identity programming impact the teen relationship with the institution?
• What museum programming do teens actively seek out and can these programs implement identity related goals and outcomes?

• What is the importance of identity programming within the museum context?

Significance of Study

Identity is a concept that is relevant to all people. In its simplest of forms, identity refers “to parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284). As people immerse themselves within a society, a culture, or a social group, they begin to construct ideologies and meanings that help them to define their own self-identity. Because people often belong to multiple groups, this identity is complex and embedded in the many beliefs, preferences, and practices a person undertakes. In order to examine this sense of identity more closely and within the context of its multiple influences, I consider identity theory a useful framework in analyzing the construction and reaffirmation of the self.

Identity theory examines “how social structure affects the structure of self and how structure of the self influences social behavior” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 285). While people utilize social influences to construct their own sense of self, they also project that sense of self back onto society. This process acts as a reciprocal relationship where social structures help the person to develop a sense of self-identity and the person acts out that self-identity within the social structures that he or she identifies with, demonstrating a link between social structure, identity, and behavior.
While all people are impacted by identity construction, certain populations tend to be more vulnerable to this process than others. Specifically, teenagers often link with identity construction as they navigate the liminal space between childhood and adulthood. Within this space, teens identify who they are and who they wish to be. Scholar John Head details the duties of this age group as having “to make a series of self-defining choices to allow them to function as autonomous adults” (Head, 2002, p. 7). In order to cross the threshold into adulthood, teens must identify who they are and how they will function within society, thus demonstrating the link between identity construction and behavior (Stryker & Burke 2000).

As teens embody a vulnerable population in terms of identity, I must also consider the social structures that allow them and others to explore this identity. While the typical person encounters multiple influences throughout a lifetime that can be linked in some way to their personal identity formation, defining those specific influences is important in understanding how different structures influence identity currently and how they can continue to influence identity in the future. One particular social structure that lends itself to identity creation and affirmation is the museum.

The museum is a cultural institution that can span many forms. Museums range in content from visual, historical artifact, and even living exhibition in terms of zoos and gardens. Considering the multifarious nature of the museum as an institution, these cultural hubs attract visitors of various identities. Scholar John Falk, in speaking about the reasons for visiting a museum, claims, “People make leisure decisions for one of many personal reasons—reasons that have little to do with their demographics and
everything to do with their personal values and interests” (Falk, 2009, p. 50). People make the conscious decision to visit the museum thus tend to have a vested interest in the content of the institution. This interest demonstrates the link between identity and museums. Because identity is composed of the meanings made out of the various roles people play within society, the role as an art lover, historian, or general museumgoer influences how a person identifies him or herself and how that self is reflected in behavior (Stryker & Burke 2000).

In understanding the identity thread linking teens and museums, I consider the benefits that these two cultural groups share in interacting with one another. As teens are vulnerable in constructing and affirming their identity, I see the museum as a potential space for welcoming identity exploration. On the reciprocal end of this exchange, the teen becomes a candidate for a possible lifelong museumgoer and patron. However, it is important to note the rather newfound relationship between teens and museums. As these cultural institutions are just now beginning to tap into this new audience market, research is necessary in understanding the relationship and possible benefit between such a collaboration (Aria & Gray 2007). My research fills this need in demonstrating the reciprocity between the teen and the museum, utilizing identity as a clear link in these cases.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

When beginning my study, I found much literature that was tangentially related to my study but found sparse literature in terms of my exact topic of identity-oriented teen writing workshops within the museum. What follows is a review of the literature that pinpoints this precise phenomenon.

Identity

Identity is a multifaceted term; it has various definitions and complex dimensions. For the purposes of this research, identity is defined as a “reference to parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284). I utilize this specific definition because it recognizes that varying aspects can construct an individual’s identity. While identity may be a blanket term for the overall view of self, this term also includes a variety of roles that one person may play in a range of situations. For instance, a student can also be a sister, an athlete, a scholar, and a writer—each a different component that contributes to a complete personal identity.

This study utilizes identity theory as a guiding principle with which to examine teen participation and programming within the museum. Identity theory asserts that “Social roles are expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships;
identities are internalized role expectations” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286). Each individual inhabits a certain role in different situations and acts out that role while in the presence of that social group. For instance, if an individual identifies as an athlete she will act as an athlete during a sporting competition; however, this same individual may act the role of sister while at home with family. This switching of roles indicates the many networks that one person may be a part of and highlights the complexity of self-identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

While a single identity can be composed of a variety of roles, different roles may possess differing levels of identity salience. The concept of identity salience refers to “the likelihood that these identities will be activated in other situations” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 292). If an identity is highly salient, then that identity or role will likely be activated in all relevant social networks; however, if an identity does not have high salience, then it is less likely to be activated again. In continuing the above example, if a student’s identity as an athlete is highly salient, then that identity is likely to be activated in social networks such as sporting events or even among peers of the same role at school. If a student’s identity as scholar is less salient, then that identity will not likely be activated within social networks such as the classroom or in after-school academic activity participation. This type of hierarchical measure of identity and role performance demonstrates that some identities are stronger and more relevant for individuals than are others. In fact, identity theory postulates, “The higher the salience of an identity relative to other identities incorporated into the self, the greater the probability of behavioral choices in accord with the expectations attached to that identity” (Stryker & Burke, 2000,
p. 286). If an individual identifies heavily with one role in comparison to all other roles, it is more likely that he or she will behave in accordance with the most highly salient identity.

As identity salience is important in understanding the behaviors or likely behaviors of a person, the saturation of identity salience can be predicted according to the most prominent social groups of the individual. Identity theory states, “Stronger ties to others through an identity lead to a more salient identity” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 230). The closer an individual is with a social group, then the more salient the identity tying that person to that social group. A person is more likely to act out a specific identity depending on the social networks of which he or she is a member.

Using identity salience and saturation, the behavior of an individual has a stronger chance of predictability, as mentioned above. Scholars Christian, Bagozzi, Abrams, and Rosenthal (2012) maintain, “Intentions contain a social element, expressing one’s intention to behave in conjunction with others” (p. 255). Because an individual has high identity salience in relation to a specific group, such as athletes, then he or she intends to behave as other athletes do. If he or she openly identifies as an athlete, then there is a stronger possibility to predict his or her behavioral patterns. Scholars McLeish and Oxoby (2011) further this idea, adding, “A shared identity creates an expectation or norm of greater cooperation or ‘friendliness’” (p. 173). When individuals interact within a certain group, they tend to cooperate with one another because of their identity salience. Rather than deviating from behavioral norms of the group, individuals tend to embrace group behavior because of identity expectations. Overall, a highly salient identity tied to
an individual’s social group is an indicator of the behaviors in which the individual will engage.

The potential importance of the museum in an adolescent’s life is illuminated through this understanding of identity, roles, and salience. If a teen identifies heavily as a museum visitor, artist, or writer, the museum may be a pivotal institution for the creation and affirmation of the teen’s identity. It is through the use of these aspects of identity theory that this paper aims to demonstrate the museum’s role in the life of an adolescent. However, in order to understand how the museum can impact teens and their sense of self-identity, this paper must first explore the general relationship between identity and the museum.

**Identity and Museums**

The museum is a common leisure space for individuals of different backgrounds. Visitors may use the museum as a space for entertaining guests with a day of cultural activities or for expanding their own knowledge about art and culture; however, no matter the motivation for visiting the museum, the goal is that “All visitors come away from their museum visit experiences with a better understanding of what these institutions called museums afford” (Falk, 2009, p. 155). By engaging with the museum, visitors are better able to understand how it can serve them, which often reflects personal identity needs (Falk, 2009).

When a person decides to visit the museum, the decision reflects an aspect of the individual’s identity. Those who do not enjoy art or culture generally do not choose to
spend leisure time at a cultural institution, such as a museum; however, those individuals who do enjoy these fields are likely to visit. Because museums are mainly used during the leisure time of a visitor, these institutions are beginning to reflect the needs and wants of the community. For instance, when an individual decides to visit the museum he or she must perform a cost-benefit analysis of what institution to visit during his or her free time (Falk, 2009). Because many public spaces, such as parks or science centers, can be used for entertainment during free time a person must decide which of these spaces will best serve their needs—a decision that is more frequently becoming “about building and supporting identity-related needs” (Falk, 2009, p. 44).

While the typical, voluntary visitor makes an identity-related decision upon choosing to engage with the museum, his or her actual visit is guided by certain expectations. Because the individual decides that the museum is the best place to spend leisure time, he or she believes that certain criteria will be met—criteria that are “an amalgam of his or her identity-related leisure desires and needs and his or her socially and culturally constructed view of what the museum affords” (Falk, 2009, p. 81). Bringing these ideas to the museum, visitors expect to reaffirm personal identity aspects and roles within the institution. If these aspects are affirmed, then the visitor will be satisfied with the visit and will likely promote the museum to friends and peers (Falk, 2009). However, if the expectations are not met and identity aspects are not affirmed, the visitor may wish not to attend the institution in the future. It is because of these experiences and identity related needs that museums must be attentive to the interests and needs of their visitors (Falk, 2009).
Though museums must be conscious to serve the identity needs of those choosing to visit these institutions, the museum can also act as a space for identity creation rather than just affirmation. Rounds (2006) states, “The museum offers opportunities both to confirm our existing identity, and to safely explore alternatives” (p. 138). Visitors, while engaging with the museum in order to confirm certain identity aspects, may use the institution as a space to explore new identity roles. For instance, a first time visitor to the institution may wish to explore the role of art enthusiast upon entering the galleries—a role that may not have been activated in other settings. The museum affords a safe space for this type of creative exploration.

Sometimes, “Museum visitors have only the vaguest understanding of their true needs and motivations upon entering the museum” (Falk, 2009, p. 232). Because these visitors may be unable to articulate their identity needs, it is important for the museum to anticipate these needs so as to integrate them into exhibitions and programming. In doing so, museums will be able to administer successful visits that encourage the promotion of the institution to the wider community.

There is a recent “movement to bring adolescents and museums together in mutually beneficial ways” (Beane, 2000, p. 3). This age demographic is particularly important for the museum to demonstrate what it can afford as an institution, as “Life experiences, including everyday activities and interactions with others, may well affect the developmental process” (Shaw, 1995, p. 247). With the understanding of how museums can support and facilitate identity formation, focusing on a population that is undergoing identity creation on a developmental level makes sense. Museums position
themselves as entities that may provide a positive environment for teens to discover and affirm identity roles all the while demonstrating the wider value of the institution to the community. But, why specifically target teens?

Identity and Teens

Adolescence occupies the liminal space between childhood and adulthood. Within this time period, individuals no longer identify with children, yet they are unable to identify as fully-grown adults. Scholar Deanna Banks Beane (2000) describes this time as “a turning point in a child’s life. The values internalized (or rejected), the skills learned (or missed), the decisions made (good or bad), and the dreams planted (or destroyed) have lifelong impact” (Beane, p. 3). Every decision made within this vulnerable period in an individual’s life can impact him or her for a lifetime. Scholar John Head (2002) describes this transition by indicating that “Children are largely defined by the significant adults in their life, but in adolescence they have to make a series of self-defining choices to allow them to function as autonomous adults” (Head, p. 7). Rather than relying on authority figures to identify them, adolescents must begin to take authority over their own self at this stage.

While adolescence is a pivotal point in life, the formation of identity is a central task for this age demographic (Head, 2002). During this turning point in a child’s life, he or she must begin to establish the identity and roles that he or she wishes to embody. One way adolescents achieve identity formation is through the forging of friendships, values, and interests (Head, 2002). In beginning to establish what they like and whom they
choose to share their life with, adolescents make choices that will continue to develop over time. It is important, however, that this process be embraced and acted upon.

Though adolescence is a time of transition, this process is not one that occurs purely naturally. In fact, “Identity achievement is an active process, requiring the effort of the individual, and is not something which occurs spontaneously with maturation” (Head, 2002, p. 10). Adolescents must be willing to embrace the transition and actively make choices concerning identity and identity roles. Any resistance to change can result in problematic identity issues throughout adulthood (Head, 2002). However, if an adolescent does embrace this transition and seeks the roles with which he or she identifies, then the healthy development into adulthood begins (Quinn, 1999).

While it is important for adolescents to actively seek identity and identity roles during their teen years, the venue in which they seek the fulfillment of these roles can affect their identity outcome. Adolescents today are quite busy. Between school, homework, and after school jobs and activities, this age demographic has very little leisure time. However, it is leisure time that many students report is the most connected to their personal identity (Shaw et. al., 1995). Because the nature of leisure activities involves personal choice, adolescents find them to be quite indicative of the roles in which they hope to inhabit, indicating that the leisure time of teens is quite valuable in terms of identity formation. It is leisure time that museums can capitalize on in order to influence this young audience. If museums can expand their accessibility to include this age group, specifically targeting the leisure time of teens, then they will be able to aid in the identity formation of adolescents and possibly expand their future audience.
Teens and Museums

The relationship between teens and museums is not a traditional union. In fact, some scholars even claim, “Teens and museums are arguably an awkward match” (Arias & Gray, 2007, p. 96). This notion of the teen and the museum being distinct and rather non-cohesive entities is one that spans centuries. As museums tended to act as houses of rare and valued artifacts, the teen was often viewed as a threat to the safety of preservation. With potentially unruly behavior and radically shifting emotions, this age demographic was not one welcomed with open arms by museum staff. However, as one scholar notes, “The object is no longer lord and master of the museum” (Lemerise, 1999, p. 7). With a shifting attitude of the role and purpose of the museum within society, the artifact no longer lies at the center of the museological mission. In removing these objects from their theoretical pedestals, the museum gains the potential to impact new audiences in more innovative and potentially resonant ways.

While museums and teens are recently a new match, the mutual benefits they can potentially afford to one another will extend for years to come. As all non-profit organizations must demonstrate a sense of public value in order to sustain operations, museums are tasked to make a case regarding their importance to the community. Inviting a newer demographic, such as teens, into the museum helps to demonstrate its ever-expanding accessibility as well as its influence on a wide array of community members (Arias & Gray, 2007). These demonstrations help to build a narrative of high public value and strong community presence. From this narrative, museums have the potential to remain heavily invested institutions of cultural and creative preservation and
learning. In a time of decreased funding and increased spending cuts, a public value narrative is a vital lifeline for the museum’s sustained presence.

Though non-profit institutions must often compete for scarce resources, such as money and trained personnel, the introduction of a new age demographic to the museum visitor population gives cultural institutions an advantage in the competition for these resources. Beane (2000) notes, “Any museum dedicated to making a difference in young people’s lives can garner the necessary internal and external resources” (p. 8). In targeting youth, the museum can demonstrate a vested interest in the healthy development of adolescents and thus demonstrate its importance to the overall community, gaining credibility and resources that would otherwise be unavailable to the institution.

The museum benefits from teen participation in terms of public value and support, and this relationship has the ability to transform the very purpose and nature of the institution. The museum is a space for continued learning. Though students often receive formalized academic knowledge within structured school systems, the museum helps to extend that learning beyond the classroom for all ages. One scholar notes, “Museums represent an important sector of the informal education community, providing an avenue for many young people to learn firsthand about art, history, science, and diverse cultures” (Quinn, 1999, p. 102). While schools and more formalized educational institutions are able to instruct students on the basic theory behind subjects, museums act as institutions that are able to expand that theory into firsthand involvement through the presentation of objects and interactive experiences. This interaction allows students to learn in a different
and sometimes more resonant way. In fact when speaking about art instruction, scholar Gray (1998) argues, “It is not so clear that school is the optimal venue for these lessons, perhaps because schools may be ill-equipped to offer the breadth and depth necessary for desired effectiveness” (Gray, 1998, p. 95). Though schools are vital in teaching the theory behind concepts, museums are often able to extend that theory into a deeper understanding through experiential learning.

Because museums have the ability to complement formalized education through experiential learning, the purpose of these institutions has expanded to include educational programming, especially for youth and adolescents. Through this expansion, “Community youth programs are well positioned to add value to the work of schools and families by building on young people’s current knowledge and strengths” (Quinn, 1999). Using the theory fostered and crafted by schools, museums enhance students’ thinking beyond the page. The informal education that museums offer can supplement academic learning in schools, and it also helps to develop a more personal understanding of a student’s self and relationship to different academic principles and interests. Students can begin to shape their identities as scientists, historians, or artists through their firsthand experiences and enjoyment of these concepts.

Because teens and museums clearly benefit one another in a myriad of ways, museums must learn how to attract this younger audience into a previously unwelcoming space. Teens often “frequent places where they can develop a feeling of belonging, not solely based on services received but also on the available roles” (Lemerise, 1995, p. 403). Teens wish to embody and explore roles that are celebrated within the museum,
rather than roles that are challenged. One way to develop a comfortable setting in which adolescents are encouraged to explore their different identity roles within the museum is through the creation of sustained contact programming (Arias & Gray, 2007). Such programming allows students to build trust with the museum over time, garnering stronger relationships. This longer-term structure allows “young people to replace their occasional visit with a more regular presence that can continue over several weeks, months, or years, making museums more meaningful environments for adolescents” (Lemerise, 1999, p. 8). As mentioned above, museums are spaces that have the potential to encourage deeper learning and can foster this learning on an extended basis, garnering a more resonant experience with teen learners. One such medium the museum can use over an extended time period is that of writing—a creative form that requires extended time and thinking processes.

**Writing and Museums**

Writing is an expressive form that is often not associated with cultural institutions, such as museums; however, writing is an active art form that may allow visitors to experiment with and reflect on identity inside, and even outside, the museum. Scholars Giroux and McLaren (1992) view the process of writing and the use of language as providing “the self-definitions upon which people act, negotiate various subject positions, and undertake a process of naming and renaming the relations between themselves, others, and the world” (p. 7). Through writing, people are able to define themselves as a person and an active participant in the world around them. Similarly, in a
discussion of the importance of writing education, Graham (2000) notes, “As literacy educators, we need to show students the possibilities for selfhood that writing offers as a way to describe who they are and how things are with them and their world” (p. 363). Whether interacting with the drop-in teen visitor or the recurring student participant, museums can explore the concept of identity through adopting this written pedagogical practice. It is through writing that visitors can explore their position in their community, in overall society, and even in the wider world.

The practice of writing is important in identity exploration (Waterman, Kohutis, and Pulone, 1977); it is particularly important for adolescents and teens in terms of understanding and constructing identity. Teens are a vulnerable population that faces a challenging process in positive identity formation. As teens explore the space between childhood and adulthood, they must learn to navigate the concepts of who they are and who they want to be. In fact, scholars Waterman, Kohutis, and Pulone (1977) conclude, “It is likely that expressive writing on the part of adolescents and youths is begun in response to the psychological turmoil of an ongoing identity crisis” (p. 286). Because teens do not yet understand who they are or how they fit into their surroundings, many of them turn to writing as a means of exploring, developing, and expressing their identity. Through this exploration, teens are able to experiment with identity without acting that identity out on a physical level (Waterman, Kohutis, & Pulone, 1977). This experimentation provides a safe space for teens to self-define absent of the immediate consequences of and reactions to physical behavior. Aside from avoiding unsavory consequences or reactions, teens are also able to experiment with the different identities
that they may find appealing. Regarding student learning, Graham (2000) notes, “We might well be satisfied if they can begin to conceive of a variety of roles for themselves as writers and of how each role is connected to different aspects of their personal and social identities” (p. 362). Through writing, students can explore multiple aspects of their self-identity and practice those roles on the page.

As writing, especially for teens, is an important activity in identity formation and exploration, the environment in which these teens write is also an important factor to consider. Should these skills be exclusively practiced within a school setting? Should only professionals trained in language arts specific education teach teens about writing? While schools are formalized institutions of learning and places where students learn the basics of academic concepts, informal institutions of learning, such as museums, allow students to practice those concepts outside of a structured setting and without the pressure of grades being attached to their writing. In offering programs, such as teen writing workshops and publications, museums are able to encourage students to continue their self-learning outside of the classroom. Graham (2000) asserts, “A major reason for the increasing appeal and popularity of a workshop approach to adolescent and adult literacy instruction lies precisely in the way this approach begins to offer students an alternative sense of themselves as writers” (p. 361). Rather than viewing themselves as students writing for a class, museum teens can approach writing through a different lens and explore how this medium connects them to their selves.

Overall, teens and museums have the potential to create a stronger relationship in terms of identity fostering and development. While museums are spaces that allow
visitors to engage in identity work, teens can particularly benefit from these spaces because of their point in identity formation. In using the museum as a space to build and explore identity, the teen can create a lifelong bond with the institution.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the literature pertinent to this research. This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. Within this chapter, I provide an overview of the research sites and my methods of study. Specifically, I highlight case study research and methods of data collection and analysis.

Overview of Study

The aim of this thesis is to answer the overarching research question: How can museums utilize identity theory in the creation and implementation of teen programming? In order to answer this question, I conducted a multiple case study encompassing two museums within the Greater Columbus area. These museums include Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts. Within these institutions, I selected two teen writing programs: Young Writers’ Studio and Pages, respectively. From these programs, I interviewed two senior administrators and collected documentation, including program evaluations, social media postings, and website information. Through the analysis of these interviews and documents, I aim to address my research question and identify how identity theory can be expanded.

Setting of the Study
Thurber House

One research site within this study is Thurber House, located in Columbus, Ohio. Thurber House is both a literary center and a historic museum dedicated to the late author and cartoonist James Thurber. Thurber House’s mission is “to celebrate the written word for the education and entertainment of the broadest possible audience and to continue the legacy of James Thurber” (Thurber House, 2015). Within Thurber House, this research focuses on the Young Writers’ Studio program. This program “offers 9-12 graders a chance to work with professional writers to learn new techniques, explore different genres, receive feedback on their work and have fun in a supportive environment” (Thurber House, 2015). The overall voluntary nature of the program was a leading factor in my decision to use this site.

Wexner Center for the Arts

The second research site within this study is the Wexner Center for the Arts, located on the campus of The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. The Wexner Center is a multidisciplinary contemporary art museum with the following mission statement:

The Wexner Center for the Arts is The Ohio State University's multidisciplinary, international laboratory for the exploration and advancement of contemporary art. Through exhibitions, screenings, performances, artist residencies, and educational programs, the Wexner Center acts as a forum where
established and emerging artists can test ideas and where diverse audiences can participate in cultural experiences that enhance understanding of the art of our time.

In its programs, the Wexner Center balances a commitment to experimentation with a commitment to traditions of innovation and affirms the university's mission of education, research, and community service (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2015).

In studying this museum, I focus on the Pages program. Pages markets itself as “an innovative multidisciplinary program that supports literacy and writing skills through the exploration of contemporary art, film, and performing arts” (Wexner Center for the Arts, 2015). Pages is a program that partners with Columbus area schools—a factor that was important to my decision to study this particular site.

**Time and Duration of the Study**

The gathering of data for the study spanned from February 6, 2015 through February 27, 2015. Interviews were conducted on February 6, 2015—at the Wexner Center for the Arts—and on February 9, 2015—at Thurber House. These interviews lasted one hour each and were conducted with a single senior administrator from each respective institution. Documents, such as program evaluations, website content, and social media content, were collected either at or before each interview and analyzed over a month-long period.
Ethics of the Study

In January of 2015, I gained approval from the Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at The Ohio State University (Appendix A). The application consisted of items including consent forms and a detailed research agenda. Consent forms were given to each interviewee and addressed possible benefits and risks of the study. Risks were minimal to the participants and merely consisted of a possible lack of connection found between museum programming and identity construction.

Research Foundations

Qualitative Case Study

Within each of these institutions, I conducted a qualitative case study, which “consists of detailed investigation of one or more organizations, or groups within organizations, with a view to providing an analysis of the context and processes involved in the phenomenon under study” (Meyer, 2001, p. 329). Qualitative research is a manner of study where “the researcher is the instrument or the tool for designing, collecting, and analyzing research. Qualitative research, in contrast to quantitative research, generally does not translate aspects of the world into numbers to be analyzed mathematically” (Foundations of Qualitative Research in Education, 2008). This type of research is utilized within this study to demonstrate the personal accounts of administrators of both Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts as well as the way in which these organizations frame their teen writing program in terms of documentation.
The methodology of case study is useful for this particular research for a variety of reasons, including its transferability and context-dependence. Case study methodology allows for generalization across cases (Noor, 2008). Because this research can apply to multiple institutions, this methodology helps to highlight the transferability of the study to other programs and museums. By demonstrating phenomenon at two museums within Columbus, this research aims to provide insights for other museums to utilize within their own programming and education departments. Case studies are also grounded in context (Flyvbjerg, 2006). As a case study demonstrates a specific phenomenon occurring within a physical institution, it highlights the practicality of the research beyond its theoretical concerns, allowing institutions to utilize the research in a very concrete way. As this study aims to provide insight and practical identity implementation steps to multiple institutions, a case study methodology is applied.

The focus of this study is teen programming—specifically, programming containing a writing component—within a museological context. In widening the scope to focus on two programs within two separate institutions, I strive to cultivate more depth of perspective (Meyer, 2001).

*Identity Theory*

A conceptual framework helps to serve “as an anchor for the study” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 553). The conceptual framework that I use as a lens to examine the programs is that of identity theory. Identity theory is a “reference to parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in
highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284). This theory frames the research and analysis of collected data—gathered documents and interviews. In using this theory, I aim to understand how identity applies to the creation and implementation of museum programming and how it can be used in a more resonant way.

Data Collection

Interviews

The interviews utilized in this study are semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are “generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). These interviews were conducted at each site and involved the senior administrator of each program. The interviews lasted one hour, respectively.

Documentation

Documents were collected from each site either electronically or at the time of the interview. Documents gathered from Thurber House included a program evaluation of Young Writers’ Studio, Facebook postings, and website content. Documents gathered from the Wexner Center for the Arts include a program evaluation of Pages, blog postings, and website content.
Analysis of Data

Upon completing interviews and collecting programming documentation, I utilized both categorizing and coding to sort and evaluate the information. As part of this process, the “data segments are labeled and grouped by category; they are then examined and compared, both within and between categories” (Maxwell & Miller, 2008, p. 465). During this process of categorizing and coding, two predetermined themes were identified—identity and relationships—and two emergent themes arose—education and structure—from the analysis.

Summary and Implications

This research allowed me as a researcher to understand how identity is utilized within the current climate of educational programming within museums. Using an identity theory lens, I looked for methods that supported the formation and reaffirmation of identity as well as for avenues to create more opportunity for identity incorporation. Identity programming is a critical tool to engage and sustain teen visitors with cultural institutions and this research helps to support and guide educators as to how to implement such practices.
Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis

Introduction

In answering the question of how museums can utilize identity theory in the creation and implementation of teen programming, this research relies on personal interviews and institutional documents. Upon gathering these materials, both coding and categorizing the information within these documents is necessary for analysis. Pre-determined themes were established prior to the coding and categorizing process. A predetermined theme is a lens with which the researcher analyzes the documents, searching for key words and phrases. There was also room for emergent themes to surface. An emergent theme is a patterned concept that naturally arises from the analysis rather than existing before the analysis begins. This particular study has two predetermined themes, identity and relationships, as well as two emergent themes, education and structure. The predetermined themes were chosen based on patterns in previous scholarly work. As many researchers have found identity and relationships to be important aspects of the teen relationship to the museum, I coded for these themes at the beginning of the analysis.

The themes are analyzed in terms of both quantity of times mentioned and the context in which these mentions are made. Determining the amount that an organization mentions a theme helps to establish the cognizant importance the organization places on the concept. This following chart tracks the theme mentions of each organization:
The numbers utilized in the chart are based on mention patterns in the interviews and documents. The most number of mentions was 10 and the least number of mentions was 2; however, a majority of mentions hovered around a score of 8 or 3 thus demonstrating the reason for this numerical separation. A score of over 8 mentions indicates the theme as having a high impact on the program. A score of 3-8 mentions indicates the theme as having a moderate impact on the program. A score of fewer than 3 mentions indicates the theme as having a low impact on the program. These measures help to determine the program’s intention for and implementation of the program.

Following this mapping, the themes are then analyzed in terms of context. Determining how these concepts are being framed and discussed by administrators helps to demonstrate how programs are thinking about certain themes—if at all.

After analyzing the documents and identifying the themes, the information is then related back to the scholarly work detailing identity theory, museums, and teens. Connections and disconnections are made between the previous scholarly research and materials provided by the two cultural institutions under study: Thurber House and the

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Wexner Center for the Arts. These connections and disconnections provide further insight into the existing climate of Greater Columbus area teen programming, as well as provide information as to where steps can be taken to implement identity related goals into this programming. The following is a presentation of the above-mentioned four themes.

Identity

As mentioned previously, identity is defined as a “reference to parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284). Both administrators and documentation at the Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts mention identity as being an important aspect in their teen writing programs. Thurber House scored over 8, indicating a high impact theme, in terms of interview. As Administrator I of Thurber House consistently spoke of identity and mentioned either this exact vocabulary or phrasing that clearly indicated this theme—mentions such as maturation, growth, encouragement, transformation, and choice—this research concludes that identity highly impacts the Young Writers’ Studio program—at least in the eyes of the administration. Thurber House scored between 3-8, indicating a moderate impact theme, in terms of documentation. As the documentation of the Thurber House regularly mentioned identity within its materials, this research concludes that identity plays an important role in the Young Writers’ Studio program. While the documentation scores indicate a moderate impact, the interview score indicates that there is a higher importance on identity for Administrator I. This difference in theme impact may be attributed to the
interview questions asked, many of which addressed identity or identity related themes. These questions may have influenced the answers of Administrator I during the interview. However, the volume of identity related phrasing—phrases or terms that suggest concepts of maturing, growth, confidence, enjoyment, and career—indicates a natural emphasis on this concept.

Administrator I links identity with concepts such as transformation, maturation, and encouragement. For instance, when asked if students self-identify as writers upon entering the program, the administrator noted, “We do have some who love to write, but they would never call themselves a writer…I feel the more involved they get with the program the more they realize, ‘I am a writer.’ Everybody has a voice; everybody can be a writer” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). Students entering the program may not at first identify as a writer, but rather view writing as a hobby. However, a shift or transformation occurs that often leads students to identify as a writer by the end of the program. This identity transformation may relate to Christian, Bagozzi, Abrams, and Rosenthal’s discussion of identity salience and intention—those with high identity salience intend to behave as others of the same identity salience do (2012). As teenagers spend time together engaging in an activity of which they all enjoy, these teenagers become accountable to one another behaviorally. Because they all enjoy writing, and write together, those who do not self-identify as writers at first will shift their behavior and self-identity to match the behaviors and identities of the larger group.

While transformation and identity are one link apparent in Thurber House’s Young Writer’s Studio, maturation also seems to be a concept linked to identity. When
asked about her personal experience with the program, such as why she enjoys working with the program and why she continues to work with the program, Administrator I replied, “To see them [students] grow and mature as people as well as writers is really awesome” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). The administrator here makes a link between growth as a writer and growth as a person. While there does not appear to be a cause and effect relationship explicitly mentioned, the idea of maturation on a personal level is equated to growth in craft. This growth and maturation can be attributed to Head’s (2002) notion of identity achievement. Head (2002) explains that identity is achieved through an active process of maturation and exploration rather than simply occurring naturally when the adolescent reaches puberty. As the administrator observes this personal maturation process as something slow moving and growing along with the writing, this process seems to mirror the identity achievement stage of adolescent growth. Acknowledging that this stage is achieved alongside the writing process, a possible link can be made between identity achievement and identity salience—because the young writer is immersed in the writing world with his or her peers, he or she may be actively maturing with the group.

This concept of maturation is important for administrators to recognize and support. According to Falk (2009), many visitors to the museum are unsure of what their needs actually are. While teens may approach Thurber House and Young Writers’ Studio thinking that they are interested in developing their writing, they may not consciously understand that they are also in search of an identity outlet as well. In discussing her personal accounts of students that particularly transformed or grew during the program,
Administrator I notes about her personal enjoyment of the program, “You get to hang out and critique…but [I enjoy] to just see the growth in the students as well” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). While Administrator I recognizes the aspects of the program that the students enjoy—i.e. hanging out with like-minded individuals and critiquing writing—she also acknowledges the growth that happens on a more subconscious level. A growth that was likely not sought after upon the student’s entrance to the program. This growth is the ‘need’ that Falk (2009) addresses in his research and that administrators must be aware of in order to tailor programming to the visitor.

Finally, Administrator I also links the concept of encouragement with identity. This particular contextual link is used in various language not only in the personal interview, but also in the documentation highlighted on the Thurber website. I identified phrases such as, “Your dream of being a writer” and “encouraging young people to tap into their creativity” in the promotional material that was distributed for the advertisement of the Thurber House program, Young Writers’ Studio (Thurber House, 2015). The language usage demonstrates Thurber House’s acknowledgement of young students’ capabilities to be writers, and Thurber House supports this gift and even urges students to continue to perfect their craft. Encouragement, especially that of a renowned literary institution, allows young students to reaffirm their identity as a writer. As Shaw (1995) notes, teenagers often view their leisure time as most tied to their identity, and this type of positive reinforcement allows students to view their relationship with the organization as strong and supportive—likely fostering a continued relationship in the future.
Overall, Thurber House scored rather highly in terms of identity themes. Thurber House uses identity formation and reaffirmation as a tool to create a positive relationship with teens as well as to help teens transform as writers and as people by the end of the program.

Similar to Thurber House, the Wexner Center for the Arts also considers identity exploration as an objective in their *Pages* program. The Wexner Center scored over 8, indicating a high impact theme, in terms of interview. As Administrator II of the Wexner Center consistently spoke of identity either through exact vocabulary or clearly related phrasing—mentions such as confidence, encouragement, articulation, understanding, comfortableness, and dream—this research concludes that identity highly impacts the *Pages* program—at least in the eyes of the administrator. The Wexner Center scored over 8, indicating a high impact theme, in terms of documentation. As the documentation of the Wexner Center also consistently mentioned identity and related concepts, this research concludes that identity is a major thematic influence on the *Pages* program. These scores indicate that not only does the administrator place a high importance on identity themes when speaking about the program, but also the language used to promote and evaluate the program is considerably centered on identity. As mentioned above, because the interview questions did address identity or identity concepts some interview answers may be slightly skewed.

The Wexner Center acknowledges identity to be linked with confidence, comfortableness, and articulation. When asked what the inspiration was in creating the program, Administrator II responded, “They [the students] haven’t been encouraged to
have that confidence or to even have their own ideas. And so my hope is that in creating
*Pages* I could, as a writer, as a creative person, an artist if you will, and especially
working in an arts institution be able to somehow deliver moments of that throughout the
program” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). The very purpose of the *Pages*
program is to promote the encouragement of personal ideas and confidence in those
ideas. As mentioned above, Shaw (1995) relates leisure activities to personal identity. In
promoting confidence and personal idea generation, the Wexner Center forges a strong
bond with students, allowing them to voice their opinions—an opportunity that may not
be afforded to them on a regular basis. This type of promotion and activity allows a
relationship to grow between the teen students and the organization, thus influencing a
possible continued relationship and identity formation (Arias & Gray, 2007).

Comfortableness also fosters an atmosphere for identity work (Falk, 2009). In
evaluating cooperating public school teachers’ responses to the *Pages* program, one
teacher noted, “He/she was delighted that the special education students opened up and
spoke much more in the field trips than they ever do in the regular classroom settings”
(Randi Korn & Associates, Inc., 2014, p. 27). These students underwent a change in
behavior due to the new space and a new experience. Rounds (2006) discusses the ability
of visitors to explore new roles within the museum space. Students who may not be
active participants in the classroom—a trait that could have multiple influences—can try
on the hat of participant within the museum space because of the differing atmosphere.
While the classroom is a formal setting with strict rules and guidelines, students seem to
find the museum space a freer experience, therefore, promoting idea generation and communication.

The notion of being comfortable is also important for administrators to recognize, as it may be a way to connect with teens that are otherwise guarded. When asked how *Pages* and the Wexner Center fit into a more formalized school structure, Administrator II notes, “[The museum is] a safe place to open up, a safe place to try on new ideas, a safe place to take risks that you could not take in the classroom” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). While this idea of safety lends itself to Rounds’ (2006) research on role exploration within the museum, it also relates to Stryker and Burke’s (2000) research on identity salience. Stryker and Burke (2000) explain that a higher identity salience in relation to other identities occupied by an individual leads to a greater probability of behavioral choices that are associated with the highly salient identity. As students explore new identities in a safe space, free of judgment and academic discipline, they may begin to develop a high salience for certain identities over others. For instance, if an athlete completes the *Pages* program and determines that she is also a writer, then she may begin to make behavioral choices in accordance with other writers as opposed to other athletes. If a safe space had not been available to this student, then she may have never explored her interest in writing and never developed her higher salience with this group of individuals. This idea of safety and comfortableness is an important factor that museum administrators must consider in order to serve the largest possible audience.

The last concept Administrator II associates with identity is that of articulation. When asked about the museum fitting into a more formalized school system—a system
of education with a rigid structure as opposed to the more loose structure of the museum educational environment—the administrator noted an instance of a student speaking after a performance. She recalled, “There’s something there that is, I don’t know. That has this person quiet. Never talks in class, never talk[s] at all this teacher said. And after this performance, she said he was so articulate about this experience, about what he understood, about what he saw” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). Once again, Rounds’ (2006) notion of exploration within the museum context appears within this program. As the scholar notes, “The museum offers opportunities both to confirm our existing identity, and to safely explore alternatives” (Rounds, 2006). While a student was unable or unwilling to communicate in a formalized environment before watching the performance, the museum space and program allowed him to explore a role of active participant. In this instance, the student seems to connect to the performance itself, thus demonstrating the museum as a supplier of transformative experience.

Overall, the Wexner Center scores highly in identity mentions as well as expresses multiple identity connections within documentation. These connections demonstrate the importance of identity, not only to the very foundation of the program, but also to the forging of relationships between students and the museum. The museum is able to use its space as a place of opportunity and safety, encouraging students to try on new roles otherwise unexplored in the formal classroom setting.

Relationships
In the context of cultural institutions, the term ‘relationship’ can be interpreted in various ways. An organization may have relationships with partners and sponsors. For example, administrators and executives may have personal and professional relationships with other administrators, executives, or educators. The institution may have relationships with participants visiting the museum, and those visiting the museum may have relationships with administrators or other guests. Clearly, “relationships” can be a loaded term for cultural institutions to consider. For the purpose of this research, ‘relationships’ refers to the connection between the museum and its visitors and the connection between visitors and other visitors. Thurber House is an institution that stresses the development of relationships with teens, while the Wexner Center for the Arts, though it acknowledges the concept of relationship, does not focus on it as a main goal of the program.

Thurber House scored over 8, indicating a high impact theme, in terms of interview, as Administrator I of Thurber House consistently spoke of relationships. Because she mentioned either this exact term or communicated phrasing that explicitly indicated the theme—for example, she used words and concepts such as friends, accountability, support, and encouragement—this research concludes that relationships highly impact the Young Writers’ Studio program. In the documentation gathered at Thurber House, I identified a more moderate impact scoring of between 3-8. As the documentation of the Thurber House regularly mentioned relationships within its materials, this research concludes that relationships play a somewhat important role in the Young Writers’ Studio program. While the language used to market the program
demonstrates principles of building a relationship with program participants, the interview with Administrator I reveals a much more heavy emphasis on this practice and motivation. The difference in this score may reflect the variety of perspectives running this program. As there are multiple administrators and educators overseeing the program, some staff may place a different emphasis on the programmatic goals than others. However, both interview and documentation reveal that building relationships is a conscious goal of the program.

Administrator I of Thurber House links relationships with friendships and accountability. When asked about the motivation to continue working with the program and its students, Administrator I replied that she enjoyed “really seeing them get excited about coming every other week [and] seeing their friends” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). The students are excited to socialize with other students who are not from their neighborhood school. In order to socialize with these friends, they use Thurber House as a space to both explore writing further and develop friendships that they would otherwise be without. In creating such friendships, the concept of identity salience becomes a relevant factor for the organization. As Stets and Burke (2000) note, “Stronger ties to others through an identity lead to a more salient identity” (p. 230). Students participating in Young Writers’ Studio create friendships with other writers, strengthening their identity salience with the writing community. This heightened identity salience allows students to begin determining themselves to be a writer and molding their self-identity to model such behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000).
While Administrator I recognizes this type of friendship development, the entire organization seems to celebrate these connections and support relationships through the very language used in the marketing, implementation, and evaluation of the program. On the website page describing the program and its goals, Thurber House encourages students to bring in work and, “Listen to friendly feedback from folks who want you to improve your story or poem” (Thurber House, 2015). Through this language, the organization encourages adolescents to view their peers as supportive friends rather than strangers who happen to participate in the same program. In encouraging the forging of friendship, the institution demonstrates itself as a supportive environment, allowing students to make connections that may be otherwise unavailable. The organization also helps to encourage a higher identity salience with the writing community, as students will begin to socialize with groups with a common interest (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Head (2002) notes, identity formation is often tied to the forging of friendships. Adolescents interacting with one another on a regular basis can influence each other’s behavior. Because this interaction is directly associated with Thurber House, the adolescents may begin to feel connected to the organization and its supportive environment as well. Lemerise (1995) describes the feeling of belonging teens develop when given roles within the museum. As students forge friendships with others interested in writing and begin to identify with these writers, they start to view themselves as writers within the organization. This role establishment allows students to feel as though they belong to the institution, developing a strong relationship between the teens and the organization.
As friendships are encouraged within *Young Writers’ Studio*, these relationships often are demonstrated through accountability. When asked about her experience with the program, Administrator I noted of the participants, “They make and form all these friendships and there’s…accountability with bringing in their pieces” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). The friendships forged within the program influence participants to feel a responsibility to their peers to behave in a certain way and embrace the program and its requirements. This type of behavior reinforces McLeish and Oxoby’s (2011) idea that sharing an identity with others fosters a greater cooperation between individuals. As adolescents bond over writing in a workshop atmosphere, this experience opens up the possibility for these teens to begin to feel responsible to one another to cooperate as writers sharing a space. This cooperation not only benefits the relationships built with one another but also the relationship developing with the cultural institution. As teens participate in the program and embrace its requirements, a relationship is developed with the institution that can foster a long-lasting connection between the museum and teen (Arias & Gray, 2007).

While Thurber House scores in the upper margin of relationship mentions, the Wexner Center of the Arts embodies a more moderate approach. The Wexner Center scored between 3-8, indicating a moderate impact theme, in terms of interview. Administrator II of the Wexner Center spoke of relationships. As she mentioned either this exact term or phrasing that clearly indicated the theme—she mentions ideas such as group thinking, support, and connections—this research concludes that relationships moderately impact the *Pages* program. The Wexner Center scored between 3-8,
indicating a moderate impact theme, in terms of documentation. This rather modest score
indicates a moderate approach to relationships by the organization—an approach that
may be explained by the overall goals of the institution.

The Wexner Center for the Arts links relationships with concepts of supportive
environments and teaching connections. When asked to give an account of a
transformative experience for students, Administrator II described a situation that
involved the death of a classmate. She explained, “Students were supporting each other;
students from other schools were supporting these students” (Personal Communication,
February 6, 2015). While this experience was singular and unique in nature, the support
that the students had for one another within the museum environment demonstrates the
relationships that the program can promote. Since these students spent time together in
the same space, their familiarity with each other and their environment allowed for an
atmosphere of support and empathy, thus aiding the students in overcoming a rather
tragic experience. Once again, McLeish and Oxoby’s (2011) theory of shared identity’s
link with cooperation may apply. As the students share the identity of a student
participating in the arts, they are able to support one another and cooperate as peers.
Without such a structure, these students would likely not feel accountable to each other
and would not lend the support necessary to the situation. This particular experience of
support is also important in terms of overall student development. As Head (2002) notes,
the adolescent years are a pivotal time in an individual’s life in terms of identity
development. An experience, such as a classmate’s death, within this time frame can
therefore lend itself to an individual’s growth process (Shaw, 1995). While this
experience influences the growth process, the ability of the museum and other students within the institution to support their classmates allows for a relationship to form between those experiencing the death and the organization overall. The ability to grieve in a safe space can foster a lasting connection between two previously separated groups (Arias & Gray, 2007).

Though the Wexner Center scored moderately in terms of the relationship theme, this score may be a reflection of the program’s overall goals. Pages is a program that partners with area school systems to enhance students’ understanding of and approach to writing. Because this program partners with schools, the emphasis seems to be on the relationship between the museum and the teacher rather than the museum and the student. When asked how the program is marketed, Administrator II responded, “It’s about relationships. You meet a teacher that you think might be a good candidate; you tell them about it” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). When considering relationships, the Administrator II centers on the connection with the teacher and how the program can benefit his or her teaching style or classroom objectives. Rather than focusing on the students, the museum aims to build a lasting relationship with the teacher in order to grow the program and impact more students. However, while this relationship is teacher focused, the students are nevertheless impacted because the museum-teacher relationship inevitably influences the teacher’s instruction and curricular decisions. Administrator II noted, “Students you will never meet will be impacted by Pages because of the change in the teacher” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). Because Pages aims to impact the lives of many students, the relationship with the teacher becomes a crucial component.
to the program’s structure. The idea of targeting the teacher or school system as opposed to the student upholds Quinn’s (1999) argument for community youth programs as supplemental learning opportunities for students. Rather than focusing on fostering a lasting relationship with students, the Wexner Center uses *Pages* as a venue to change teacher learning styles and practices and supplement student learning both in and outside of the classroom. While the students are in no way ignored, their relationship with the museum is filtered through the school system—a system that the museum must focus on appealing to in order to reach students.

Overall, Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts acknowledge relationships as an important aspect of their writing programs. Though each institution places a different amount of emphasis on this theme, they both parallel in terms of working toward building relationships in order to impact students’ lives. While Thurber House does focuses on relationships through the support and encouragement of friendships, the Wexner Center focuses on gaining trust and lasting relationships with schools systems and educators to reach the widest possible audience and transform how writing is perceived in academic circles.

**Education**

Increasingly, museums have become institutions with overarching educational goals (Lemerise, 1999). Whether through art, history, or culture, these organizations help to supply knowledge for a public looking to expand their knowledge and contextualize their life experiences. While the museum is a space of discovery, it is also a place where
formal learning—or learning within the classroom—can be supplemented. As the school textbook and classroom can supply the facts and foundation, the museum is able to expand those facts into demonstrations and activities. For the purpose of this research, I view education within the museum to be supplemental in this context and adding to a foundation built within the school system. Both Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts view supplemental education to be a theme of their respective writing programming.

Thurber House scored over 8, indicating a moderate impact theme, in terms of interview. Administrator I of Thurber House consistently spoke of education either through explicit terminology or clearly related phrasing—mentioning concepts such as worthiness, expansion, craft, and practicality. This demonstrated that education is of high importance to Young Writers’ Studio. In terms of documentation, Thurber House scored over 8, indicating it is a high impact theme. Since both the interview and the documentation gathered indicate that education is a high importance theme, I conclude that education is foundational in the Young Writers’ Studio program.

Administrator I links education with the craft of writing, as well as concepts such as career encouragement and academic expansion. When asked about the outcomes that the program hopes to achieve, Administrator I noted, “Our goal for the students is to keep them writing, to keep them inspired and excited, and to learn more about craft” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). The very programmatic goals of Young Writers’ Studio aim to teach students more about the craft of writing. As Young Writers’ Studio is a voluntary program—meaning students elect to attend the writing sessions every other
week—these teens are choosing to spend their time learning more about writing. This choice to spend leisure time learning about writing demonstrates Falk’s (2009) concept of visitors using a cost-benefit analysis to determine if the museum is a worthwhile organization to spend time within. When students choose to attend the workshop sessions, they are making a conscious choice to forgo other leisure options, such as going to the movies, shopping at the mall, or hanging out with friends at home. Shaw (1995) notes that leisure activity is connected with personal identity; this choice and analysis indicates the importance of the workshop to the teens and their salience of identity as young writers.

While the interview with Administrator I reveals craft building to be an important concept linked with education, the documentation of Thurber House indicates career encouragement to be another important concept for this education theme. Examining the Thurber House website, I found language that reflected the purpose of Young Writers’ Studio. The content reads, “You’ll never reach your dream of being a writer if you don’t write” (Thurber House, 2015). This phrase works in two ways: it acknowledges students’ career aspirations to become a writer and it encourages them to practice writing in order to meet those aspirations. By establishing the teens’ desire to become writers, the organization positions itself as a stepping-stone toward achieving that goal. As Lemerise (1995) notes, “[Teens] frequent places where they can develop a feeling of belonging, not solely based on services received but also on the available roles” (p. 403). While Young Writers’ Studio certainly provides services to students aspiring to write as a career, administrators also create roles for teens within the organization as writers. In
understanding that they will be writers learning more about their craft within the program, students desire to occupy those roles in order to move closer to their intended career goal.

Thurber House also attempts to diversify the careers in which they prepare students for, thus expanding their programming audience. When asked to speak more on a teen publication—a literary journal celebrating the young authors of Central Ohio—sponsored by Thurber House, Administrator I noted, “Not only are they getting the writing component but they’re getting the behind the scenes component” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). Rather than narrowing their focus to those students wishing to become writers, this program expands the scope of services to accommodate any teen interested in any portion of the writing process, such as writing, publishing, and editing. As Arias and Gray (2007) note, including a wider demographic allows for more accessibility and a larger influence on a broader portion of community members.

Through Young Writers’ Studio, Thurber House is able to reach a wide demographic of varied interests and encourage them to pursue careers and further education within the writing field.

The last conceptual link to education mentioned by Administrator I is academic expansion. When asked how a student participating in this particular program differs in attitude or intention from a student participating in a program linked to the classroom, Administrator I states, “It’s expanding skills that they learn in school…you know how to do adjectives and adverbs, but how are you going to put that into your story” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). While the administrator acknowledges the necessity
of understanding the foundational writing skills acquired in the classroom, she demonstrates how *Young Writers’ Studio* expands those skills beyond the strict academic structure. Students are encouraged to explore and transfer their foundational knowledge attained in school to their writing in the program. This notion of exploration relates to Rounds’ (2006) research on exploration within the museum. Since students are encouraged to explore their identities as writers and explore their academic knowledge in a more informal setting, they are able to discover different interests and techniques of which they might otherwise have been unaware.

The concept of exploration inside of the museum also provides insight into the importance of the museum-classroom relationship. Some scholars, such as Charles Gray, question the concept of the classroom as a sole medium for instruction. Administrator I recognizes the supplemental relationship that *Young Writers’ Studio* has with the more formalized academic classroom. As Gray (1998) notes, “It is not clear that school is the optimal venue for these lessons, perhaps because schools may be ill-equipped to offer the breadth and depth necessary for desired effectiveness” (p. 95). In offering supplemental material and activities to teachers and students, museums, such as Thurber House, allow teens to experience the depth and breadth necessary for learning some subject material. *Young Writers’ Studio* is one such program offering an expanded curriculum in terms of writing.

The Wexner Center for the Arts scored in the upper level margin of education mentions. The Wexner Center scored over 8, indicating a high impact theme, in terms of interview. As Administrator II of the Wexner Center consistently mentioned education
either through direct wording or clearly associated phrasing—mentions such as intentionality, arts integration, process, flexibility, expansion, and challenge—this research determines education to be a theme important to the Wexner Center and the Pages program. The Wexner Center scored over 8, indicating a high impact theme, in terms of documentation. Overall, the consistently high mentions of education throughout both the interview and documentation indicate that education is a very important theme to the Pages program.

Administrator II of the Wexner Center regularly related concepts of process and a challenge to the theme of education. When asked about her inspiration for creating the program, Administrator II replied, “I was hoping to create a program that said can we just look at the way we teach writing differently, and can we just look at the process of writing differently, and can we get to our writing differently” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). In aiming to instruct students about the process of writing, the administrator reveals the program’s desire to transform the thinking about the writing process as a whole. As Quinn (1999) suggests, community programs have the ability to build upon students’ already existent knowledge and strengths. Learning about the technical aspects of writing within schools, students are able to learn about the process of writing—or the manner of thinking about and formulating writing—in a different and more expressive way.

Administrator II of the Wexner Center views Pages as a program concerning the process of writing and transforming the perceptions of the writing process; the teachers who participate in the program agree with this view. According to Randi Korn and
Associates, Inc. (2014), “[Teachers] said they like meeting with others from different schools and perspectives to exchange ideas about how to incorporate the program experiences into the classroom and curriculum” (p. 25). The instructors seeking out the Pages program plan to implement the programming and strategies within their very classrooms. This plan of implementation demonstrates the power of the program to transform the thinking surrounding the writing process. As Graham (2000) theorizes, writing workshops allow students and adults to think of themselves as a writer in a different way. In approaching writing as a workshop or as a method for arts integration instead of as a classroom activity, the Wexner Center allows students to begin identifying themselves as a writer and to begin approaching their writing with an increased excitement or passion.

Though process is a common concept associated with the education theme, Administrator II also acknowledges that challenges to traditional education are important to the Wexner Center’s Pages program. When asked how the museum can work within a formalized education system, Administrator II noted of Pages, “The point of it is to do things that you couldn’t normally do in this traditional classroom setting—to push against those boundaries, [to push against] those restrictions, and to say [sic], what else?” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). The Pages program challenges the methods of the classroom and encourages students and teachers alike to ask what else can be done in terms of instruction and in terms of learning. Graham (2000) asserts that literacy educators have a responsibility to demonstrate to students the different ways in which writing can be used to explore self-hood and the world. In supplementing
classrooms with writing programs, such as *Pages*, students are encouraged to think and write about their lives and experiences in differing ways, not just within the academic classroom. In thinking and writing about their life experiences in different ways within the museum context, teens are able to explore their thoughts about the world around them without having to face the immediate consequences of physical behavior (Waterman, Kohutis, & Pulone, 1977). For instance, if a student believes that he or she is an artist, then he or she can explore thinking like an artist and writing like an artist within the museum before presenting him or herself as an artist to friends and family. This exploration period prepares teens for future reaction and allows them to think in new ways.

As *Pages* challenges the traditional classroom and encourages students to think in new ways, students may begin to identify with certain groups they had not previously considered. Beane (2000) identifies adolescence as a delicate period in which teens develop a self-identity and internalize values and experiences. Students in the *Pages* program have the opportunity to internalize their museum experiences and translate them into components of self-identity. These students may begin to identify as museumgoers, writers, or art appreciators. No matter their identity, these students draw from their experiences to compose an understanding of their selves. Stryker and Burke (2000) explain that the closer an individual is with members of a group, the more likely that individual will have a higher salience with the identity associated with that group. As students experience the museum program with others and begin to explore these possible new identities, they begin to relate to one another and become highly salient in terms of
their shared identity. This challenge to the classroom that *Pages* poses creates an opportunity for identity work among student participants.

Overall, Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts recognize education as a highly important theme to their respective programs. While Thurber House views education in terms of craft building, career encouragement, and academic expansion, the Wexner Center links education with process and challenge. These different concepts demonstrate a separate focus within education for each institution: Thurber House emphasizing a more career or craft-based education and the Wexner Center zooming in on the thinking process of writing in general. However, while both institutions may veer in terms of educational focus, they both consider themselves supplemental institutions to the formalized school structure.

**Structure**

All museum programs contain some sort of structure. While some programs are more loosely structured than others, all programs generally have a framework by which they operate. This framework can take the form of a daily agenda or a list of basic goals that the program hopes to meet. Both Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts implement programming that has a basic structure. This structure is important to both institutions and is a theme that proves important to the implementation of their respective writing programming. For the purposes of this research, I define structure as the basic framework, including location, schedule, and daily agenda, by which *Young Writers’ Studio* and *Pages* are run.
Thurber House scored over 8, indicating a high impact theme, in terms of interview. As Administrator I of Thurber House consistently spoke of structure either through direct terminology or clearly associated phrasing—mentions such as format, flexibility, freedom, and involvement—this research determines structure to be a highly important concept to Young Writers’ Studio through the lens of the administrator.

Thurber House scored below 3, indicating a low impact theme, in terms of documentation. This discrepancy could be due to the questions asked during the interview. As many questions inquired about the program and its implementation, the concept of structure may be a natural subject relating to such topics. This difference may also exist due to different emphases by different administrators. As multiple individuals are involved with the program, they may utilize different lenses when evaluating the program and its important themes. Overall, this discrepancy suggests that while structure may be acknowledged by the organization, it is not emphasized through promotional or survey materials.

Administrator I of Thurber House often links structure to concepts of flexibility and freedom. Young Writers’ Studio is structured as a bi-weekly writing workshop, spanning two hours (Thurber House, 2015). The first hour is dedicated to writing instruction, focusing on certain topics and techniques, such as genre or character. The second hour is dedicated to workshopping student work submitted to the organization prior to the workshop. When asked if the program had gone through any kind of changes or evaluations, Administrator I replied, “The format is basically the same, but the teaching style has change[d] a little bit…it’s also very organic, so it kind of depends on
the students” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). While the program relies on basic structure or framework, it is flexible enough to change with needs of the instructor and the students. Arias and Gray (2007) note that teens thrive in environments where they are able to inhabit specific roles; the programmatic structure of *Young Writers’ Studio* allows for the establishment of these roles within the workshop. Since the program is able to change with the students, the students can determine what they would like to emphasize or study more during their time in the workshop. Administrator I noted of the writing instructor, “If he is feeling that they really like this one activity one week, he might extend it two weeks later” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). The students have the power to determine the content of the program from week to week, thus demonstrating students’ personal involvement with the program. Lemerise (1995) notes that teens will return to spaces where they feel as though they have a role, suggesting that the students of *Young Writers’ Studio* would continue to be involved with the program because of their involvement with the structure of the content. When asked about the retention rate of the program, Administrator I noted, “They usually stay involved. They might not come every other week. They might only come for a summer session…but they will try to stay involved” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). As students are able to have input into their own learning, they feel as though they are part of the organization, prompting them to return in some capacity over time. This flexibility that the program promotes allows students to develop a bond with the organization and picture themselves as having ownership and power over their own learning.
Another concept that Administrator I links with structure is freedom. Freedom, as I define the term for this research, is the ability of the program to operate without a set of strict guidelines or requirements. When asked about the difference between a student in the *Young Writers’ Studio* program versus a student in a school related program, Administrator I said, “We have the luxury of having more freedom than a lot of the high school teachers do. We don’t have to block off time for...a pop quiz or anything like that. So, they get to delve into what they want to write” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2015). Without standards or requirements, the program and its administrators are able to plan lessons and utilize techniques that would not necessarily work within the school classroom. As Gray (1998) mentions, schools are unable to cover topics with breadth or depth because of structural requirements. Programs, such as *Young Writers’ Studio*, are able to structure their programming in order to delve deeply into the subject of writing without the constrictions of formal education requirements. This freedom allows for more experimentation, which leads to a greater development of self-identity and a stronger bond with the organization overall (Rounds, 2006).

Similarly to Thurber House, the Wexner Center for the Arts recognizes structure to be a theme contributing to the *Pages* program. The Wexner Center scored over 8, indicating a high impact theme, in terms of interview. As Administrator II of the Wexner Center continuously mentioned structure either explicitly or through clearly related phrasing—mentions such as disruption, framework, revision, system, and collaboration—this research determines structure to be a highly influential theme for the program through the lens of the administrator. The Wexner Center scored over 8, indicating a high
impact theme, in terms of documentation. These overall high mentions demonstrate the importance of structure to *Pages* both through the lens of administrator and through the promotional materials for the program.

Administrator II of the Wexner Center links structure with systems, revision, and disruption. When asked how the museum fits into a more formalized education structure, Administrator II replied, “It’s big ‘E’ education…it’s bureaucratic, it’s systemic, it’s a bunch of different things. The museum has to figure out ways to understand that and accept that” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). In viewing the schools as systemic, the *Pages* program works to collaborate with that structure and understand its nuances. Quinn (1999) discusses the added value of working with schools to expand the knowledge of students. Understanding the system in which schools operate allows the museum to create meaningful collaborations with classrooms, teachers, and students.

Administrator II continued, “We can’t be all things to all these issues…we have to accept that at some point and say [sic], but what can we do and who’s willing to do that with us” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). In establishing its role within the larger school system, *Pages* is able to react to specific issues and work toward resonant change on a more realistic level. Beane (2000) suggests that museums striving to make a difference in the lives of teens are afforded the resources to do so. As *Pages* strives to transform the ways students and teachers approach writing, the program is able to pool resources, such as teaching artists, teacher collaborators, various school systems, etc., to help support its overall mission.
According to Administrator II, a second concept linked to structure is revision. When asked about the evolution of the Pages program, Administrator II noted, “It’s really like the writing process in a sense. We just never publish anything. It’s like constant revision…the program actually is this breathing, living practice” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). Rather than establishing a rigid framework that is followed every year, the program instead follows a loose framework, taking into account the experiences of teens and teachers, and revises the program each year to tailor itself to the needs of the community. Falk (2009) notes that museums must be attentive to the needs and interests of the visitors in order to help them in identity affirmation. If an individual visits an institution and affirms his or her identity within its walls, the person is more likely to become a recurring visitor as opposed to a person that does not experience that same affirmation (Falk, 2009). Assessing the needs of the teens and instructors and revising the program to fit those needs positions Pages and the Wexner Center as a program and an institution that helps to aid in the identity affirmation of its patrons. This position could ultimately lead the institution and program to experience high levels of retention in terms of visitors and program participants.

The last concept Administrator II links to structure is disruption. When asked about the students and schools participating in the program, Administrator II said, “Pages, I like to think of it as a really beautiful disruption…but in an intentional way…it sort of disrupts the system. It disrupts the monotony. It disrupts some of the angst” (Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). While the term “disruption” tends to have a negative connotation, Administrator II views this idea as something necessary to excite
the students about writing and allow for more creative thinking in terms of the writing process. Gray (1998) notes that schools may not be the best venues for a depth of learning. Pages aims to disrupt that system and advocate for more depth of knowledge and understanding about writing. This disruption takes place on a systemic level—removing students from the classroom and bringing them to the museum—and on a thinking level—encouraging students to think differently about their writing and encouraging teachers to think differently about how they teach writing skills. Giroux and McLaren (1992) claim that writing is a process by which individuals can self-define and explore their relations to the outside world. By encouraging students to think about writing differently and possibly think about it in a more positive manner, the Pages program provides students an outlet for self-exploration and for thinking and formulating their own opinions about the world around them.

Overall, four themes, including identity, relationships, education, and structure, consistently appeared within the interviews and documentation of both Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts. These themes speak to how both organizations think about their writing programming and how the institutions market such programming to their audiences. Many of these themes overlapped and demonstrated unique positions on how writing can be used within the museum context. Following is a discussion of the conclusions of this research and how identity can be incorporated into programming in other areas of museum education.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

General Findings

The findings of this study conclude that two Greater Columbus area teen writing programs—Thurber House’s *Young Writers’ Studio* and the Wexner Center for the Arts’ *Pages*—incorporate an identity theme within the creation, implementation, and evaluation of their programming. While the theme of identity is not the only theme guiding the museums’ programming—other themes include relationships, education, and structure—this theme is one that directly impacts the teen participants and can have a lasting impact on this population. The guiding research question for this study was: How can museums utilize identity theory in the creation and implementation of teen programming? Both *Young Writers’ Studio* and *Pages* are writing programs that can be used as guides for successful identity-related programming within the museum. Though Thurber House aims to allow students to explore career and hobby aspirations and the Wexner Center for the Arts aims to allow students to develop their writing skills in a more comfortable environment, both of these institutions stressed the goal of encouraging their students to view themselves as either a writer or view writing in a different, and hopefully more positive, manner.

Stryker and Burke (2000) note that identity theory is a concept that views identities as a conglomeration of role expectations forged through relationships. Both Thurber House and the Wexner Center of the Arts utilize programming to promote
relationships not only among student participants, but also with the museums themselves. Overall, this promotion of relationships allows students to begin identifying as either writers or museumgoers and influences the students to act accordingly with these roles. As students begin to act out their roles, the associated identity salience becomes higher and encourages students to value their identities linked to the museum more highly than other less salient roles (Stryker and Burke, 2000). Since student participants are impressionable at this adolescent life stage, museums have the chance to make a lasting impression on their identity formation (Head, 2002). By creating a highly salient identity for teens, museums position themselves as influential institutions in the creation of identity and behavioral performance—students identifying as a museumgoer will likely visit museums in the future. This research concludes that both Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts accomplish this process of identity salience creation and behavioral influence through their respective writing programs.

Suggestions for Use

This study can be used as a guide for museums aiming to create identity related teen programming or for institutions desiring to implement identity goals within already existing teen programming. In understanding the various components of identity theory, museums can create a strategic plan to implement within teen programming. Such a plan would consist of overall institutional outcomes for the program, targeted demographics, important themes guiding the program’s curriculum, and evaluation strategies to monitor the program’s goal achievement. In incorporating identity theory to a strategic plan, an
organization would consider how students are building relationships with one another and with the institution itself. If the plan does not foster the creation of such relationships, then the utilization of identity theory may be hindered. However, if the plan accounts for teens building relationships with one another around a common goal—for the purposes of this research the goal is centered around writing—and for building relationships with the organization itself, then identity theory can be fully implemented. Museums and other cultural institutions can look to Thurber House and the Wexner Center for the Arts studied within this research for ways in which students can be factored into program plans.

**Study Limitations**

Though the findings of this research are conclusive, there are limitations to the study. The study took place with Columbus, Ohio—a city known for its support of the arts—which may affect the generalizability of the research. While organizations within this geographical location found success with identity theory implementation, other areas may not find the same success due to outside factors, such as lack of funding, accessibility, and support from not only their home institution, but also public school administration in relationship with the museum.

The study also spans two programs. While these programs are held within accredited institutions that are well known within the Columbus community, a study involving more comparable programs may help the research to become more generalizable. The two programs studied also narrowly focused on teens and writing.
Since these types of workshops are specific and unique, the generalizability once again may be affected when branching out into other types of programming, such as programs focusing on adults or on technology.

**Future Research**

Further research in this area is necessary to fully capture the importance of and strategies for implementing identity theory in teen programming. Suggestions for further research include interviewing teens involved in such programming and expanding the study to focus on a specific group of teens over a number of years to gauge the impact of identity programming. While this research focuses on the creation and implementation of identity programming on an administrative level, more research is necessary on those attending the programming.

Further research is also necessary on the stakeholders of the program. How will the museum benefit from implementing such programming? Is there a noticeable change in relationship between the teen and the museum? Questions such as these could be answered in a long-term programmatic study, which would help to detail specific results in terms of the museum-teen relationship, teen development, and museum patronage.

Lastly, studies on how museums can train staff to implement identity programming are also of importance. Those working in public positions, such as guest relations, docents, security, etc., must be trained to help those within the museum explore in a welcoming environment. A study on the training of such individuals would be helpful for those museums interested in implementing such a program.
References


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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board

Office of Responsible Research Practices
300 Research Administration Building
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1063
Phone (614) 688-8457
Fax (614) 688-0366
www.orrp.osu.edu

January 27, 2015

Protocol Number: 2014B0585

Protocol Title: AN EXPLORATION OF SELF-IDENTITY ORIENTED TEEN PROGRAMMING WITHIN THE MUSEUM, Joni Acuff, Jessica Sarber, Arts Administration, Education & Policy

Type of Review: Initial Review—Expedited

IRB Staff Contact: Jacob R. Stoddard Phone: 614-292-0526 Email: stoddard.13@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Acuff,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for expedited review, as indicated below.

Date of IRB Approval: Date of IRB Approval Expiration: Expedited Review Category:

January 24, 2015 January 24, 2016 6, 7

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If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00006378. All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Michael Edwards, PhD, Chair Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board
Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How long have you participated in facilitating the program?
2. What has your experience with the program been like?
3. What motivates you to continue working with the program?
4. Has the program undergone any changes or evaluations in the past? If so, what are these changes and what was the feedback from these evaluations?
5. How do students hear about the program?
6. Do students freely choose to participate in the program? If so, what are the motivations these students have in choosing this particular program? If not, why do students participate and are their motivations different than a voluntary participant?
7. What are the programmatic outcomes for students and how are they met?
8. What do students leave the program with?
Appendix C: Interview Transcriptions

*Thurber House*

Me: How long have you participated in facilitating the teen writing studio program?

Thurber: Our teen program is *Young Writers’ Studio*. I have been at Thurber House for 9 years, and I’ve probably been helping out or facilitating it and doing the hiring and so forth with *Young Writers’ Studio* for probably about 5 years.

Me: And within that 5 years has the program or have you seen it go through any types of changes or program evaluations?

Thurber: We started off with one facilitator, she and my predecessor created it. She left a couple of years ago to take a different job and then we brought on a professor of English over at Columbus College of Art and Design. And since then, topics and structure have changed a little bit. It still meets every other week for two hours. There’s still a writing prompt. There’s still an hour where they can critique and do their work shopping. But the writing activities are a little bit different. He structures their critiquing a little bit differently. So, the format is basically the same but the teaching style has changed a little bit, and it’s also very organic, so it kind of depends on the students. So, some are really deep into the critiquing and they’ll take a really long time for one piece. And then one week you might have a slightly different group and they might be a little bit faster or might be into the writing part of the two hours more. So, every week, every session is a little bit different, but the format over all has kind of been the same.
Me: So would you then say that the day-to-day program is kind of student driven?
Thurber: Yeah, I would say that. He will get a feel for the group. And if he is feeling that they really like this one activity one week he might extend it two weeks later. Sometimes we’ll have larger groups sometimes we’ll have smaller groups depending on the session, so he kind of goes with that as well. So, maybe more group projects if we think we’re going to have a group of 20 kids versus you know a couple weeks ago it was really cold and we only had like 4 or 5 show up just because of timing and the weather and then they just didn’t want to participate. So it is kind of driven that way.
Me: So what has your experience with the program been like?
Thurber: I love it. It is so much fun to see the teens really get into it. The students, there’s usually a pocket of students who really get into it and they stay. They make and form all these friendships and there’s kind of accountability with bringing in their pieces and you know they do take it seriously. They take critiquing seriously. And they love to write, and they have fun with it. It’s really unique and exciting to see them find their niche. They might not have a writing club at school or they might not, like their friends might be more into something else and they’re more into writing, so it’s really fun to see them come here meet other students their age who love to write who have the same sense of humor or you know you’ll find somebody who has this like one book that’s a favorite and it’s kind of quirky and they don’t know anybody else who knows it and then they come here and three other people have read it. So, it’s a lot of fun to see them get that like niche and that like friendship and then see them grow in their writing too. Particularly if they stay for you know more than a couple sessions or you know we have someone started as a
freshman and they stayed all the way through senior year. So to see them grow and mature as people as well as writers is really awesome.

Me: Because it’s so week by week basis, how do you market to students?

Thurber: We do a lot of it ends up being word of mouth. But, we do through the libraries; we send fliers and emails to teachers and principals, high school teachers and principals. A lot of libraries. And then we do the social media. Facebook, Tweet it. A lot of it is by word of mouth though. They come and bring their friends. They’ll spread it around. And the teachers and librarians are really good advocates for us. They see that it’s a program worth sending students to. And that the students get a lot out of it. And if they like love to write then this is the place to go, so that helps out a lot too.

Me: So would you say that the relationships that you build with other organizations are important to the marketing aspect?

Thurber: Yes.

Me: You seem to enjoy the program. So what motivates you to want to continue to work the program in this capacity?

Thurber: I think just seeing the students love it so much and get into it and really seeing them get excited about coming every other week seeing their friends and just seeing their faces when they realize that they’re not the only one who likes to write. They’re not the only one who likes, you know, reading and spending hours creating fantasy worlds and doing other stuff. I think I feed off of their excitement and it makes me want to do more. Find new teachers and find new speakers and things like that. To encourage them so that they don’t stop, so that they keep being inspired, and they don’t get discouraged or too
swamped with other things that they forget that they love to write and that they you know that’s what they want to do. So that’s what I think keeps us going. That’s what keeps him going. He loves working with the students too, so it’s a program of love for us. But their excitement and their involvement and how they encourage one another and how much they like it and make it a priority in their schedule. It’s their time. For a lot of them they pay themselves. Some parents pay too. But for them it’s their pizza money or their work money, so they take it seriously and have fun with it, so we take it seriously and have fun with it too.

Me: So, because it’s kind of a free choice program rather than fully integrated into the school system would you say that a lot of the students or a majority of the students who participate in it identify as writers before they come or have you ever had an experience where they didn’t necessarily identify as a writer?

Thurber: I think both. I think a large majority love to write, they consider themselves writers, and they want to further it. Whether they want to go into college as writers or want to be published writers or whether they just are writers now and they love it and they might do something else in the future they’d still consider themselves writers. And then we do have some who love to write but they would never call themselves a writer, and then I feel the more involved they get with the program the more they realize, ‘I am a writer.’ Everybody has a voice; everybody can be a writer. So I think it’s a little bit of both. I think it just kind of depends on where they are in their comfortableness. With that it’s kind of where they see themselves. But, like you said it is a free choice, so for the most part if they’re coming they at least love to write. Whether they consider themselves
a writer or not, they do at least enjoy it or are curious enough to see if they want to pursue it.

Me: How does a student in this program differ from a student that you would get in say a program directly tied to the classroom?

Thurber: The key difference I think for us is that we don’t have a certain test or margin that we’re trying to hit. So we can do, it’s all based on creativity, imagination. It’s expanding skills that they learn in school. So we always consider ourselves supplemental. So they learn the grammar and the structure and things like that in school. And when they come to us he pushes them a little bit farther. Yeah, you know how to do the adjectives and the adverbs but how are you going to put that into your story and make and use that to create a better character to make a better plot to make it more believable. So I think that the big difference is that we get to go a little bit farther. We have a little bit more time, and we get to use the word creative measures. We have the luxury of having more freedom than a lot of the high school teachers do. We don’t have to block off time for a you know like a pop quiz or anything like that. So they get to really delve into what they want to write. And then they also get to write about what they want to write about, which is always motivating for them too because we’ll have somebody who is a poet sitting next to a playwright sitting next to a fantasy or dystopian writer, and they all get to do the same prompt in whatever genre they like. So I think that’s kind of what differs us from something that’s in the schools, that we have a little bit more freedom with what we get to work with them on. But we completely supplement what they learn in school.

Me: What would you say the outcomes that you hope to achieve are for the program?
Thurber: Our goal for the students is to keep them writing, to keep them inspired and excited, and to learn more about the craft, whether it be as authors and poets, somebody in the publishing world, a graphic novelist, anything like that; to show them that outside of school you can write, you can have fun with it. There’s careers in it that you can do. But even if you don’t want to go into it writing is always going to be important. We want to, our goal is always to inspire them to continue writing. That they have a voice, and their voice is important. And that everybody is a writer and to keep going with even if it is just journaling or anything like that just to keep them inspired and encouraged.

Me: And what would you say the retention rate of the program is?

Thurber: That’s a little tricky with high school because they get so busy. We do typically have a good core that will stay through. Like last year we graduated a core of like six or seven who had been with us for a while so we’re kind of rebuilding from losing a big core group. There’s usually about five that go along with it and then the rest fluctuate. We average around ten to fifteen students. This year it’s a little bit smaller because we lost so many seniors. They usually stay involved. They might not come every other week. They might only come for a summer session or something like that. But they will try to stay involved, either submitting to Flip the Page or you know keeping up with us on Facebook and things like that. So it’s a pretty decent retention rate. Obviously we wish it was a little bit higher; you always wish it to be higher. But given their schedules and the time restraints the fact that they make the relationships and the friendships I think is what helps them retain helps them want to come back and work it into their schedules. So it’s a pretty decent retention rate.
Me: And would you say that the students that participate in this program attend other programs or have they attended programs in the past?

Thurber: A lot of the ones who are in high school have done stuff with Thurber House in the past. I’d say probably half of them. They’ve either done camp or wizards or been an intern or something along those lines. And then the others have come because of their friends or their teacher encouraged them, something like that. And then they might also intern with us or work on the Flip the Page committee or things like that. So if they’re invested they usually find other ways to work with us too. And we try to include in other things too like internships or volunteering anything like that.

Me: I think Flip the Page is really a unique component to this program. Can you talk just a little bit more about it?

Thurber: Flip the Page is Central Ohio’s teen literary journal. And I think we’re in our fourth edition, and it comes out in the spring. It is a journal that is put together and written by teens. Thurber House does all the editing and puts it together through Create Space on Amazon. But all the pieces, if you’re ages thirteen through nineteen you’re able to submit up to two pieces 800 words and fewer, and it’s completely free. You can upload it from any computer you want. We want to make sure it’s accessible to everybody. And we have a committee of teenagers who read the pieces. They rate them based on a rubric. They decide what goes in and what’s accepted and what’s not accepted. They help choose the artwork, the themes. Pretty much almost everything. It is really a team effort and the Young Writers’ Studio is part of it because members of Young Writers’ Studio are able to be on the submissions committee. This year we changed it a little bit. We made it
a little bit different. Those who were in Young Writers’ Studio and then those that were accepted in Flip the Page last year. Both of those groups were offered the opportunity to be on the submissions committee if they were interested. So, that was slightly different this year. But it’s a great partnership. It shows teens what the publishing world is like, what it’s like to be an editor, what it’s like to choose the artwork. So not only are they getting the writing component but their getting the behind the scenes component. And for students who are interested in that kind of stuff it’s really neat to see. And they’re also still able to submit, which is really important to us because we want them to do that as well. So they submit and then we make everything blind. So everybody is reading everything blind, including myself. We judge everything not knowing who the writer is. So that way they are able to submit pieces and learn how to critique just like they do in Young Writers’ Studio but still being considerate because you don’t know if somebody on the committee’s piece that you’re talking about if they wrote it or not. So you really do want to be polite and keep the reading strictly to what they’re talking about. But it’s a really great program. The students who are chosen also get to they have the opportunity to read their piece at the Columbus Arts Festival. Last year for the first time we did a book launch party and that was for all the families and friends we had teachers we had principals come. And we had an open mic, so if they couldn’t read at the festival they could read there. They got to pick up their journals and we had food and things so we’ll be doing that again this year too. But it’s just a really big celebration of teen authors in Central Ohio. We had over 200 submit last year. We had 87 in the journal. So it’s really
exciting for us. It’s a real labor of love. And to see how excited the students get when they get their journals, definitely a big pay off.

Me: And do you see a lot of the teens from the Young Writers’ Studio submitting or wanting to work on the publishing side too?

Thurber: Yes. Particularly the passed two years we’ve had a good number of Young Writers’ Studio students submit. And then for the submissions committee, except for this year, it’s usually primarily Young Writers’ Studio students. Again we graduated a good core of the committee so we have a couple from Young Writers’ Studio this year and then we have a couple who were in Flip the Page last year. They’re very involved both in submitting and in the committee.

Me: Do you have any testimonials or experiences anything that kind of just sticks out in your mind with a student who has gone through the Young Writers’ Studio workshop that you’ve seen transform in some sort of way?

Thurber: Actually a couple. The first one she, one they’re all amazing writers. I’m not going to lie. I know it’s going to sound like I’m partial. But a lot of them are really gifted writers. And one of them in particular was really good. And she was constantly asked to bring stuff in and we would critique it and we thought it was wonderful. And she was to the point where she was sending stuff out. So at that time a former employee was still in charge. So she worked with her on sending out query letters and how do you do that. So as a group they did query letters and they would ask her if she heard back from anybody, and she would show them her big excel sheet and what she did and who she was sending out to and things like that. So that was a really great group. It was a smaller group. They
were really close. And they were really behind her wanting to know what she was up to and wanting to get further chapters and things like that. So that was really neat for them to experience. And she’s still in college. And I have absolutely no doubt that she’s going to get published. There’s no doubt in my mind that it’s coming in the next couple of years. But it was really cool for students to see that even though you are in high school and you’re just a teenager you can do query letters. You can get picked up. Like she got responses from people. So that was really cool. And then we had another writer in the passed year, year and a half maybe, and he’s writing this novel. And I don’t want to give it away but he is doing it from a bunch of different points of view and it’s really it is really a difficult job to take on. And he’s been submitting chapter after chapter and all of the students are like remembering and asking these fantastic questions. And if he misses one when he comes back everyone’s just like where’s the next chapter we want to know what’s going on with so and so. And the difference with that is his writing from day one chapter one to where it is now and now the revised chapter he’s writing are so much better. And like the students are noticing it too. Like they’ll talk about the differences in how much stronger of a writer he is in his description and how you’re thinking more about things like that. And you can see him get more and more confident. And then also just from a practical like teacher standpoint like his writing is getting so much better. And you can see you can actually see the difference in the revised chapters that he’s bringing in and how he’s thinking about how this story is going to keep going and keep evolving and things like that. So it’s really fun to see him grow in that way and we still have him for a little while longer so I’m hoping that we get to you know he’s continuing to bring in
chapters. But he takes the critiques really well. You can see him, and he writes everything down and he takes it back and he changes it. So me on the outside I see that as being an important aspect of this. You know not just to be fun and you get to hang out and critique and stuff but to just see the growth in the students as well. And we have several students who are going on to English and teaching creative writing and things like that degrees and they will talk about missing Young Writers’ Studio and how much it helped them and how much they miss that type of atmosphere. And now it’s just writing for class. They miss the creative writing aspect. They miss getting that every two weeks the two hours that was just theirs to write creatively and things like that, so those are testimonials that are fun for us to see or hear. They’re excited and that they miss us and the college kids come back for holiday break or spring break or something like that will stop in and say hi or if we have a session they’ll stop in and say hi to him and sit in and tell them what college is like and things like that too. It is really fun. It is a really cool niche place. And when they get into you know they stay and it means a lot to them.

Wexner Center for the Arts

Me: How long have you participated in the Pages program?

Wex: I created it, so the entire time. We are in our ninth year. It will be 10 years this Fall 2015. It will be 10 years of the program. So, I created the program back in 2005. It started out as a pilot and we did a sort of mini Pages within I think over a 3 month span with just
a school that I had a relationship with. And then after the pilot, after we sort of tested it out just to see if something like this was possible, we rolled out the next full we rolled out in the next year 2005-2006 school year the full Pages program.

Me: What was your inspiration for creating the program?

Wex: I worked for many years as an artist in residence, so I was a writer in residence. And I was working with a lot of different arts institutions. I was working with the Wexner Center, I was working with Columbus Museum of Art, Thurber House, Franklin Park Conservatory. Lots of different arts institutions creating educational programming or arts education programming and using sort of writing as the medium or it was a multidisciplinary environment, so it might be writing and some other medium and really enjoyed that. And from that work kind of working with museum educators or even just sort of arts institution educators or even just cultural institution educators I just became more and more interested in education and teaching. And so I don’t know just sort of one thing led to another and all of a sudden I was sort of doing residency work in schools like an artist in schools working with different organizations. And really enjoyed that work. And was encountering students that more times than not really struggled with their writing, disliked writing, and you know the more I sort of saw how it was taught in school and even did some I did some teaching in the classroom sort of in that span of time as well and saw kind of what the curriculum dictated you know in terms of sort of maybe what was important about writing and how it was being taught in the schools and I just I saw an opportunity for arts integration to say we can maybe teach writing differently. I was already a writer. I was doing I was freelancing a lot so that’s where this
residency work was. I was doing journalism and all sorts of different copy writing and things like that some editing. And I thought what better way to kind of think about how we teach writing than to sort of be a writer doing that or consulting with teachers in some way. And so this program is kind of out of years of that thinking years of gosh I wish I could do a little more. I would leave a residency or leave a workshop and say gosh I wish I could do more or wish I could follow up or I wonder what happened to that group of kids or that teacher or that experience. I wonder if somehow that changed and you don’t always get to see the fruits of the labor you don’t always get to see sort of what happens. But I wanted to. I wanted to do that. And so Pages allowed me to sort of be actively researching actively reflecting it just I wanted to create a space where I could constantly be thinking about how we engage with writing and the arts. I wanted arts to be central and be important in the process. I wanted us to learn through the writing process, learn about the writing process, engage with the writing process through engaging with the creative process, engaging with artists and their processes their questions to show or to get students thinking huh maybe these processes are not that different maybe there are some similarities some overlap. Maybe there’s something I can learn from this said artist or this particular sort of arts experience that will impact how I think about writing. Because I encounter students who don’t think about their writing. They’re not intentional about their writing. They are maybe intentional about getting it in at a particular time. Like it’s due at said time and I need to get this in. But they’re not always thinking about well so how are you going to go about that. And they’re stuck. They get stuck on the first line. I’ve had so many conversations about getting passed the first line. They get stuck on
the grammatical, and I’m like you can go back and really polish that up. Get your ideas out. They get stuck about they don’t have the confidence in their ideas. Because they haven’t been encouraged to have that confidence or to even have their own ideas. And so my hope is that in creating Pages I could as a writer as a creative person an artist if you will and especially working in an arts institution be able to somehow deliver moments of that throughout the program. And so we’re always trying these new and different ways to engage with content. Material research, writing processes, writing genres. I mean all these different things. All these teachers are coming from these various points of intersection with these arts experiences we have at the Wexner Center. And we’re going out to the classroom, these very different classrooms: AP, honors, ninth through twelfth. I mean just this wide range. They go around a round table and they talk about their ideas what they dream of. Here’s what they want their students to do. Some sort of argumentative writing right? But here’s how we want to get there. Pages slows the writing process down. It just slows the process down period. I think everything has a process right? And writing has a process, and it just slows it down a little bit. And has teachers thinking about how are we going to get their students thinking about how are we going to get there. And we just go step by step by step instead of here’s something that I want you to write it’s due on said date.

Me: Just the assignment aspect?

Wex: Just the assignment. Exactly. And so Pages, I was hoping to create a program that said can we just look at the way we teach writing differently and can we just look at the process of writing differently and can we get to our writing differently. Those were the
questions I had and *Pages* allows me to constantly be researching that, constantly be engaging that, constantly reflecting on that. Not just by myself but with everybody who’s a partner. All the teachers, all the artists, the students I mean just this is what a great space to be in to be kind of thinking about writing and language and words and content and thinking with all of these people.

Me: So how would you characterize your experience then with the program?

Wex: I would say I’m a gal that wears many hats, and I’m ok with that. I definitely am in every aspect every facet of *Pages*. Not because I’m trying to be sort of over controlling or over manipulative or over anything. Even overseer. I care for the program; therefore, I care for all the participants in the program. I created it and so there’s a certain vision I have for it and so I try and sort of steer our partners in a direction you know sometimes we’re working with folks that have never collaborated outside of their school. You know we’re collaborating with teachers that are as far as Delaware to as close as like down the street you know and in the Linden area. And so you know we’re bringing together these interesting collaborations. Sometimes like minded sometimes so disparate. And so I am really just constantly navigating that space as facilitator as supporter as cheerleader sometimes as person that pushes a little bit. I don’t know what that would be called. But I’m the person that says you know I had to have a conversation the other day with one of my partners and said that’s not quite arts integration but we’re going to get there. Thank you for trusting the process. But I need to push you. Just know that I’m just pushing you. It’s out of care. It’s out of general just wanting you to understand the difference between what you’re doing right now and arts integration. Those kinds of conversations. So
sometimes I have to have really tough conversations, but I do it with care. And sometimes I’m the artist in residence because I am a writer and I like to stay close to the work. And so sometimes I put on my artist hat and I get to go out and be an artist but I’m still facilitating and still researching and still sort of in constant collaboration, gathering of things, materials, budget. I mean logistics sometimes just even dealing with logistics documentation, busing systems, education in schools are systems so it’s about understanding the system staying abreast of the changing of the system. Being supportive of bureaucratic systems that can be frustrating and can be difficult and challenging for teachers and not just saying I expect you to be able to do this but how can we do this within this system that is constantly changing that’s what’s really challenging and exciting about the work but those are the sort of many different roles that I can find myself in. Many of those roles in a single day. I mean it’s just constantly shifting my role is constantly shifting, and I’m pulling people in to sort of learn these different roles but I definitely am sort of caretaker I would say.

Me: What do you see as your motivation to continue on with that many sort of hats role?

Wex: That’s a good question. Maybe lack of resources? You do what you can with what you have. It’s not like I can say here do this to someone and I’ll sort of sit back and just watch from the sideline. I think I do care about the work. I am very close to the work. I like the fact that I can be a museum educator be within an institution and still be a practitioner. I like the fact that I can still teach and I can still learn and I can still write and not just even just my personal writing but also the writing that I might ask students to do or teachers to do. I can just be a part of that and I enjoy it maybe is an honest answer. I
really enjoy it. It’s the way that our department is structured. I’m very much happy to be a part of sort of all the interworking. I have an assistant. Definitely helps me with the research and some of the expenses and things kind of the logging of expenses transactions things like that. As well as idea sharing. Sometimes I’ll bounce off ideas to my graduate assistant. Who’s really active in this. Like everyone who’s involved with *Pages* I consider them a partner in some way. And so yea I’ll bounce off ideas. I have an intern oftentimes that will help you know research data entry, logistical things, preparing materials you know we have I definitely get support from my colleagues just in terms of you know even just ideas, things like that, making connections. You know there’s people that are helping. I’m not a one woman show in any way. Like there’s no way that I could do this program without the support from the curators that are here at the Wexner Center, the entire education staff that’s here at the Wexner Center, our tech staff, you know my graduate assistant, interns you know, just work study students. They’re all a part of it. The teachers, the students you know everybody plays their role. I try to thank people as I go along. Recognize the people. There’s tiny roles; there’s huge roles. I have a photographer that I work with. I wanted her to understand the program to know how to document it so we could capture images that I thought could convey the program in this really authentic way. That kind of stuff. It’s a whole team of folks. Me: And earlier when you were talking about this system. How do you see the museum kind of working its way into that formalized educational system? Wex: Oh my goodness. So that’s a huge question and yeah, we here at the museum know that we consider that we’re considered this informal learning if you will. And that’s fine.
I like to think of it as really a flexible space to learn a bunch of different things in these really flexible ways. Which is fine, so if that’s seen as informal I’m ok with that. And then there’s the formal right? Sitting at a desk, you know specific curriculum standards, testing all of that. And the system is huge and it’s complicated and it is not easy to break into. Break into is not the word but collaborate with them intersect. It’s just the system is locked tight, and it’s a stressful I think place for those that are within that system. I always call it big E education because it’s huge right? It’s big E education. Education umbrella with all the different kinds of things. It’s bureaucratic it’s systemic it’s a bunch of different things. The museum has to figure out ways to understand that and accept that. I understand that we are not going to change the system but what we can do is look for openings glimpses, partners, collaborators, folks that are within the system. I like to think of myself a little bit in and a little bit out where I really try and stay in touch with the ever-changing system of education. Everything from busing to new standards to funding to local and national issues. If you’re going to be a museum educator and work with the schools I think that’s a really important place to start. Is to just understand your audience and who you’re serving and that it might not be that easy for them to get to your institution. So how do you figure out some balance getting them here going there? Disparity with resources from district to district, school to school. We really have to understand the audience we’re serving. And I think the museum can do that and there’s plenty of museums that are doing that and doing great programming. It’s not easy, and I think the challenge is just because the entire educating of young people in this country and other countries too but in this country it’s just a challenge. It’s a resource challenge.
It’s a sort of philosophical challenge, I think. There’s just many challenges. And I guess what I look to do is say ok there’s so many difficult things where can we kind of get in between a space and get in there and just do some good work. We’re just not going to be able to solve it all. Like this museum education program is just not going to be able to solve all these problems. Could we speak to them? Could we be therapeutic? We could be a bunch of different things, but we can’t be all things to all these issues. And so we have to accept that at some point and say but what can we do and who’s willing to do that with us. And we have to be willing to do that with this system that is really complicated. And we have to think about how to do that and the strategies are numerous. And they’re going to be so different depending on what district what school what part of the country. All of those things are different. So I think you have to get to know who it is that you’re serving understand them and can speak their language because the museum language is not the same as the education and school language. And so you just have to be able to find some common ground I think. Maybe make the case for arts integration or arts experiences. Pages is high school, so it’s making the case for why arts in high school, which I don’t even know why I have to make that case. But we have to make that case all the time. High school please they don’t need arts then. It’s like you know it’s so cute when the little kids are doing art but like we’re talking about teenagers having these experiences too. And it really it’s amazing. It’s amazing the transformative experiences these teenagers have and how their teachers are like wow. This was one year when one teacher was like this kid was mute basically did not talk. This was last year maybe and we had an experience it was a performance. And she said he just doesn’t talk. And I don’t know if
there was a condition or if there was a trauma. I don’t know what the issue is. We don’t get to know these kids sometimes that close. Depends. Sometimes they’re writing and I you know I might be working with a student and we’ll connect. Sometimes we’re connecting on social media. You know sometimes we’ll get to know some of the kids. But there’s like 200 kids, so we don’t always get to know them close. But the teachers know them. And the teachers will tell us these experiences and they’ll say oh remember such and such you know and oh yeah yeah yeah, or oh they wrote this or remember they have the red hair or you know whatever right. And I remember the student distinctly. I remember him being quiet in class and not just quiet reflective but quiet and maybe reflective but quiet and just oh man something’s there. Something’s happening there and there’s something there that is I don’t know. That has this person quiet. Never talks in class never talks at all this teacher said. And after this performance she said he was so articulate about this experience about what he understood about what he saw. And I’m like oh my gosh. And so you just don’t know who you’re going to reach; it’s that kind of thing that makes this all worthwhile. And so that’s how. We might think I don’t know I said to a colleague the other day you know no this isn’t brain surgery but it surely is brain work. It’s brain work; it’s heart work. It’s you know it’s that mind, heart, hand, full body whatever. It’s that mind work or that brain work that I think is happening here. And it’s also coupled with that sort of heart work right? And that’s what the museum can offer. So many things the museum can offer that kind of space where if done right it can be very safe. A safe place to open up, a safe place to try on new ideas, a safe place to take risks that you could not take in the classroom. Pages, I told a teacher the other day, the point of
it is to do things that you couldn’t normally do in this traditional classroom setting. To push against those boundaries those restrictions and to say what else.

Me: And how do you feel that writing as being that kind of main medium works within this museum? Because traditionally writing and museums isn’t a partnership.

Wex: That’s true. I laugh all the time. I don’t how I ended up in the museum context but I’m having a good time here and I’ve been here for a long time so it’s working. You know I look at the literary arts as definitely an art form in its own right. I look at writing as being accessible and as being plentiful. And that writing is going to be with us for the rest of our lives. We’re reading, we’re writing things in our lives. As a writer I was already going to museums, going to performances, going to these other art forums to be inspired, to make me think about things, to give me some clear head space. I mean just whatever. And I thought if I’m doing that as a practice could I show students how to do that and open themselves up when they’re feeling stuck or when they’re like all we do is analyze this can I just write some of my own ideas down and refute this thing or challenge this thing or extend this idea. I wanted to show students how to do that. And I know that writing is something that they’re going to be doing for the rest of their lives literally. So it just made sense. I was a writer; it made sense I’d already done some of that work. I thought why not the museum? Why can’t we be writing in the galleries? Which is so fun. The kids love it. They’re getting to know the work. They’re getting to know their own work. They’re making you know. And you know thinking through their ideas being reflective, standing still in front of a piece of art, looking closely, being very intentional. So I think writing and museums is quite a natural relationship. You see some writing
programs across the country. None that are quite like Pages but similar ones. Or ones that are you know doing some things that are similar in some ways very different in others. I like that we’re all really different. We can maybe learn from each other I think. I think writing in the museum is so natural. It feels good. I mean I see students, even undergrads, graduate students in here with their journals. They’re writing I mean they’re doing that as a practice. They’re doing that it’s with intention. I wanted to show younger folks how to do that. Why that might be important.

Me: Have you seen the program go under any sort of evolutions or any sort of changes since you’ve been here since the very conception of the program?

Wex: That’s a good question. To be honest every year we’re changing. You know we never like I am just never like we got this solved. Done. You know. I’m just constantly with every evaluation I do a pre-assessment with the students and a post-assessment with students and then I do a post-assessment with teachers. It’s extensive. I ask lots of questions lots of really detailed questions about their experience through the year. I have a range of more experienced teachers to new teachers, so that gives me a wealth of information. And I pay attention to what students are telling me, what teachers are telling me, what artists. All the feedback. I’m reflective. I’m constantly within sort of a reflective state of being in this program. So constantly paying attention, tweaking things, writing down notes; sometimes I can change things easily sometimes it takes more time to figure out how to do that or problem solve things. It is under constant it’s really like the writing process in a sense. We just never publish anything. It’s like constant revision you know. And even when you do publish right there’s still. You might go oh I could
have changed that. Why did I? You know so I would say that we are living the process that we are sort of teaching. That we are practicing. Like the program actually is this breathing living practice. And so it is just constantly looking to sharpen change something here change something there. And the framework kind of stays the same. I mean we’ve got these three experiences we’ve got these schools. Sometimes there’s this many schools sometimes there’s this many schools. Oftentimes it’s about 200 students you know give or take. You know this year we have over 200, which is an undertaking. Sometimes it’s just slightly under. We sort of play around with the framework, but the framework is in tact for the most part. We tweak our process. How we get there, what we’re thinking about. And we should. We should just never rest I think in thinking ok we’ve got this solved. We’ve got a nice framework to ground us because I think that’s important, but every year I’m looking to and every year I’m looking to say how will this work for you not how this worked for the partners that we were working with last year. So I think that’s important in a program is to be pretty malleable.

Me: How then do you go about marketing the program?

Wex: You know we send out HTMLs, it lives on our website. We’re really transparent. I talked about it in a TED talk. I present at conferences. Well I’m going to present at a conference. I’ll talk about it at conferences. You’ll meet people, you’ll just get the word out. It’s really hand to mouth you know that kind of thing. It’s you know even just person to person. We definitely use technology and get some things out there. And you know through social media networks. It’s about relationships. And you know you meet a teacher that you think might be a good candidate, you tell them about it, you maybe build
a relationship, you sort of watch them, you maybe do some programming with them. You see what their temperament is and you know what their interest level of engagement. You encourage them to apply. Sometimes teachers will just kind of email me and ask me questions. You know it’s an interesting climate in education, so I think a program that requires this kind of commitment you really have to have someone that really wants to do this. And it is an application process. And it should be and needs to be. You really need to know what is it that you want from this program, what is it that you can offer this program, why do you even want to do this. Knowing the commitment. You know it’s a school year. Lots of different points of contact.

Me: It’s interesting because this program is tied directly to classrooms and teachers and schools. So you’re not necessarily getting the kids that say oh I want to go participate in this program.

Wex: Yes. So that’s a really good point. For 10 years I did a drop in writing workshop for teens in the city. Free. Kids chose to be there. And I had a handful of kids that were just my regulars. And then I had kids that were sort of in and out. Which was great; it was fine. And I saw sort of what that’s like. This is more intersecting with a place. I’m going to where they’re already at. Right? Like it’s different. It’s either like when I did the drop in writing shop I was like you know come here and come hang out and you know it’s safe and let’s write what you’re really interested in, let’s develop your writing, let’s do some creative writing, let’s go see some a reading or something. It’s all sorts of different fun things that we did. Yes, they made the choice to be there. This is more like well where are where are kids at. They’re in school for a really long time. And they’re like doing the
same thing over and over again for many years. And so *Pages* I like to think of it as a really beautiful disruption. It’s sort of disruptive. But in an intentional way. In a hopefully positive way. It sort of disrupts the system. It disrupts the monotony. It disrupts some of the angst. It might cause some angst too because you know contemporary art can be very provocative. But it’s a bit of a disruptor. A provocateur. It’s a little bit of that and so I wanted to work within a place where there’s already an audience. Like a set audience. And this audience I was interested in engaging this audience that’s kind of doing this thing and I wanted to say well what if we did it a different way. What if we did this. And so yeah it’s the teachers that apply. I rarely find students that usually in the beginning of the year there’s always skepticism. Of course students are like contemporary art that’s weird. I don’t do art. I’m not an artist. I’m like I don’t want you to be an artist you know you’re not here to be an artist. I’m like but you are in English class aren’t you going to be here anyway. Don’t you just want to see if the way that we can think about writing can we think about writing differently a little bit. Like try this on. And most of the time in the beginning of the year I ask students to just keep an open mind. Will you keep an open mind? And most of them are like yeah let’s try this. Let’s see. They’re just still young and still a little green and still they’re jaded but not so far into that that they can’t just give it a chance. They’re still willing to say ok we’ll try it. We’ll see. And I appreciate that. So it’s a challenge. I think going into the schools and trying to do a program like this is a challenge. Because you can work with a kid like when I teach at Thurber House those kids oftentimes want to be there. They’re choosing to be there, they’re letting mom and dad know that they want to be there. Sometimes
mom and dad are like you know you should be here. But most of the time they’re sort of self-identified. Most of the students that I work with in *Pages* and there is a percentage that are they self-identify as writers or artists that’s great. And sometimes they’re really open to certain things and sometimes they’re not. I mean even being self-identified as artists sometimes they’re just like this is weird. And I’m like it is. And then so when I say that they’re like so you’re acknowledging that too, and I’m like yeah. You know so it’s true that the teachers are often like there’s just got to be something else. And sometimes the teachers apply because they’re looking for something else. They’re looking to shake up stir things up a little bit. We’ve been doing this kind of like this and I just want something else. Or they’re looking for guidance and how to do more arts integration or they’re just curious. Or they don’t they teach English but they don’t think of themselves as writers. Many people who teach English they don’t think of themselves as writers, especially sort of in that K12 environment. And they can write but they don’t maybe think of themselves as writers, so it’s nice to kind of bring in someone who’s done it professionally. Bring in other art we bring in all these other artists. Where kids get to see these other professionals that do creative work come into their environments and hang out and help them with their thinking and their writing and their making and their processing. So yeah I you know I’ve always thought wow you know the students kind of have to go along for the ride. But they’re in school anyway. I kind of look at it as you know let’s shake things up a little bit. You’re here anyway right? I tell them you’re here anyway right. And most of the time students are really cooperative. If you look in the back of this book the *Pages* quotes. These are reflective thoughts from students about I
thought this was going to be weird. And it maybe was a little bit weird but it was cool weird. You know what I mean. Or Pages really changed everything for me. Like I’ve had students say it really just slowed me down a little bit to just think about how amazing life is or just whatever right. Kids are just they’re great. I mean I love this. I ask them to write in metaphors. Like I ask them to be really creative with the way that they reflect on the program. One student ‘Pages is an artistic prison break.’ But that lets you know what they think about school right? I love this, ‘Pages is a window into cultures I would never have had the chance to see otherwise.’ ‘Pages is the stepping stone turning a hobby into a dream.’ ‘Pages felt like really connecting instantly with someone except with art.’ You know they talk about it as a memory, a beautiful memory, as an experience. ‘Pages has taught me to analyze rather than criticize.’ ‘Pages is where people cannot be ridiculed for what they say or believe.’ Like that’s a safety. Like I can say what I believe here and I know it’s ok and I know someone’s going to listen. ‘Pages is a forger’s hammer changing our perspectives and opening our minds to the possibilities of life.’ These are kids. ‘Pages is an outlet and a program where you can explore and educate yourself.’ And it’s just and even the opening mind part, ‘Pages is a beautiful experience for those willing to open their minds.’ And I find that you know, ‘Pages program helped me understand the complex art of writing.’ So I love that. The complex art of writing, yes. Really thinking about writing as this process, really think about writing in this complex way instead of a task to do.

Me: I was wondering if you had any kind of testimonial or firsthand experience with something that really stuck out in your mind as a student’s transformative experience.
Wex: There’s many. When you say that there’s one that comes to mind about a student grappling with the suicide of her aunt. It was her mother’s twin sister. And the piece that we saw implied suicide. And she really struggled with it. And I saw her sort of work through that through her writing, through talking with me, her teacher, her parents. Really working through that in a positive way. And I talk about this in my TED talk. I’m going to tell you an instance that still sticks out in my mind as just I don’t know just a moment that I don’t know at the time was like oh my gosh what do we do. There was a day that everyone was coming for a film and the students on the way to the field trip coming here to the Wexner Center found out that their peer had been killed. On the way they find out the death of their friend, their peer, this student that went to their school. Some of the students being very close to this person. And it just rocking their entire world on the way to this field trip. They get here and I immediately so I didn’t know this happened. I feel like later I saw the story and I don’t know but anyway they get here and no one knew what was going on. But I could instantly tell something the teacher was so pale he was just I don’t know he just something was different. And I knew something was up, but I just couldn’t quite put my finger on it. And I went up to him and I said are you ok is everything ok. And he sort of pulled me off to the side told me what had happened. And I said oh my goodness how can I support you what you know do you need to go back to the school I mean what do you need. And his response was so I just will never forget it. He said no we need to be here. Now as this adult sort of caring for these minors right? Caring for these young people sometimes heck as an adult you don’t know what you need. As a kid how could you know what you need. This friend this peer has lost his life,
and you’re just in shock. And he said you know we’re going to go back to that school and just suffocate in this grief. We need to be here this sort of light. It just felt light and open and disruptive. Like disruptive to maybe this alternative that he imagined going back to school. And I don’t know some people look at distraction and disruption as like these negative things, but I feel like it can also be positive, so I try to play around with those a little bit. But what I noticed we watched the film, had this discussion, and what I noticed and this is what stands out to me as transformative. There’s so many transformative moments but this just this one was just remarkable. Sort of instead of this death and grieving being this I can’t learn, I’m stuck, I’m crying and there was lots of crying and hugging and lots of just standing there in disbelief like all of that was happening during this experience. *Pages* was wrapped up in all of that. And students were still writing and reflecting and thinking through all of that. Students were supporting each other students from other schools were supporting these students. It just was quite I don’t know if it was transformative for them, but it was transformative for me. I mean it was transformative for me and everything that I thought I knew about anything. I don’t that’s so big. But like just about sort of maybe how teenagers care for each other or even sort of where they’re at, they’re capacity for empathy. I mean we just all have it. It just was nice to really see. Like I believe that. I just believe it’s there. And it was amazing to kind of see that. I do feel as though being here and I would have to obviously go back to that year and see sort of what students said but I do remember their writing and them dealing with death and them dealing with grieving and them building that process into their writing into their thinking and into their experience. And not letting it be this obstacle to say I’m now just
going to shut down and just be full of angst and anger and all of those things. You’re going to go through I think a grieving process for sure. But to see them just to see them get embedded and how *Pages* was embedded in this process it just became a part of the grieving process or the process in general. It aligned with like the processes aligned right. There’s grieving, there’s creative thinking, there’s writing, there’s all these things, there’s you know all these things going on and how they just intermingled and collaborated if you will. That’s a weird way to sort of think of grieving but like just these processes sort of just intermingled and were interwoven and so complicated, so complex what I was watching happening. All the emotion and just this heightened state of awareness of life and death and it was all very present. This questioning. That in itself seemed transformative for everyone I think that witnessed it and that experienced it. Of course I think those that were sort of close to it you know impacted them in very different you know everybody impacted differently. But I can imagine that that was quite transformative for the teacher involved. It was very much so for me. It just that stands out in my mind as an amazing moment in being sort of in this informal learning space and being presented with something so tragic, so sad, so immediate and watching students deal with that in this way that was just different. And they were on their own. They didn’t have their parents with them they didn’t you know they’re on a field trip and how the teacher thought being here would be safe for them that says a lot and how the students agreed with that. You know I don’t know if he decided we could go back to school what do you guys want to do. I don’t know how they arrived at the fact that we’re going to stay. But they did. They all stayed; they stayed for the whole time. And I watched this
sort of ebb and flow in the emotion and all that. And it just was quite transformative like
the space. It transformed the space. So I guess I can’t speak for and you know and the
writings definitely reflected in the writings. So yeah I would think that that was
transformative for definitely more than just me. You know I was blown away by that
moment. It was just I was like way I don’t even know what to do. But just be here you
know just be here and talk to students just be natural. You know be do what we’re
supposed to do and we did. But it was just it was remarkable to see the sort of the spirit,
the space, the pacing of the day. Things seemed slow. Yeah so that stands out in my mind
as quite a transformative kind of moment. But there’s lots of times where students come
to me. I have students come out to me. They tell me that they I’ve had students tell me
that they are barely alive. You know at any moment they could snap and not be here. I
hear it all. I have students that have been hurt by an adult or hurt by someone in some
way. There’s trauma. There’s students grappling with race, class, you know having come
from another country and trying to you know sort of cultural nuance. So much. There’s
so much that we engage with in this program and that I get a glimpse of. And like I said
you know we’re in and out. I’m here the whole year, so that’s nice. I get to be constant.
And that’s kind of another role I play I get to be sort of this constant where the artists are
weaving in and out I get to be this constant person hanging out with them all year. I
would like to think that each year folks are having transformative experiences. I’ve seen
teachers just I have teachers say everything I do now is just different after this
experience. I’m like great. Now we’re getting somewhere. And the impact it’s a ripple
effect. You know some folks are like oh it’s only 200 students. I’m like if you have a
teacher. And that’s why I approach the teacher I mean it’s one thing to kind of have students sort of drop in come to your writing workshop that’s great. But it’s another thing if you can have transformative experiences, so it goes both right. If you’re serving the students somehow I just feel you need to also be serving the teachers. Like you just it’s all a part of it. So supporting the students is supporting the teachers is supporting the school and the system and operating within some of that. And if you have if you can transform some of the ideas that the teacher the approach or just even what they’re thinking about the impact becomes year after year after year students you will never meet will be impacted by *Pages* because of the change in the teacher is what I is the philosophy sort of that I operate under and why strategic development is a part of the program as well as student development. I just believe that a school program has to have both I think. That’s at least what I practice in the program. It’s a little bit of both and making sure that while the students kind of come and go the teachers continue to be able to use what they’ve gotten in *Pages* year after year after year for students that will maybe never get because we just won’t get to work with everyone. It’s just it’s how it is and we have to accept that. So we have the so that’s where the transparency comes from. All the stuff on the blog, the social media stuff, the talking to researchers, the evaluators. You know how can we get this out there to say everyone won’t get to do this but here’s what we know and here’s what we can do and here’s what’s possible.