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A Visual Analysis of “Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience” at the Heard Museum

Carol Hepburn

Regent University

E-mail: carohe2@regent.edu

Think back to a time when you were last at your favorite science, history, or art museum. Picture the place in your mind. Remember the details of your visit. Explore the connections you made while you were browsing through rooms, walking in and out of the galleries, stopping here or there to admire specific exhibits, and appreciating the artifacts that were displayed all around you – on the walls, on the ceilings, and on the floors. Perhaps you were alone on a Saturday or Sunday. Perhaps you were with family or friends. Let your mind wander back to a particular memory, a day or days, when you found yourself immersed within an exhibit so powerfully created, so beautifully imagined, and so persuasively stimulating that you felt rushed by the sensory details and overwhelmed by the emotional impact of the visual design.

Now imagine the construction of that same exhibit and consider the way in which the museum curator presented the thematic context and the elements they chose to display – whether with artworks or with artifacts – to represent the political event, the social happening, the historic period, the artist, or the genre. Upon reflection, did you stop to consider the conceptual design and thematic presentation of the “event” or did you simply enjoy the experience?

Audience Perception and Experience

As museum visitors, more times than not, the design and functionality of a display is lost in the “moment of time” – the moment – when we step into an exhibition experience. Our senses are engaged immediately as we contemplate the visual representation or the “big picture” of the design. Rarely do we stop to think of how the exhibit was created or consider the reasons why certain objects and artworks were chosen. We accept the designer’s and curator’s reasons for their construction and inclusion without much thought simply preferring instead to enjoy the “moment.” We accept our role as a passive observer. We are there to observe and not to engage with the exhibit – or so we think.

Although we might believe that our role as audience is passive, visual scholars (those who study visual rhetoric, visual anthropology, and museology) say otherwise. They see the role of audience as a critical component when it comes to understanding how museum exhibitions function as a whole, and they consider how the design elements, the artifacts, and the audience share in a symbiotic-like relationship whereby meaning, value, and worth are established¹. These scholars are interested in understanding the relationship between audience and exhibit, and they consider it significant and vital to constructing meaning. As such, they study audience involvement, affectation, and experience to learn how values and identities are formed².

¹Corrine A. Kratz, "Rhetoric's of Value: Constituting Worth and Meaning through Cultural Display." *Visual Anthropology Review* 27, no. 1 (May 2011): 21-48. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 20, 2014).

² Ibid, 22.

Furthermore, visual scholars, specifically those that critically analyze the way exhibits are designed, seek to comprehend the relationship between audience and exhibit terming it “shared connection.” These scholars believe that this relationship fosters a type of “community” when audience participation integrates with the visuality and the textuality of museum exhibitions.³ Historically, researchers have explored this “shared connection” between museum exhibit, design, and audience through the framework of time and space⁴ or by looking at how exhibits occupy the spatial confines of museum galleries. However, since the 1980s, when museum designers began to enlarge the idea of “experiential space” by using multimodal media and immersion in exhibitions,⁵ research has led scholars to seek to learn how multimodal exhibitions function to create liminal space⁶ – space in between – where ‘framed exhibits’ and the ‘audience viewing the frames’ join together to co-create meaning⁷. Therefore, scholars who study visual rhetoric or the way in which visual texts or artifacts are used persuasively to communicate and construct meaning will also seek to understand the role of audience and how audience participation and interaction with a particular text, in this case a museum exhibition⁸, can shape audience values and identities⁹.

The intended scope of this paper is to analyze how the visual construction of the exhibit, “Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience,” and the use of key design elements such as sound, lighting, photography, and artifacts function to communicate the meaning of the history of the off-reservation Indian Boarding Schools experience. A visual examination of the exhibit, as well as a close reading, will seek to identify how audience perception co-contributes to the overall experience, and how audience values and identities may be shaped through strategic rhetorical design. The “Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience,” was chosen specifically for this project because it offers a visually stunning and intensive immersive audience experience that clearly seeks to communicate persuasively the history of Indian education as experienced by Native American Indian school students.

Visual Rhetoric as a Tool for Exhibit Analysis

Before we can explore the exhibit itself, it is vital to understand how multimodal exhibits use visual rhetoric to communicate meaning. Visual rhetoric combines aspects of both rhetoric and visual study. For the purpose of this paper, rhetoric is defined as the art or ability to use language (prose or verse) for persuasive means. Normally, when we think of rhetoric, we think of formal writing or speaking that uses conventions such as figures of speech and compositional technique convincingly to inform, to influence, and to inspire the audience through logical, emotional, and ethical appeals. Rhetorical discourse studies both the method or the way language is used and the meaning or the context of the symbolic action. Rhetoric, therefore, is concerned with the content and with the form¹⁰.

Thus, since rhetoric is concerned with both the method and the meaning or context of language, visual rhetoric is concerned with how imagery is used to create meaning or construct an argument.¹¹

³ Ibid, 22.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ KerstinSmeds, "On the Meaning of Exhibitions - Exhibition Epistèmes in a Historical Perspective," *Designs For Learning* 5, no. 1/2 (June 2012): 50-72, *Education Source*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 20, 2014).

⁷ Corrine Kratz.

⁸ KerstinSmeds.

⁹ Corrine Kratz, 23.

¹⁰ Burton, Gideon O. "Silva Rhetoricae." Brigham Young University. <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>.

¹¹ Alfano, Christine. "What is Visual Rhetoric." Stanford University. <http://web.stanford.edu/~steener/f03/PWR1/whatisvisrhet.htm>.

Scholars in fields of English, Composition Studies, and Communication are interested in understanding how the symbolic acts of language can communicate persuasively through both verbal and visual contexts, and in understanding how the civic, cultural, and social discourse can be analyzed through rhetorical theory and criticism. Moreover, as scholars study the interconnectedness between the visual and the rhetorical, they begin to posit theoretical and critical assessments as they consider how these individual studies can challenge audience “assumptions and values” and “guide individual choices and collective actions.”¹²

Visual rhetoric occupies the intersection between Rhetorical Studies and Visual Studies and seeks to clarify and to understand how all forms of media (photography, film, posters, cartoons, drawings, memorials, emblems, advertisements, etc.) contribute to audience involvement and perception. Visual rhetoric critics study media and its influence on audience engagement in order to not only understand viewer knowledge, thought, and behavior, but more so to analyze the reflected consideration of visual impression and the resultant creation of community that develops through these symbolic acts of language and vision. Visual Rhetoric presumes that audiences are not passively present when viewing media, but rather they are active and engaged in the co-creation of meaning as they experience the immersive act (whether through images, artifacts, or performances.)¹³

Historical Context of Indian Education

Since the purpose of this study is to explore how the “Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience” functions as a rhetorical device to persuasively communicate meaning and *teach the history of the off-reservation Indian Boarding Schools experience, it is important to gain a proper perspective on the Indian Boarding Schools Movement in the United States and Canada. Richard Zephier states that Americans have been involved in the education of the American Indian for nearly 400 years.*¹⁴ *Throughout the last hundred and fifty years, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has regulated Indian education to the extent that it sought to conform Indian schools (on reservation and off) to standards through curriculum design and reform.*¹⁵ *Zephier makes a strong argument for the creation of off-reservation boarding schools citing poor economic conditions on the reservations, which would prove inhospitable to most educators.*¹⁶

*Moreover, in other institutionalized reports prepared by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Department of Education, we see the advent of boarding schools during a time of great expansion and effort to educate the Indian. Off-reservation boarding schools existed between 1879 and 1990.*¹⁷ *Robert Wesemann and John Chilcott prepared a National Study on American Indian Education whereby they assess the value and importance of the Phoenix Indian School. Wesemann and Chilcott review the history of the Phoenix Indian School and state that in the early years “much stress was placed on education of students for better homes, better food, clothing, etc.,”*¹⁸ *believing that the boarding school environment helped to bring students out of the economic poverty of the Arizonan Indian reservation. The life activities at the Boarding Schools included far more than the school curriculum.*

¹² Christine Alfano.

¹³ Charles A. Hill and Marguerite H. Helmers, *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed October 26, 2014).

¹⁴ Richard Zephier, *American Indian Education: Separation, Amalgamation, or What?*, n.p.: 1973. ERIC, EBSCOhost (accessed November 20, 2014).

¹⁵ Richard Zephier, 5.

¹⁶ Richard Zephier, 7.

¹⁷ Heard Museum, “Remembering Our Indian School Days”

¹⁸ Richard Zephier, 1.

*According to Wesemann and Chilcott, students at the Phoenix Indian School regularly participated in “activities that are related to local Indianlife.”*¹⁹

*Indian education initiatives sought to help the native student assimilate into life in the dominant culture of American society. While many may view this approach of assimilation as negative and disruptive to the social and cultural order of native tribes, many historical documents suggest that for some Native American parents, school choice was of vital concern. Many chose to send their children to boarding schools because they felt that an American education was far superior to that of tribal education. Moreover, many of the social issues facing life on the reservation such as alcoholism prompted many parents to choose boarding school life over that of reservation life.*²⁰

*Yet despite the many positive experiences reported by former students and official reports stating that life in the boarding schools was rewarding for most students, there is still a majority of individuals who feel that the purpose of the boarding school was to civilize the Native American and acculturate him to the American way of life*²¹. *This supports the view that the boarding schools’ main purpose was to “established [and] to ‘civilize’ American Indians into mainstream society”*²² and thus allowing Indian boarding schools to become “a shaping force of the national American Indian identity.”²³ Robbins et al. conducted a study in 2006, which refutes this point. They write, “There is a general knowledge about the United States governments’ deliberate attempts to destroy American Indian cultures”²⁴ that does not accurately reflect the history of the effort. Despite historical reports and personal testimony to the contrary there remains a predominate belief that Indian education was designed to solve the so-called “Indian problem” rather than serve to liberate the Indian from poverty, neglect and tribal abuse²⁵. This belief suggests, “Federally run Indian boarding schools became a key element of the widespread national effort to ‘Americanize’ American Indians beginning in the late 19th century.”²⁶ Nonetheless, the current attitude of how federally funded programs sought to educate Native American children is often of a contested nature²⁷.

Brief Introduction to the Exhibit

The “Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience” is a permanent exhibition located on the second floor of the Heard Museum in Phoenix, AZ. The exhibition was opened in 2002 and has held permanent gallery space at the Heard Museum since that time. It is one of the most popular exhibitions at the museum.²⁸

¹⁹Ralph E. Wesemann and John Chilcott. *Community Background Reports: Three Boarding Schools (Phoenix Indian School, Phoenix, Arizona; Theodore Roosevelt School, Fort Apache, Arizona; Chemawa Indian School, Salem, Oregon). National Study of American Indian Education, Series I, No. 15, Final Report.* n.p.: 1970. ERIC, EBSCOhost (accessed November 20, 2014).

²⁰Robbins, Rockey, et al, "Colonial Instillations in American Indian Boarding School Students," *Educational Foundations* 20, no. 3-4 (June 1, 2006): 69-88. ERIC, EBSCOhost (accessed November 20, 2014).

²¹Clifford Trafzer, Jean A. Keller and Lorene Sisquoc, 2006. *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 20, 2014).

²² Heard Museum, “Remembering Our Indian School Days”

²³ Ibid.

²⁴Rockey Robbins, 77

²⁵Stephen Colmant, Lahoma Schultz, and Rockey Robbins, "Constructing Meaning to the Indian Boarding School Experience." *Journal of American Indian Education* 43, no. 3 (September 2004): 22-40. *Education Source*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 26, 2014).

²⁶ Heard Museum, “Remembering Our Indian School Days”

²⁷Clifford Trafzer, Jean A. Keller and Lorene Sisquoc.

²⁸Betty Murphy, interview by the author, September 16, 2014. Phoenix, AZ.

For a visual guide through the exhibit, please see the Appendix where a 20-minute presentation video will walk the reader through the exhibit from start to finish and provide a first-hand perspective on how the exhibit has been designed for rhetorical effect.

Fine arts curator, Margaret Archuleta, created the “Remembering Our Indian School Days” exhibit. Archuleta is of Tewa heritage and wanted to share the boarding school’s history through an immersive experience because as she states, it is “not just a part of American Indian history,” but rather because “it is an important element of American history.”²⁹ The exhibit is designed to celebrate “the spirit of survival”³⁰ and embraces an open appeal to people from all cultural backgrounds, not just Indian. Archuleta explains that the exhibit “is an important examination of our society both past and present.”^{31,32}

The “Remembering Our Indian School Days” exhibit uses a fully featured multimodal emphasis that incorporates “historic images, music, sound, oral histories, memorabilia, and video to immerse visitors in the story being told by the people who lived it.”³³ The exhibit spans the second floor of the museum and includes the entrance portal, a curved antechamber, and ten rooms that represent different boarding school environments. Each room contains selected memorabilia to enhance the room’s theme from dorm room to choir room to weaving room to schoolroom. Artifacts are encased in glass or are stationed behind railings and are arranged in such a way as to provide a sense of how a typical Indian boarding school might appear to students. Visitors engage with media throughout the exhibit. The design of the exhibit permits freedom to explore each room without feeling trapped by any sequence of events or historic timeline.

Moreover, the “Remembering Our Indian School Days” exhibit offers a hands-on environment whereby visitors to the museum can interact with the exhibit as they listen to first person narratives of former students recalling their experiences at the various schools. There are several areas located within the exhibit where visitors can sit and watch a video or where they participate in demonstrations of Native American school life (for example, they can sit at student desks; touch various crafts, and journal to document their reaction to the boarding school environment.) The use of photography predominates the experience, with textuality functioning as a secondary influence to persuade the visitor of the importance of the historical impact of the boarding school’s movement on Indian education.

Walking through the Exhibit

The Entrance

Visitors arrive to the second-floor gallery through a back staircase. The gallery entrance sits above an interior courtyard and provides an open-air experience where visitors can enjoy the beauty of native Arizonan plants, trees, and where they can appreciate Southwestern architecture. The entrance to the exhibit greets visitors through 3-dimensional life size cut outs of Native American children and teens as they appear in various stages of the boarding school experience (from 1879 to the 1990s). The small entrance is bordered with the large photographs that serve as a “welcome” to visitors, and act as an introduction for the “story board” narrative of the Native American Indian School experience (Fig. 1).

The narrative originates on the reservation and carries the visitor through the various stages of the exhibit from train transport to school induction to dormitory lifestyle and education to final resting place (for some who did not survive the experience of being removed from their native surroundings).

²⁹ Heard Museum, “Remembering Our Indian School Days.”

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Hoerig, Karl A. "Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience." *American Anthropologist*, 2002., 642, *JSTOR Journals*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 26, 2014).

³³ Heard Museum, “Remembering Our Indian School Days”



Fig. 1 – Entrance to the Boarding School Experience This narrative creates a “framing” of the exhibit, similar in the way that a book encapsulates the story with a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end. In addition to the photography on the entrance walls, the visitor is greeted with the sounds of the Native American experience.

Native American recordings are included throughout the exhibit and at the entrance, the voices of Indians chanting as they dance in rhythmic succession fills the air to set the tone and the mood.

The Transition Room (Antechamber)

The double-doors of the exhibit open to an antechamber that is designed specifically to impress upon visitors the transition between reservation life and the boarding school experience. The walls are curved with floor to ceiling photography. The black and white photography includes pictures of family groups, individuals, and children, dressed mostly in Native American clothing. On one side of the curved wall, there is a large cutout of a locomotive train. Images of children in boxcars and standing on platform stations reinforce the theme of transition. This room, which is narrow and long, is shaped in an s-curve that could easily represent a river or other type of channel. The mood in the antechamber is somber. The lighting is dim, and the darkness lends an ominous feel as if something unwelcomed is about to happen. Throughout this space, large text is superimposed strategically over the photographs. There are several quotations from Captain Richard H. Pratt, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1879, where he states with graphic illustration the purpose, the value, and the importance of “civilizing” the Indian.

“Transfer the savage born infant to the surroundings of civilization and he will grow to possess a civilized language and habit” – Captain Richard H. Pratt, 1879³⁴

The Barber Chair

As the visitor moves from the antechamber into the interior of the exhibit, the first artifact they encounter is a green barber chair (Fig. 2) enclosed in a glass case. The photographs that border the walls have now changed from images of children in native clothing to children in 19th century European dress. The music playing overhead has changed from native voices chanting to the sound of a barber’s shears clipping hair. A first-person narrative begins to tell the story of how the first step in civilizing the Indian was to remove their clothing and to cut their hair. Images of children shorn of their long hair predominate this section of the exhibit.

³⁴ Heard Museum, “Remembering Our Indian School Days”

The barber's chair is well lit compared to the rest of the room to give heightened importance to this step in the cultural transition from tribal citizen to American citizen. The text above the chair contains a quote from Asa Daklucie, a Chiracuhua Apache (1886) that reads,



*Fig. 2 - The Barber Chair
The School Rooms*

As the visitor leaves the antechamber, the hallway leads down to a series of small rooms. Each room is designed as a representative example of what Indian children would have seen as they entered into the boarding school environment. These rooms are situated across from one another and they allow the visitor to move freely back and forth depending on their preference for viewing. The open floor plan facilitates large groups as well as small groups and allows the visitor the opportunity to spend time in each room, listening to the music or audio recordings or watching video presentations of interviews with former school members. As in the exterior entrance and interior transition hall, the walls are covered with photography and historical text that tells the story of each phase of the boarding school experience.

The Dorm Room

In the first room on the left, the visitor enters into what appears to be a dorm room. There are twin bunk beds set behind a railing. The photography on the wall contains images of children cleaning rooms, sweeping and scrubbing floors. An oral recording plays continuously as the visitor scans the room, trying to take in the sheer volume of images that cover the walls from floor to ceiling. The recording begins to tell the story of a young girl as she arrives at one of the boarding schools. The first-person narrator tells her own story, sharing her memories of the rules and regulations instituted at the “industrialized” school she attended (industrial schools were styled upon a military structure). Her story begins with her fearful arrival at school, her confusion over the “American way,” and her bewilderment as to the rigid structure of the school curriculum. It ends with her testimony summary of her experience as not completely negative because of the friendships she made with other Indian children.

The Choir Room

The next room the visitor enters is the choir room, a room adorned in a similar manner with photography again spread from floor to ceiling. The first thing the visitor encounters upon entering the room is the sound of teenagers singing choral arrangements. The volume is loud, almost deafening at times, as the visitor listens to the schoolchildren sing classical and traditional music. Choir robes hang in enclosed cases at the front of the room. In this room, in particular, the oral recordings set the tone and create a sense of inclusion as if music is connecting the two cultures together, providing an intermediary of sorts, to smooth the transition from one culture to another.

The Gymnasium

The last room the visitor enters is at the end of the long hallway. It is the gymnasium where sports memorabilia and trophies are encased in wall displays. The purpose of this last room is to highlight the involvement of Native American teens in American sports such as basketball and football. The floor in this section is inlaid with wood and contains the red lines of a basketball court. The visitor to this section is immediately drawn in by the sound of a game playing over the loudspeaker. In fact, the sound of students dribbling balls drifts from the back of the exhibit almost all the way to the middle portion where the Choir and Dorm Rooms are located. The specific memorabilia in this section clearly articulates the importance of Indian games and serves to demonstrate another important connection between two diverse cultures: music and games.

The End

As the visitor prepares to leave the exhibit, the last hallway contains difficult imagery that serves as a remembrance of the harshness of the boarding schools experience. Three large photographs are placed on the walls near the exit. Each one displays a similar theme: death. The images show small graveyards with tiny white headstones³⁵. Many do not have names on them. Those that do contain names simply list the child's name with their date of death. One image in particular stands out. The quote that is superimposed over the photo reads, "Death was the only way you could get home...it had to be a sickness or death before they let you out of there very long."³⁶ The impression the visitor is left with is that death was a common occurrence at the boarding schools and that to the Native American, sickness or death, was a welcome relief from the confines of the school experience.

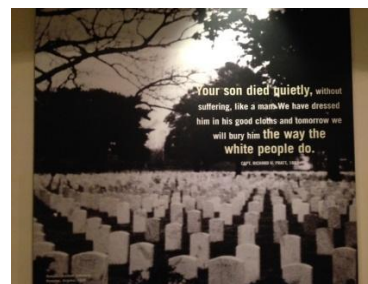


Fig. 3 - Gravestones

Fig. 4 – Close Up Gravestones

Fig. 5 – Cemetery

Analysis of Rhetorical Appeals

The limitations of this paper make it difficult to analyze the “Remembering Our Indian School Days” exhibit in close detail because of the scope and magnitude of the exhibit. The exhibit uses a massive number of photographic images along with audio, video, and selected memorabilia. The curator has used the media impressively and has them displayed to provide rich detail in order to communicate the history and the experience of the schoolchildren living at an off-reservation Indian Boarding School. These elements including the photographs, the sound recordings, and the selected memorabilia deftly incorporate the rhetorical strategies of logos, ethos, and pathos to persuade the visitor and communicate meaning through the staged experience.

³⁵ David H. DeJong, "Unless They Are Kept Alive": Federal Indian Schools and Student Health, 1878-1918." *American Indian Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 256-282. *Humanities International Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 26, 2014).

³⁶ Heard Museum, “Remembering Our Indian School Days”

The Use of Pathos or Emotion

Upon first inspection, the exhibit overwhelms the senses. The sheer volume of photographs, the size, and the placement of the photos impresses the visitor with the magnitude of the project. The photographs were carefully selected for their specific persuasive ability to convey one or more “thematic” elements tied to the overall experience. The emotional pull generated by the sound of the barber sheers, the student narrated recording of having an “American haircut,” and the image of a school worker attempting to communicate to a young girl dressed in native clothing illustrate the difficulty these native children had in overcoming language and cultural barriers. Furthermore, the images of children transformed as they underwent the social changes are illustrated below:



Fig. 6. Chiricahua Apache children upon arrival at Carlisle Indian Industrial School from Fort Marion, Florida. J.N. Choate, photographer, Barry Goldwater Collection #GI-44, Arizona Historical Foundation, University Libraries, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.



Fig. 7. Chiricahua Apache children four months after their arrival at Carlisle Indian Industrial School. J.N. Choate, photographer, Barry Goldwater Collection #GI-44, Arizona Historical Foundation, University Libraries, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.

The purpose of these selected images is to suggest to visitors that the removal of children and teens from the reservation and relocating them to an off-reservation boarding school was torture because it forced enculturation and assimilation in the greater American society. The visitor is repeatedly bombarded by like sentiment that strongly argues that the Indian Boarding Schools movement was designed not to better the Indian, but rather to solve the Indian problem.³⁷

The Use of Logos or Text

The exhibit is not solely dedicated to photographic and audio/visual presentation. The use of logos is strategically placed to convey the importance of the Indian experience. The exhibit uses textuality to frame the experience through narrative. The use of text is seen throughout each room and serves to provide visitors with historic information such as statistics from the Bureau of Indian Affairs or to isolate specific quotations and offset elements that will serve to “educate” the visitor in a particular aspect of the movement. The examples below show two of the ways the exhibit uses text to communicate meaning through display.

³⁷ Heard Museum, “Remembering Our Indian School Days”

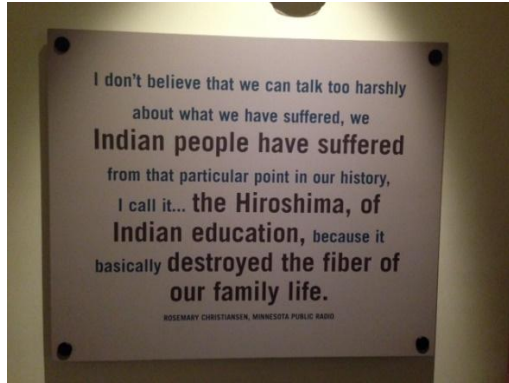


Fig. 8. A sign found near the end of the exhibit bearing the testimony from Rosemary Christiansen, Minnesota Public Radio

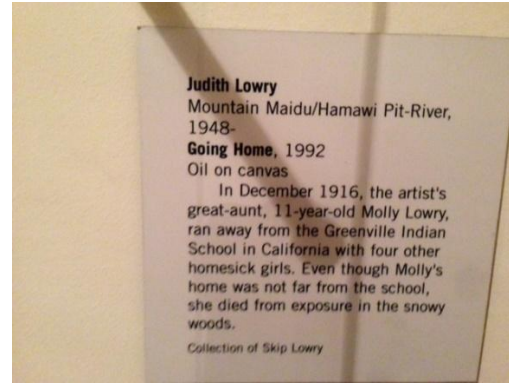


Fig. 9: A typical gallery exhibit sign with detail for visitor to gain information

The Use of Ethos

Ethos or the appeal to ethics is predominate throughout this exhibit. The visitor is questioned rhetorically about the ethics of removing schoolchildren from their homes and placing them in “institutionalized” school settings from the moment they set foot at the entrance of the second-floor gallery. The overall feel of the exhibit lends itself to that of a strongly biased view of Native American history, yet the curator and designers have attempted to present as much factual history as possible within the confines of the space. For example, the following signage provides historical information to help the visitor understand the significance of the Indian School experience. Each storyboard tells part of the overall narrative of the experience from manifest destiny and relocation to captured and civilized to assimilation and Americanized.



Fig. 10

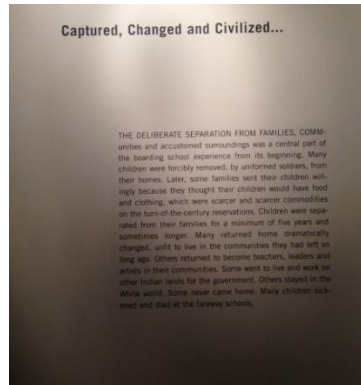


Fig. 11

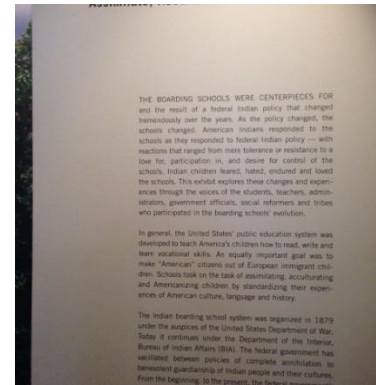


Fig. 12

Clearly, the historical information presents one side of the story only. Although the information contained in each storyboard lends credibility to the exhibit, the choice of text leads the visitor into understanding the Native American experience – hence – communicates meaning as defined by the curator rather than as gleaned from a purely historic evaluative perspective.

Commentary on the Analysis

To evaluate the “Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience” completely, a significant portion of time would be needed to review each artifact included in the exhibit. The scope of this study only lightly touches on how the exhibit is designed to persuade the visitor through multimodal immersion to communicate the meaning of the Indian Boarding Schools experience.

The use of rhetorical strategy is persuasive and presents the argument of Native American enculturation from a stacked one-sided view only. Research scholars who have studied the history of Indian Affairs and the Boarding Schools Movement, while no doubt have concluded that the treatment of Native Americans was at times extremely harsh; find that contrary reports such as the National Study on American Indian Education from 1970 report a very different view on the experience of students at boarding schools.³⁸ Moreover, the Zephier Report of 1973 (Bureau of Indian Affairs) stated that for many Native Americans parents, boarding schools were a first choice for education in order to ensure that native children were educated in the dominate culture.³⁹ While the “Remembering Our Indian School Days” exhibit includes a variety of testimony showing that not all of the Indian schoolchildren reported their experience at an off-reservation school as horrific or terrifying, the majority of the artifacts and the perception presented suggest a strong argument against this more moderate view to Indian education. Research scholarship into student experiences at the Boarding Schools has shown that many former students reported gaining life-long friends through the boarding school experience, and many felt that the institutionalized environment, while strict, did provide a strong emphasis on American work ethic and values, which ultimately helped to shape their own ideals.

Probes for Further Research

One area of further research that would help clarify and enlarge scholarly study would be to integrate audience experience with the emphasis on multimodal design creation. The ideas postulated by Kratz and others that seek to know more about audience participation and the role they play to co-create meaning would serve to help illuminate areas of understanding that could provide links to how community is established between the “spaces” of exhibition design. Audience participation in immersive exhibitions such as the “Remembering Our Indian School Days” is integral to the overall success of the exhibit. Clearly, the design of the exhibit with its strong use of visual rhetoric serves to educate the visitor to one historical view of Indian education. Audience immersion was a central tenet of the design of this exhibit, and the curator and her team of designers created a visual experience to help bring the story of Native American schoolchildren alive. However, questions as to the political persuasion of the exhibit must be asked before any determination can be made as to the efficacy of the exhibit’s instructional value.⁴⁰ Furthermore, audience participation varies depending on the cultural background of the individual visitor. For example, early on in the exhibit’s run, solicitations for interview were requested for visitors who had experienced life in one of the boarding schools. The hope was to attract Native American visitors to the exhibit to help them feel comfortable with sharing their story (or that of a family member) with others. The museum has collected a number of requests for interview, but due to a lack of funding, they are unable to process those requests. On the day that I made my site visit, I noted several visitors walking through the exhibit. For some, clearly the presentation created a tension or caused some discomfort because they exited the exhibit without examining all the artifacts. However, others seemed to feel as immersed in the experience as I did and as a result spent a significant amount of time reading all the textual displays. Therefore, research into audience participation would require study that involved more than a visual examination of the exhibit.

Conclusion

The intended scope of this project was to analyze how the visual construction of the exhibit, “Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience,” used key design elements such as sound, lighting, photography, and artifacts to communicate the meaning of the history of the off-reservation Indian Boarding Schools experience.

³⁸Ralph E. Wesemann and John Chilcott.

³⁹Richard Zephier.

⁴⁰Fredrik Lindstrand and Eva Insulander, "Setting the ground for engagement - multimodal perspectives on exhibition design," *Designs For Learning* 5, no. 1/2 (June 2012): 30-49. *Education Source*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 20, 2014).

Through a close reading of the exhibit, I clearly demonstrated how the exhibit used strategic rhetorical design to help persuade the audience toward the values and identification as presented within the Native American Boarding Schools experience. Although, this analysis was not exhaustive given the time restraints and limitations for study, I demonstrated how the “Remembering Our Indian School Days” clearly communicated persuasively the history of Indian Education as experienced by Native American Indian school students. Suggestions for further research include studies that seek to explore liminal spaces in museum design as well as research into how the role of audience functions to co-create meaning as part of an immersive multimodal experience have been made. Research of this sort could illuminate opportunities to understand multimodal design effect and could help explain how audience perception, values, and identities are shaped.

Appendix

My Site Visit on November 8, 2014

I visited the Heard Museum several times this semester, first to conduct research for the Site Prospectus project, and then later to revisit the “Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience” exhibit to prepare for research for this paper. I recorded my visit on November 8, and I created a video to share with my colleagues so that they could see the exhibit as I was viewing it. The link below will take you to YouTube where you can watch my 20-minute visual presentation of this living history exhibit.

<http://youtu.be/2LeP9Cca0Oc>

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