

Building Nexus: An Investigation Into the Effectiveness and Impact of Teacher-Curator Pedagogy in Visual Arts

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Summary

This study explores the implementation and impact of a visual arts teacher-curator pedagogy, which empowers teachers to assume the role of digital museum curators by creating thematic virtual exhibitions to enhance student learning. In the digital age, free online visual resources and digital tools have equipped teachers with new opportunities to innovate, yet challenges remain in designing technology-enabled curricula, particularly during disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. Against the backdrop of Hong Kong's rapid museum development—including the reopening of the Hong Kong Museum of Art (2019) and the launches of M+ (2021) and the Hong Kong Palace Museum (2022)—this pedagogy seeks to foster cultural literacy and critical thinking through a hybrid of in-person and virtual art education.

The study seeks to achieve four main objectives: exploring how teachers take on dual roles as educators and curators, understanding their processes in creating virtual exhibitions, evaluating the impact of this pedagogy on student learning outcomes, and examining its influence on teachers' curriculum planning and teaching practices. The research investigates the effectiveness of teacher-curator pedagogy in Hong Kong schools, focusing on interdisciplinary integration, resource organization, and technology use. Key questions include:

1. Teachers' experiences, challenges, and evaluations of curatorial practices.
2. The impact of virtual exhibitions on teaching goals and student learning.

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3. Effects on students' learning outcomes through virtual exhibitions.
4. The pedagogy's influence on teachers' use of technology and curriculum planning.

The teacher-curator pedagogy connects various stakeholders in art education through four dimensions: linking the roles of teachers and curators; bridging school-based and museum-based learning; connecting contemporary Hong Kong art with diverse cultures, regions, and eras; and integrating classroom and online teaching.

The study adopted a design-based research (DBR) approach, involving six teachers and 331 students from primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong during the 2021–2022 academic year. The research was conducted in three phases. The first phase focused on training teachers in curatorial pedagogy through workshops that equipped them with the necessary skills to integrate art themes with digital resources, and use the Kunstmatrix platform to create 3D virtual exhibitions. In the second phase, teachers developed two virtual exhibitions; these were integrated into classroom lessons, museum visits, and online activities, and provided students with opportunities for self-directed learning, collaborative tasks, and immersive exploration of curated artworks. The third phase evaluated the pedagogy's impact through teacher interviews, classroom observations, and student questionnaires, yielding valuable insights into its effectiveness.

The findings demonstrated that thematic virtual exhibitions effectively bridged classroom learning with independent exploration, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration among students. The study also demonstrated great enhancements in student learning, including: (1) fostering motivation for self-directed and active learning; (2) enriching the development of meaningful learning contexts; and (3) promoting peer learning and interaction through the use of social media. Most students (76.7%) reported that the virtual exhibitions deepened their understanding of art, while 59.3% noted an improved ability to contextualize artworks. Students strongly preferred 3D virtual environments, multimedia displays, and exhibit descriptions, although hyperlinks and extended learning activities were seen as less effective, due to design restrictions. By engaging in activities such as researching artworks, participating in discussions, and creating art inspired by the exhibitions, students enhanced their observation skills, artistic creativity, and motivation to learn. Additionally, students recognized virtual exhibitions as a flexible and engaging alternative to physical museum visits, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Teachers also experienced obvious benefits from the teacher-curator pedagogy. The approach allowed them to select themes, organize interdisciplinary resources, and design narrative-rich exhibitions that enhanced their teaching practices. However, challenges emerged, including

limited access to advanced technological tools, the additional workload of curatorial tasks, and the need for clearer metrics to assess student learning outcomes. Despite these obstacles, teachers gained confidence in using digital tools and appreciated the flexibility and innovation this pedagogy brought to their classrooms.

To address these challenges, the study recommends targeted solutions. Training workshops can strengthen teachers' digital skills. Collaborative frameworks can reduce individual workloads and promote teamwork. A centralized resource database has the potential to store successful exhibition cases and materials, streamlining resource sharing and preparation. Enhancing virtual platforms—such as improved image quality, interactive features, and cross-device compatibility—can further empower teachers to create engaging and efficient virtual exhibitions. Additionally, implementing learning tracking systems can provide insights into student behavior and outcomes, enabling teachers to refine their strategies and better meet student needs.

This research emphasizes that technology should not serve merely as a tool, but as a catalyst for creativity and innovation in education. By adopting curatorial strategies, teachers can transform learning into an immersive and engaging experience that bridges classroom lessons and museum learning with independent exploration. Thematic virtual exhibitions offer a forward-looking model for integrating digital curating and technology into art education, fostering cultural and digital literacy and creativity in students.

The distinctive value of this study lies in its groundbreaking introduction and precise articulation of the teacher's role as a curator, while further demonstrating how curatorial pedagogy acts as a vital bridge connecting digital technology, digital archives, and arts education. This pedagogical model reimagines the structure and practice of teaching by leveraging technology to address long-standing challenges, such as resource scarcity and the burdensome workloads often faced by educators. In doing so, it unlocks the transformative potential of digital technology in order to drive educational innovation.

By offering a flexible and scalable framework, this proposed pedagogy empowers educators to seamlessly integrate technology into their teaching practices. Over time, the advancement of curatorial pedagogy is poised to transcend the simple fusion of technology and teaching, signaling a profound shift in educational philosophy. This study not only charts a pioneering path for digital arts education, but also establishes a forward-thinking and practical model for the future of education. It serves as an exemplary reference for the ongoing evolution of teaching practices, inspiring innovation and progress across the educational landscape.