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**TO WHAT EXTENT DOES STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN CURATORIAL
PROCESSES INFORM VISUAL LITERACY, OWNERSHIP AND ETHICAL
ENGAGEMENT?**

*A case study of curatorial decision making and rationale among a cohort of art students in a
post-primary classroom*

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BY

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Statement of Authenticity

I hereby declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a diploma or degree in any other college or university.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the question: To what extent does student participation in curatorial processes inform visual literacy, ownership and ethical engagement? The study focuses on curatorial decision making and rationale among a cohort of post-primary art students within a classroom-based unit of learning.

The research was conducted as a small-scale qualitative case study during teaching placement, examining how students engaged with curatorial processes while developing a digital exhibition of their work. Data was collected through guided student discussions, student reflective writing tasks, recorded student presentations and a semi-structured interview with the cooperating teacher, and was analysed using thematic analysis.

The literature review positioned curatorial practice as a pedagogical framework, with particular attention to participation, agency, visual literacy, dialogue and reflection in art education. It identified a gap in research relating to curatorial processes in post-primary classrooms, particularly in relation to student rationale and decision making over time.

The findings indicate that participation in curatorial processes supported the development of curatorial decision making, visual literacy and ownership. Students progressed from initial uncertainty and descriptive responses towards more reflective and reasoned explanations of their decisions. Discussion, reflection and teacher facilitation were central to the development of decision making, while structured prompts and a keyword bank supported students in articulating meaning, enhancing audience awareness and intention.

The study concludes that curatorial processes can provide a valuable framework for learning in post-primary art education when supported through structured discussion, reflection and facilitation. While limited to a specific classroom context, the findings suggest that curatorial practice may support deeper engagement with art making and meaning making, as well as the development of student voice and participation in decision making.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Art education increasingly emphasises student-centred approaches that prioritise active participation, critical thinking and the development of individual voice. Within this context, curatorial practice offers a potential framework through which students can engage more deeply with their work, not only as makers but also as decision makers. Curatorial processes involve selecting, organising and presenting artwork, requiring students to consider meaning, audience and intention. This study explores how participation in such curatorial processes within the classroom may inform visual literacy, ownership and ethical engagement in a post-primary art classroom.

Visual literacy is widely recognised as a key component of art education, encompassing the ability to interpret and construct meaning through visual forms (Eisner, 2002). At the same time, there is increasing emphasis on fostering student ownership and agency, where learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their work and articulate their thinking (Freire, 1970). However, while these aims are central to contemporary art education, there is less clarity around how they can be meaningfully developed within classroom practice. This study considers whether curatorial processes can provide a structured yet flexible approach to supporting these outcomes.

The research is guided by the question: To what extent does student participation in curatorial processes inform visual literacy, ownership and ethical engagement? This is explored through an examination of students' curatorial decision making and rationale within a specific classroom context over a period of weeks. Rather than seeking to prove a direct causal

relationship, the study adopts an exploratory approach, focusing on how students engage with curatorial thinking and how their ideas develop over time.

The study was conducted as a small-scale qualitative case study during teaching placement in a post-primary art classroom in a large co-educational school in North Wicklow. A qualitative approach was selected as it allows for in-depth exploration of student experiences, reasoning and interaction within a real classroom setting (Bryman, 2016). Data was collected through guided student discussions, student reflective writing tasks, recorded student presentations and a semi-structured interview with the cooperating teacher. This combination of methods supported the capture of student thinking across different stages of the learning process, as well as the perspectives of the cooperating teacher, who had over ten years of teaching experience in the school.

The use of thematic analysis enabled patterns to be identified across the data, focusing on how students made, explained and revised curatorial decisions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The findings are organised around key themes, including the development of curatorial decision making, visual literacy and meaning making, and the role of discussion and reflection in supporting learning. These themes provide insight into how students engaged with curatorial processes and how their thinking evolved over time.

This research is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, which recognises that knowledge is constructed through experience and social interaction (Bryman, 2016). In the context of the classroom, this is particularly relevant, as students develop understanding through dialogue, reflection and engagement with learning activities. The study also acknowledges the role of

the researcher as both teacher and researcher, recognising the potential influence of this dual position on the research process.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on classroom practice. While curatorial approaches are often associated with gallery or higher education contexts, this research explores their potential within a post-primary setting. It aims to contribute to ongoing discussions around how art education can support deeper engagement, critical thinking and student voice through structured yet open-ended learning approaches.

The dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature relating to curatorial practice, visual literacy and student-centred learning. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, including the qualitative approach, data collection methods and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, organised into key themes. Chapter 5 discusses these findings in relation to existing literature, before the final chapter concludes the study and reflects on its implications for art education practice.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review examines key writing that connects curatorial practice, art education, student agency and participatory learning. It is framed by the research question, which explores how student participation in curatorial processes may support visual literacy, ownership and ethical engagement in post-primary art classrooms. A literature review situates

a study within existing knowledge, clarifying how it contributes to ongoing debates and identifying areas for further inquiry (Bryman, 2016).

Rather than covering an extensive range of literature on curation and education, this review focuses on selected texts that directly inform the aims and methodology of this study (Thomas, 2008). In contemporary art, curating is increasingly understood as an active, relational process involving participation, dialogue and decision making, where meaning emerges through relationships between people, artworks and contexts (Bishop, 2012). In parallel, art education has shifted towards student centred, process-based approaches that prioritise reflection, decision making and engagement over final outcomes.

This convergence suggests a strong alignment between curatorial thinking and contemporary approaches to teaching and learning in art education (Bishop, 2012; Mörsch, Sachs and Sieber, 2016). Curatorial actions such as selecting, arranging, presenting and reflecting can support students in developing visual language, confidence and intention. Vella (2018) highlights the role of dialogue in curatorial learning, while Dewey (1934) emphasises reflection as central to meaning making through experience.

This study draws on Bishop's *Artificial Hells* and Mörsch et al.'s *Contemporary Curating and Museum Education*, which provide theoretical and educational frameworks for understanding participation, authorship and facilitation in curatorial contexts. While these ideas are well developed in art and museum settings, there is limited research examining how curatorial processes operate within post-primary classrooms. This review therefore identifies a need to explore how students make and articulate curatorial decisions, and how these processes contribute to learning over time (Bryman, 2016; Bishop, 2012; Mörsch et al., 2016).

2.2 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by a conceptual framework that draws on contemporary art theory and educational perspectives on participation, agency and reflective learning. It defines curatorial practice as a process of meaning making through selection, arrangement and interpretation, rather than simply display. Participation is understood as active engagement involving decision making and responsibility, while agency refers to the capacity of students to make, explain and reflect on choices within their learning (Bishop, 2012; Mörsch et al., 2016).

2.3 Participation, Authorship and Agency in Contemporary Art

Participation in contemporary art is understood as an active process in which meaning is produced through interaction rather than passively received. Bishop (2012) describes participatory art as shifting traditional roles of artist, audience and author, positioning participants as contributors to meaning making. This involves negotiation, choice and accountability, where decisions shape both outcomes and interpretation.

Although developed within art contexts, these ideas translate effectively to education. When students curate their own work, they engage in authorship through selecting, organising and presenting, rather than simply producing objects. Agency in this context involves making informed decisions, articulating reasoning and reflecting on how meaning is constructed.

Student agency is also linked to ownership and voice. In classroom settings, this refers to learners having influence over how their work is developed and communicated, recognising

that students are younger and in the early stages of their artistic development. While Bishop's work is not specific to education, it provides a useful lens for understanding how participation can extend beyond engagement towards responsibility and decision making within collaborative environments (Bishop, 2012).

2.4 Decision Making, Ownership and the Role of the Participant

Curatorial practice centres on decision making. Actions such as selecting, sequencing and presenting work shape how meaning is communicated, requiring participants to consider intention, context and audience. Mörsch, Sachs and Sieber (2016) describe curating as a process grounded in dialogue, care and responsibility, positioning participants as active contributors to meaning making rather than organisers of display.

In educational contexts, this emphasis aligns with process-based learning. Dewey (1934) argues that understanding develops through reflection on experience, rather than through outcomes alone. When students are encouraged to explain and reconsider their choices, learning becomes iterative and reflective. This supports the integration of curatorial tasks within assessment for learning, where the focus is placed on reasoning, revision and development over time.

Curatorial participation is also closely linked to ownership. As students make decisions about how their work is selected and presented, they take greater responsibility for how meaning is constructed and communicated. Vella (2018) highlights the role of dialogue in this process, suggesting that collaboration and shared interpretation support deeper engagement with ideas. Similarly, Robins (2005) identifies the educational potential of curating, noting that

engagement with selection and display can support critical thinking and understanding in art and design education.

Together, these perspectives suggest that curatorial processes can support the development of confidence, visual literacy and reflective thinking in post-primary classrooms (Bishop, 2012; Mörsch et al., 2016; Vella, 2018; Robins, 2005).

2.5 Curatorial Practice as a Pedagogical Framework

Curatorial practice can be understood as a pedagogical framework that supports meaning making through selection, arrangement and reflection. In art and museum contexts, curating involves constructing relationships between works, spaces and audiences, where meaning emerges through these interactions (Mörsch et al., 2016).

Applied to education, this shifts presentation from a final stage to an integral part of learning. Curatorial actions such as grouping, sequencing and contextualising require students to consider intention and interpretation, supporting dialogue and reflection (Vella, 2018).

This approach aligns with constructivist perspectives, where learning develops through active engagement and reflection. Dewey (1934) describes learning as arising from interaction followed by reflection, a process supported by curatorial tasks that require students to evaluate and explain their work.

Within the classroom, the educator facilitates this process by creating structures that support student choice and reflection. Mörsch et al. (2016) emphasise that educational curating involves guidance rather than control, positioning the teacher as a facilitator of dialogue.

Curatorial practice therefore connects making and reflecting, supporting visual literacy and reasoning. It positions learning as relational and ongoing, providing a strong framework for integrating assessment for learning within art education (Dewey, 1934; Mörsch et al., 2016; Vella, 2018).

2.6 Curatorial Decision Making and Visual Literacy

Visual literacy involves interpreting, analysing and communicating meaning through visual forms. Curatorial decision making contributes to this by requiring students to consider how work is presented and understood. Choices relating to placement, sequencing and grouping shape how meaning is constructed and interpreted (Bishop, 2012).

Through curatorial tasks, students move beyond individual artworks to consider relationships between works. Vella (2018) highlights how this relational thinking supports comparison, interpretation and articulation of visual ideas. Explaining curatorial choices requires students to use visual language and justify reasoning, which in this study took place through guided classroom discussion, peer and whole class evaluation, and written reflection in students' sketchbooks.

Curatorial processes also introduce audience awareness. Bishop (2012) emphasises that meaning is shaped through the encounter between work and viewer. In classrooms, this encourages students to reflect on how their work may be interpreted, strengthening clarity and intention.

Mörsch et al. (2016) argue that these processes are most effective when supported through dialogue, allowing students to explain, refine and reconsider decisions. This supports visual literacy as an active, reflective skill developed over time.

Embedding curatorial decision making within classroom practice can support students in interpreting, communicating and constructing meaning visually, reinforcing its relevance to post-primary art education (Bishop, 2012; Mörsch et al., 2016; Vella, 2018).

2.7 The Role of the Educator in Supporting Curatorial Thinking

Within curatorial learning, the educator's role shifts from directing outcomes to facilitating decision making and reflection. Teachers create conditions for students to explore, explain and revise ideas, aligning with participatory approaches to learning (Mörsch et al., 2016).

Rather than providing answers, educators support learning through questioning and dialogue. This encourages students to articulate reasoning and consider alternative perspectives. Dewey (1934) highlights the importance of reflection within learning, suggesting that understanding develops through guided consideration of experience.

Bishop (2012) also emphasises responsibility within participatory processes, where individuals must account for their decisions. In classrooms, this involves guiding students towards thoughtful engagement with their choices.

Vella (2018) further supports dialogic approaches, where discussion and collaboration enable students to refine understanding. Through facilitation, educators support the development of confidence, ownership and visual literacy, positioning curation as an integral part of learning.

2.8 Curatorial Learning and Assessment for Learning

Curatorial processes align closely with assessment for learning, as they make student thinking visible throughout the learning process. Reflection and dialogue enable students to explain, revise and develop their ideas, supporting ongoing learning (Dewey, 1934).

Dewey's concept of reflective thinking highlights how learning develops through consideration of experience. Curatorial tasks provide structured opportunities for this reflection, requiring students to articulate decisions and evaluate outcomes.

Dialogue further supports this process. Vella (2018) emphasises the role of discussion in deepening understanding, allowing students to engage with multiple perspectives. Feedback in this context is often delivered through questioning rather than correction, encouraging further reflection (Bishop, 2012).

Mörsch et al. (2016) highlight the importance of reflective pauses within curatorial processes, aligning closely with formative assessment practices. These moments allow teachers to assess understanding while supporting student development.

Curatorial tasks therefore function as effective assessment for learning strategies, supporting reflection, dialogue and the development of visual literacy in post-primary classrooms.

2.9 Gaps and Limitations in the Literature

While curatorial and participatory practices are well established in contemporary art and museum education, there is limited research examining their application within post-primary classrooms. Much of the literature focuses on galleries, museums or higher education contexts, which differ significantly from school environments (Bishop, 2012; O'Neill, 2012; Mörsch et al., 2016).

In these contexts, curating is often discussed in relation to audience engagement and public interpretation (O'Neill and Wilson, 2010). However, less attention is given to how these practices function within structured classroom settings shaped by curriculum and time constraints.

While reflection is widely recognised in art education, it is often treated as occurring after making rather than during the process (Dewey, 1934), with limited research examining how students articulate curatorial reasoning as it develops over time. This highlights a gap in understanding how curatorial decision making operates within everyday classroom practice in relation to student voice, reasoning and the timing of decisions.

2.10 Conclusion Positioning the Current Study

This literature review has established that curatorial practice is an active, participatory process involving decision making, reflection and responsibility (Bishop, 2012; Mörsch et al., 2016; Vella, 2018; Dewey, 1934). However there is limited research exploring how these

processes function within post-primary classrooms in relation to student rationale and development over time.

This study addresses this gap by examining how students engage in curatorial decision making within a classroom context, focusing on how they select, present and explain their work. In doing so, it positions curatorial practice as a form of assessment for learning that supports visual literacy, ownership and ethical engagement in art education.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to investigate how student participation in curatorial processes affects visual literacy, ownership and ethical engagement within a post-primary art classroom. The study was conducted as a small-scale qualitative research project during teaching placement and focuses on how students make, explain and revise curatorial decisions over time within the classroom.

The chapter outlines the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach underpinning the research, followed by the classroom-based case study design, research context and sample. Data collection methods and thematic analysis are then presented, alongside ethical considerations, issues of rigour and limitations, and a rationale for the methodological choices made.

3.2 Research Paradigm: Interpretivist

This study is situated within an interpretivist research paradigm, which focuses on understanding how individuals make meaning from their experiences. Interpretivism recognises that knowledge is shaped by social interaction and context, rather than being fixed or objective. In an educational setting, this is relevant as students construct understanding through discussion and engagement with learning activities (Bryman, 2016).

The research explores how students participate in curatorial processes and how they explain and develop their decisions over time. This aligns with an interpretivist approach, as it prioritises students' perspectives and focuses on their reasoning within the classroom (Bryman, 2016).

3.3 Research Methodology: Qualitative Approach

This small scale study adopts a qualitative research methodology to examine how students engage in curatorial decision making within the art classroom. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding experiences, processes and meaning, making it appropriate for exploring how students develop, explain and revise their ideas over time (Bryman, 2016).

This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of student reasoning and decision making, which could not be captured through quantitative methods (Bryman, 2016).

3.4 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study research design, focusing on a specific post-primary art classroom during a unit of learning centred on curatorial practice. A case study approach allows for in-depth exploration of student experiences, decision making and interaction within a real educational context (Bryman, 2016).

The design supports close examination of how curatorial processes operate in practice, with attention to how students make, explain and revise decisions over time. This approach is appropriate as the research seeks to understand process, meaning and development within a particular setting, rather than produce generalisable findings.

3.5 Research Context and Sample

The research was conducted during teaching placement in a post-primary school setting, within a fifth year art class over a period of five weeks. The class consisted of eleven students. The students were engaged in a unit of learning in which they developed a digital exhibition of their own work using Metasteps. Within this unit, students were required to make curatorial decisions, including selecting artworks, organising and arranging work, and developing a rationale for their exhibition. The unit of learning was aligned with the Leaving Certificate Art specification, particularly the strands of Research, Create and Respond (NCCA, 2019).

The sample was selected using a non-probability purposive sampling strategy, as the group was chosen based on accessibility during placement and its relevance to the research focus.

While the findings are specific to this context, the study aims to provide insight into how curatorial decision making can be supported within art education practice (Bryman, 2016).

3.6 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher in this study was the classroom teacher and held a dual role as both teacher and researcher. This position provided direct access to student learning and enabled close observation of how curatorial decision making developed through discussion, reflection and classroom activity. As an insider researcher, the researcher had established relationships with the students and cooperating teacher, which supported familiarity with the classroom context but also introduced the potential for bias.

This dual role required careful consideration. Balancing teaching and research presented challenges, as the researcher was actively guiding learning while also collecting data. It is acknowledged that this position may have influenced how students responded or articulated their ideas. To address this, a facilitative approach was adopted during discussion, using open-ended questioning and allowing students to lead responses where possible, rather than directing or evaluating answers.

Reflexivity was an important part of the research process. Reflective lesson notes from the Unit of Learning were used to consider how teaching decisions, questioning strategies and classroom interactions may have shaped the data collected. This supported ongoing awareness of the researcher's role in the construction of knowledge within the classroom. The aim was not to remove subjectivity, but to acknowledge its presence and account for its influence, ensuring that student voice remained central to the study (Bryman, 2016).

3.7 Data Collection Methods

Data was collected over the duration of the five-week unit of learning using a range of qualitative methods. Student responses were documented during structured classroom activities, including guided discussion, reflection tasks and final presentations. Reflective lesson notes from the unit of learning were also used to record observations of student engagement and decision making.

Semi-structured student discussions were conducted at key stages of the unit of learning, including a mid-unit guided curatorial discussion and a final tutorialised discussion during student presentations. These discussions were audio recorded and took place during class time. In addition, ongoing formative assessment occurred through peer and whole-class evaluation at the end of lessons. These approaches provided insight into how students explained and developed their curatorial ideas over time. Student reflective writing tasks, completed regularly in sketchbooks and through structured prompts, offered individual perspectives on their decision making process.

A semi-structured interview was also conducted with the cooperating teacher at the end of the unit of learning as a summative element of the research. This was audio recorded and later transcribed. The purpose of including the teacher perspective was to provide additional context on classroom practice and teacher facilitation, support interpretation of student learning, and reflect on how curatorial processes are currently used in art education. This also contributed to identifying areas for further development in supporting visual literacy, participation in decision making and curatorial thinking, while helping to balance potential researcher bias.

The discussion prompts and reflection questions were designed to support curatorial thinking, including decision making, visual literacy and audience awareness. A full version of these materials is included in the appendix (Bryman, 2016).

3.8 Data Analysis

Data collected from student discussion, written reflection, recorded presentations and the cooperating teacher interview was analysed using thematic analysis, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The data was reviewed, coded and grouped into themes relating to decision making, student rationale, visual literacy and changes in thinking over time. An example of the coding process is included in the appendix to demonstrate how themes were identified from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Ahmed et al., 2025).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained in accordance with programme requirements.

Participants were informed about the research and gave informed consent prior to participation. Students were informed that discussion recordings were used for research purposes. Participation was voluntary, and both students and the cooperating teacher were informed that they could choose not to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

All data was anonymised to protect participant identity, and no identifying information is included in the final dissertation. Data was stored securely and used solely for the purposes of this research. Care was taken to ensure that participation in the study did not impact students' assessment or classroom experience. Copies of the Plain Language Statement and Informed Consent Form are included in the appendix.

3.10 Rigour and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is used to assess the quality and credibility of the study. This research draws on the framework proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility was supported through the use of multiple data sources, including student discussion, reflective writing and documented classroom responses. These were collected at different stages of the unit of learning, allowing for triangulation and providing a more comprehensive understanding of student decision making and development over time.

Transferability was addressed through clear description of the school context, class group and structure of the unit of learning, enabling the reader to consider how the findings may apply to similar post-primary educational settings.

Dependability was supported by maintaining a consistent and transparent research process, including clear documentation of data collection methods, structured prompts and discussion formats, and the use of thematic analysis.

Confirmability was addressed through reflexivity and the use of student responses as evidence, ensuring that findings were grounded in the data rather than researcher assumptions. The inclusion of multiple data sources, including the perspective of the cooperating teacher, further supported the interpretation of findings within the classroom context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

3.11 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its small sample size and focus on a single classroom context. As a result, findings are not intended to be generalisable to a wider population, but rather to provide insight into a specific teaching and learning environment.

The dual role of the researcher as teacher may also have influenced student responses, despite efforts to maintain a facilitative and non-directive approach. The study was conducted over a short timeframe within the school calendar, which limited the depth of data that could be collected and restricted the extent to which long term development of student decision making could be observed.

3.12 Rationale for Methodological Choices

The methodological approach adopted in this study was selected to align closely with the research question, which focuses on how students participate in and explain curatorial decision making. A qualitative approach was appropriate as it allowed for in-depth exploration of student reasoning, discussion and reflection within a classroom setting.

The inclusion of tutorialised discussion and reflection tasks, led by the researcher, provided structured opportunities for students to articulate their thinking and develop their curatorial reasoning over time. While these discussions were guided, students were encouraged to lead responses and contribute their own ideas. The methodology prioritised student voice and supported analysis of how curatorial thinking developed over time.

The perspective of the cooperating teacher, gathered through a semi-structured interview, provided additional contextual insight into classroom practice and supported reflection on how curatorial approaches are currently used within art education.

3.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the research methodology, including the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative approach and classroom-based case study design. Data collection methods, analysis, ethical considerations and limitations have been addressed. The following chapter presents the findings.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this small-scale classroom-based case study, examining how students participated in curatorial processes and how their decision making developed over the course of the unit of learning. The findings are based on qualitative data collected from eleven students through guided student discussions using structured prompts linked to

the research questions, student reflective writing tasks, recordings of final presentations and a semi-structured interview with the cooperating teacher, with selected responses used for direct quotation to illustrate recurring patterns across the group.

The data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following familiarisation with the data, recurring ideas across discussion, reflection and presentation were identified and coded. These codes were grouped into broader categories, which developed into key themes based on consistent patterns across multiple student responses.

The main themes identified are: the development of curatorial decision making, visual literacy and meaning making, and the role of discussion and reflection in supporting learning.

The findings are presented descriptively, focusing on what students said, did and produced during the unit of learning. Interpretation of these findings in relation to existing literature is addressed in the following chapter.

4.2 Initial Ideas and Uncertainty

The unit of learning commenced on the 19th of January 2026 and was delivered over five weeks by the researcher, consisting of three one hour classes per week. During the initial stages, students demonstrated early curatorial ideas in relation to their artwork and exhibition themes, but many were uncertain about how to define or develop these ideas. Responses collected during the first week through guided discussion activities indicated varying levels

of clarity. Some students articulated clear starting points, while others expressed difficulty in defining their direction.

For example, Student A stated, “I want to do nostalgia... like going back to childhood and remembering what it was like”, while Student B noted, “I am still deciding... I do not know what kind of vibe I want yet ”. These responses suggest that early decision making was tentative and open-ended, likely influenced by limited prior knowledge of curatorial processes and a lack of confidence in articulating ideas.

Uncertainty was also evident in selecting and organising artwork. One student described this as “kind of hard to decide”, indicating that early curatorial thinking involved ongoing questioning rather than fixed decisions.

This stage can be understood as an early phase within a broader developmental process, characterised by exploration, personal interest and uncertainty in how to proceed with both the curatorial process and the development of their work.

4.3 Refining and Changing Decisions Over Time

As the unit progressed, students began to refine their ideas and make more considered curatorial decisions. Through discussion, questioning and student reflective writing tasks, students developed greater clarity in how their work connected to their chosen themes, while engagement with the process became more sustained.

Students increasingly justified their decisions, often linking their choices to personal experiences or intended meaning. Decision making was iterative, with students adapting and revising ideas over time, as one student explained, “I kept changing the order”. This highlights how students refined their work through testing and reconsideration.

More than half of the group began to consider audience experience. Some described how their exhibitions might evoke memory or emotion, while others considered how lighting and atmosphere could influence interpretation. This reflects an increased awareness of the complexity involved in presentation and display.

Overall, decision making developed from tentative beginnings towards more confident, reflective and intentional curatorial choices. This progression suggests that curatorial decision making is a durational and iterative process, shaped by task complexity and supported through structured opportunities for discussion and reflection within the group setting.

4.4 Visual Literacy and Meaning Making

Students demonstrated a developing ability to communicate ideas visually and interpret meaning through their curatorial decisions. While initial responses were often descriptive, students increasingly engaged with how visual elements could convey ideas, emotion and narrative, as one student explained, “I do not want it dark and scary. I actually want it to feel calm”.

For example, one student described their exhibition as exploring childhood memory, explaining how images were arranged to be viewed through “windows” to reflect how memories are fragmented over time. This indicates an emerging awareness of how visual elements contribute to meaning and audience interpretation.

During the tutorialised discussion, students articulated clearer intentions behind their work. One student described their exhibition as exploring “the fragility of life”, while another focused on gender equality, aiming to “raise awareness about assumptions”. These responses demonstrate an understanding of how visual choices, including imagery, atmosphere and subject matter, can communicate meaning and engage with broader social ideas.

Students also considered how their work might be interpreted by different audiences, reflecting a shift from making artwork to constructing meaning. The use of a keyword bank supported this development by providing accessible language to describe and explain ideas.

By the final stages of the unit, students were able to explain how visual elements such as imagery, colour, composition and display contributed to the overall message of their exhibition. This indicates that visual literacy developed alongside curatorial decision making through structured discussion, reflection and facilitation.

4.5 Role of Discussion and Reflection in Supporting Learning

Discussion and reflection functioned as key learning strategies in supporting student learning throughout the curatorial process. These approaches created structured opportunities for

students to articulate ideas, respond to feedback and refine decisions over time, often working in tandem rather than as separate stages of learning.

During the tutorialised discussion, guided questioning by the researcher supported the development of curatorial reasoning, as students moved from brief responses towards more detailed explanations. Discussion also fostered a collaborative environment, where students considered alternative perspectives and built on each other's ideas, with one student noting that "talking about it out loud" helped to clarify their thinking.

Student reflective writing tasks enabled students to consolidate their thinking, describe changes in their work and identify areas for further development. Decisions described as taking "the longest" often related to selecting and organising artwork or aligning work with a clear theme, indicating that more complex aspects of the process required extended consideration.

Students also demonstrated increasing confidence in evaluating their own work, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Teacher facilitation played an important role, with open-ended questioning and structured prompts supporting students without directing outcomes.

Taken together, discussion and reflection supported the development of student voice, enabling students to articulate their thinking more clearly and take greater ownership of their curatorial decisions.

4.6 Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that student participation in curatorial processes supported the development of decision making, visual literacy and ownership within the art classroom. Students progressed from descriptive responses towards more reflective and reasoned explanations of their curatorial decisions, as evidenced through discussion, student reflective writing tasks and final presentations.

Curatorial decision making developed as a durational and iterative process, shaped by task complexity and supported through structured opportunities for discussion and reflection. Students became more confident in selecting, organising and justifying their work, demonstrating increased awareness of audience, meaning and intention.

Visual literacy was strengthened as students developed the ability to communicate ideas through visual elements and interpret meaning within their work. The use of a keyword bank supported this process by providing accessible language for articulating ideas.

Discussion and reflection played a central role in supporting learning, enabling students to refine their thinking, respond to feedback and develop ownership of their work. The findings suggest that curatorial processes can support meaningful engagement with art practice when students are actively involved in decision making and supported through structured dialogue and reflection.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to existing literature, focusing on how student participation in curatorial processes may inform visual literacy, ownership and ethical engagement within a post-primary art classroom. The discussion is structured around the key themes identified in the findings: the development of curatorial decision making, visual literacy and meaning making, the role of discussion and reflection in supporting learning, and student ownership, with further analysis of these themes supported by key concepts from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

As this study is based on a small-scale classroom case study, the discussion does not seek to make generalised claims, but rather to explore how these processes operated within this specific context. The findings are considered in relation to existing research in art education and qualitative pedagogy, while also acknowledging alternative perspectives and limitations.

5.2 Curatorial Decision Making as a Developmental Process

The findings suggest that curatorial decision making developed over time, moving from initial uncertainty towards more confident and intentional choices made by students in the classroom. This supports the idea that curatorial practice can function as a process-based learning strategy, rather than a fixed outcome.

This aligns with Vella (2018), who describes curating as a dialogic and iterative process in which meaning emerges through engagement, questioning and revision. Similarly, Dewey (1934) emphasises that learning develops through experience and reflection, suggesting that understanding is shaped gradually through interaction and reconsideration rather than immediate resolution.

In this study, students refined their ideas through discussion and reflection rather than arriving at immediate decisions. This supports the view that decision making in art education is durational and shaped by task complexity and opportunities for revision. However, it is important to acknowledge that this development may also be influenced by the structured nature of the unit, and may not occur in less supported environments.

5.3 Visual Literacy and Meaning Making

The findings indicate that students developed an increased ability to communicate ideas visually and interpret meaning through their work. This progression from descriptive responses towards more intentional use of visual elements reflects the development of visual literacy.

This aligns with Elliot Eisner (2002), who argues that visual literacy involves the ability to interpret and construct meaning through visual forms. As students began to consider elements such as imagery, composition and atmosphere, they demonstrated an awareness of how meaning can be shaped through visual decisions, such as the selection and arrangement of

artworks, use of colour, consideration of lighting and spatial placement, and the inclusion of curatorial text to support audience understanding.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that visual literacy was closely linked to curatorial decision making, rather than developing in isolation. This supports the idea that learning in art education is often integrated and process-based. However, it is also possible that students' increased ability to articulate meaning was influenced by the structured use of language supports, such as the keyword bank, rather than solely by engagement with curatorial practice.

5.4 Role of Discussion and Reflection in Supporting Learning

Discussion and reflection were identified as key learning strategies that supported the development of student thinking. Through guided questioning and structured reflection, students were able to articulate, refine and evaluate their ideas.

This aligns with Dewey (1934), who emphasises the role of reflection in learning through experience. The collaborative nature of the tutorialised discussion allowed students to build on each other's ideas and consider alternative perspectives, supporting the development of understanding through dialogue.

In this study, structured prompts and questioning acted as scaffolding, enabling students to move from initial uncertainty towards more developed reasoning. This reflects Vella (2018), who highlights the importance of dialogue and guided discussion in supporting learning and meaning making.

However, it is important to consider that these outcomes were supported by a highly structured environment. Without this level of facilitation, which was largely teacher-led through guided questioning and structured prompts, students may not have engaged in the same depth of reflection or discussion.

5.5 Ownership and Student Voice

The findings suggest that student participation in curatorial processes supported the development of ownership and student voice. As students were given responsibility for selecting, organising and presenting their work, they demonstrated increased confidence in explaining and justifying their decisions to peers and the teacher within the classroom context.

This aligns with Freire (1970), who emphasises the importance of student agency and dialogue in meaningful learning. Through active participation and decision making, students are positioned as contributors to knowledge rather than passive recipients.

In this study, ownership appeared to develop alongside confidence and understanding. However, it is important to recognise that not all students responded in the same way. Some students, particularly those with less prior experience of art at Junior Cycle level or who had not previously studied the subject before entering Senior Cycle, required more guidance and support, suggesting that ownership is not solely a result of autonomy, but also depends on appropriate scaffolding.

5.6 Limitations and Alternative Perspectives

While the findings suggest that curatorial processes can support learning, it is important to consider alternative perspectives. The study was conducted within a single classroom over a short timeframe, which limits the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts.

In addition, the structured nature of the unit may have played a significant role in supporting student development. It is possible that the observed outcomes were influenced as much by teaching strategies, such as guided questioning and reflection, as by the curatorial process itself. This suggests that the effectiveness of curatorial approaches may be closely linked to how they are facilitated within the classroom, rather than the process alone.

Furthermore, the dual role of the researcher as teacher may have influenced student responses. Although efforts were made to adopt a facilitative approach, the presence of the researcher may have shaped how students articulated their ideas.

Taken together, these factors indicate that while the findings are meaningful within this specific context, they should be interpreted with caution. At the same time, they raise broader questions about current art education practice. If curatorial processes can support visual literacy, ownership and student voice, it is worth considering why such approaches are not more consistently embedded within classroom teaching. This points towards a potential gap between contemporary curatorial practices and what is prioritised within post-primary art education, and invites further consideration of how and why such approaches have been slow to emerge within everyday classroom practice.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the findings in relation to existing literature, exploring how student participation in curatorial processes may inform visual literacy, ownership and ethical engagement within a post-primary art classroom. The discussion showed that curatorial decision making developed as an iterative process, supported by structured opportunities for discussion, reflection and facilitation. Visual literacy emerged alongside this process, as students became more able to communicate and interpret meaning through visual choices.

Overall, the discussion suggests that curatorial processes can provide a meaningful framework for learning in art education when supported through guided and reflective practice, highlighting a clear role for teacher facilitation in supporting student engagement and decision making.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This study set out to explore the extent to which student participation in curatorial processes informs visual literacy, ownership and ethical engagement within a post-primary art classroom. Through a small-scale qualitative case study, the research examined how students engaged in curatorial decision making and how their thinking developed over the course of a structured unit of learning.

The findings indicate that participation in curatorial processes supported student learning in several key ways. Students demonstrated progression in curatorial decision making, moving

from initial uncertainty towards more confident and intentional choices. This development occurred gradually, suggesting that curatorial decision making is a durational and iterative process shaped by task complexity and supported through discussion and reflection.

Visual literacy also developed alongside this process, as students demonstrated an increased ability to communicate ideas through visual elements and interpret meaning within their work. Discussion and reflection supported this development, with guided questioning, structured prompts and student reflective writing tasks creating opportunities for students to articulate their thinking and refine their ideas.

Student participation in curatorial processes also supported the development of ownership and student voice. As students were given responsibility for selecting, organising and presenting their work, they demonstrated increased confidence in explaining and justifying their decisions. Curatorial approaches can support meaningful engagement with art practice when students are actively involved in decision making.

However, the study is limited by its small-scale and specific context. The research was conducted within a single classroom over a short timeframe, and the structured nature of the unit may have influenced the outcomes observed. The dual role of the researcher as teacher also presents the potential for bias. As such, the findings should be understood within the context of this particular study and are not intended to be generalisable.

Overall, the study suggests that curatorial processes can provide a valuable framework for learning in post-primary art education. When supported through structured discussion, reflection and teacher facilitation, these processes may inform the development of visual

literacy, ownership and ethical engagement. This highlights the potential of curatorial practice as a pedagogical approach that enables students to engage more deeply with their work as both makers and decision makers. Further research could explore how curatorial approaches might be embedded more consistently within art education practice and curriculum, particularly through the development of structured teaching resources and over longer periods of learning.

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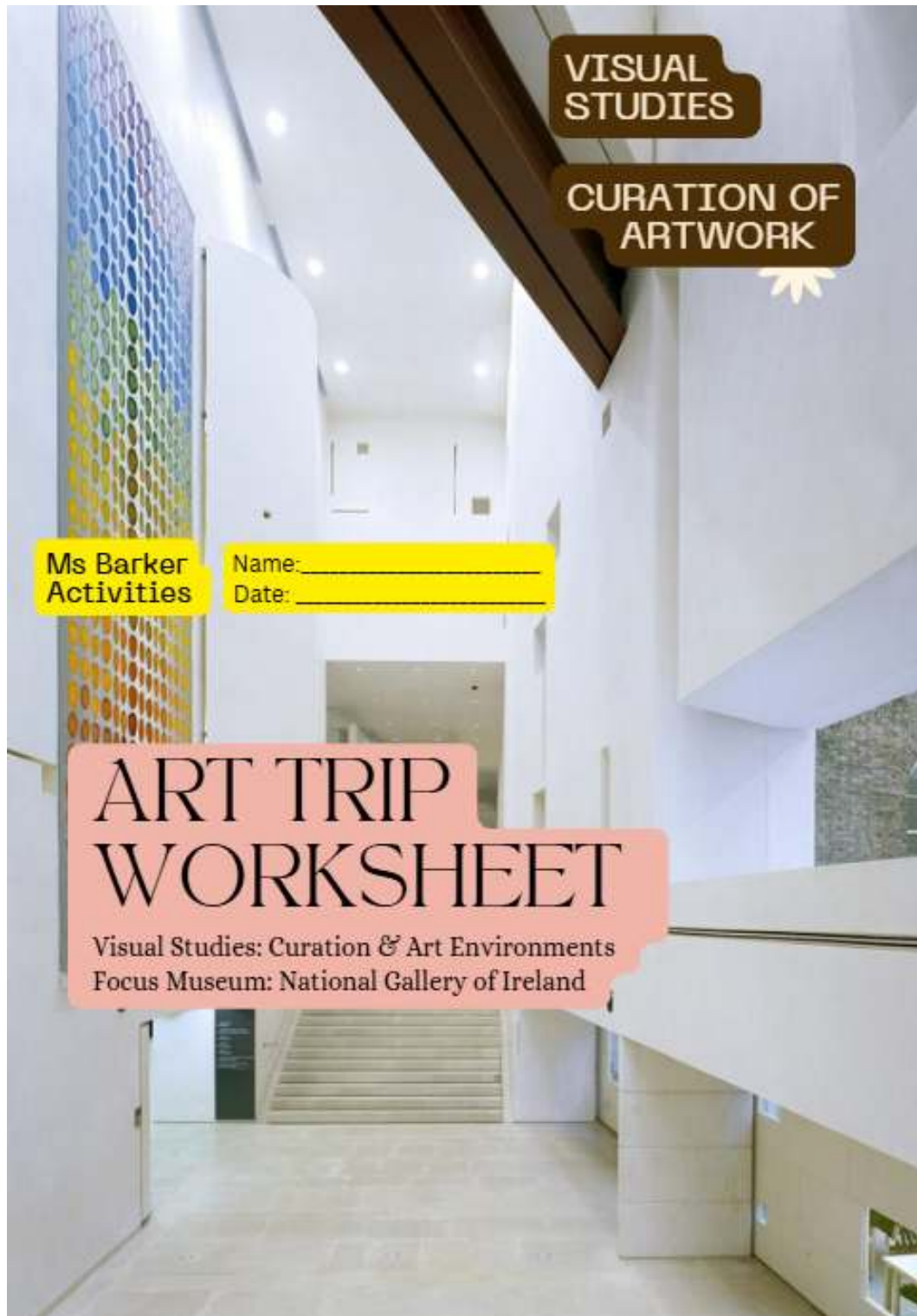
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Appendices

Appendix A: Art Trip Worksheet



Ms Barker
Activities

Name: _____
Date: _____

Focus Museum: National Gallery of Ireland

Key Words:

Curation, display, white cube, lighting, accessibility, layout, flow, audience, environment, visitor experience

Section 1: Observing the Gallery Environment (Tick ✓) Tick all that you can clearly see in the National Gallery.

Space & Display

- White or neutral walls
- Artworks spaced apart
- Clear pathways through the gallery
- Quiet atmosphere
- Seating available for visitors

Lighting

- Controlled artificial lighting
- Spotlights on artworks
- Direct sunlight on artworks

Accessibility

- Wide walkways
- Seating for rest
- Clear signage
- Wall labels at readable height
- Staff or guides available
- Virtual tour online



Section 2: Information & Audience Support (Tick ✓)

- Wall labels beside artworks (infographics)
- Artist name and title included
- Date and materials included
- Clear, simple language
- QR codes or digital supports
- Brochures or gallery maps available
- Knowledgeable tour guides
- Headphones with information
- Interactive activities for students



Ms Barker Name: _____
Activities Date: _____

Focus Museum: National Gallery of Ireland

Key Words:

Curation, display, white cube, lighting, accessibility, layout,
flow, audience, environment, visitor experience

Section 3: Short Written Responses

(Answer in clear sentences. Be specific. No waffle.)

1. White Cube & Curation (5–6 lines)

How does the National Gallery use a white cube style to help viewers focus on artworks?

2. Visitor Experience & Accessibility (5–6 lines)

Describe how the gallery supports visitors.

3. Reflection: Art in an Environment (4–5 lines)

How is viewing art in a gallery environment different from seeing art on the street?

Ms Barker Name: _____
Activities Date: _____

Focus Museum: National Gallery of Ireland

Key Words:

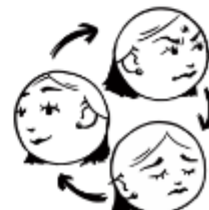
Curation, display, white cube, lighting, accessibility, layout, flow, audience, environment, visitor experience

4. Curatorial Decisions: Relationship Between Artworks (5–6 lines)

How is this exhibition organised?

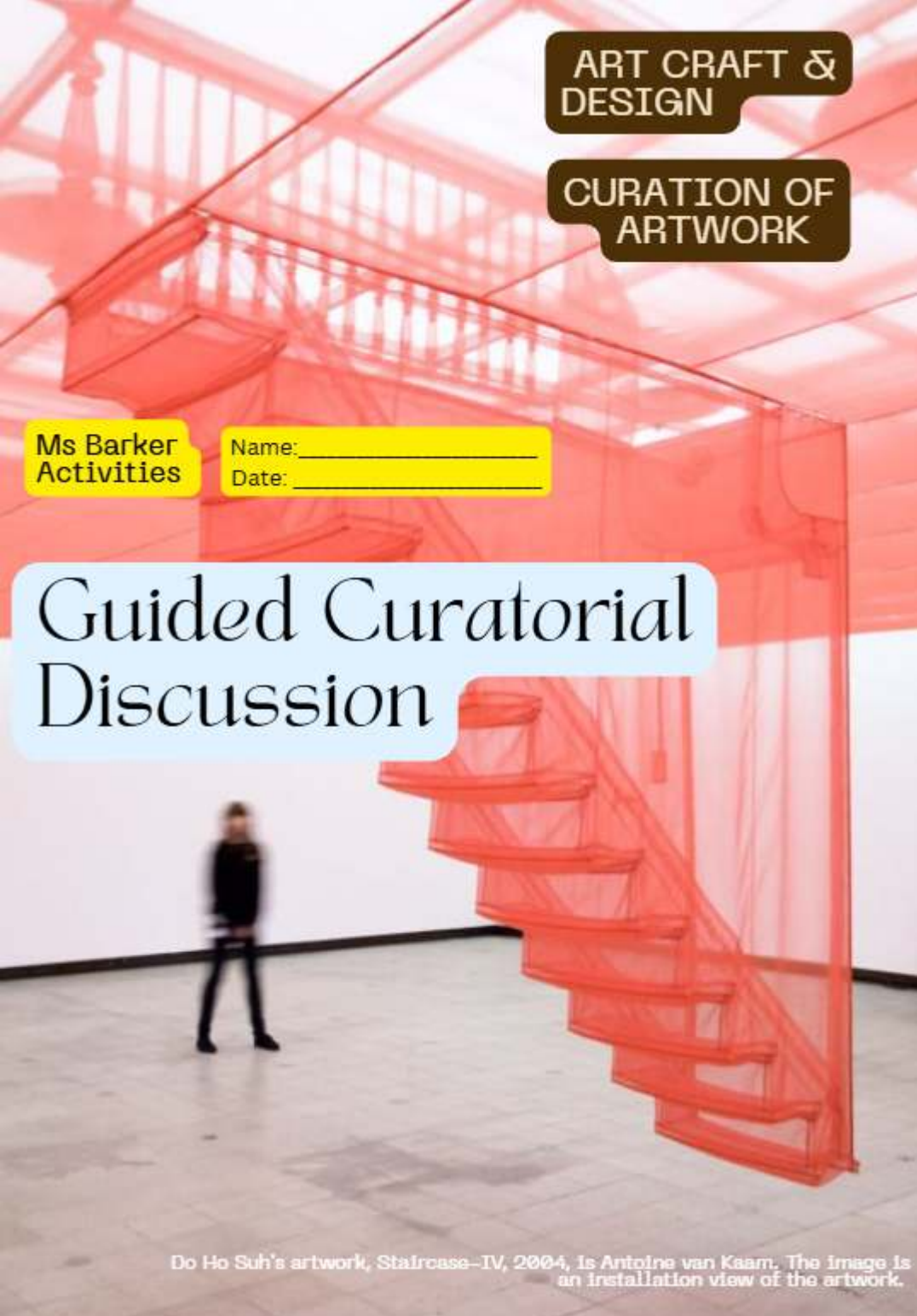
Do you think the artworks are grouped by artist, time period, subject matter, size, or theme?
Explain why certain artworks are placed beside each other and how this affects the viewer's understanding.

Any other thoughts, questions and reflections?



Appendix B: Guided Curatorial Discussion and Reflection Worksheet

Section 1: Teacher Led Discussion Questions



ART CRAFT &
DESIGN

CURATION OF
ARTWORK

Ms Barker
Activities

Name: _____
Date: _____

Guided Curatorial
Discussion

Do Ho Suh's artwork, Staircase-IV, 2004, is Antoine van Kaam. The image is an installation view of the artwork.

Guided Curatorial Discussion Question Set

Teacher Toolkit Page

These questions support student participation as part of the curatorial process by developing design thinking, visual literacy, ownership, and ethical engagement. They help students think independently about curatorial decisions and explain their rationales, supporting deeper understanding of how their choices shape meaning. Teachers can use these prompts during tutorialised discussion, adding or removing questions to follow the natural direction of student conversation. Tutorialised discussion should feel natural and responsive, with these questions acting as prompts to help cover key areas of learning and reflection.

Section 1 — Grounding (Understanding the Exhibition Idea)

- What is your sub theme in one sentence?
- What is your exhibition about overall?
- Who is your audience?
- What do you want your audience to feel or think?

Section 2 — Artwork Decision Making

- Which artworks are you selecting and why?
- How do these artworks connect to your theme or sub theme?
- What do all your artworks have in common?
- Is there anything you decided not to include? Why?
- Did you change your mind about any artwork? What made you change?

Section 3 — Curatorial Thinking

- How will you display or arrange your work?
- Does placement change meaning? How?
- What atmosphere do you want your exhibition to have?
- How do you want the audience to move through your exhibition?

Section 4 — Visual Literacy and Reflection

- What message are you trying to communicate visually?
- How might different people interpret your work differently?
- What part of your work are you most confident about right now?
- What still needs development?

Section 5 — Metacognition (Thinking About Thinking)

- What decision took you the longest to make?
- What helped you make that decision?
- If you had more time, what would you change or develop further?

Section 2: Student Reflective Writing Tasks

Ms Barker
Activities

Name: _____

Date: _____

Student Question Set

My Exhibition Idea

My exhibition is
about: _____

My sub theme
is: _____

My Artwork Choices

The artworks I am including
are: _____

I chose these
because: _____

I decided NOT to
include:
Because: _____

My Curatorial Thinking

I want my audience to feel /
think: _____

The atmosphere of my exhibition will
be: _____

My work connects together
because: _____

Student Question Set

My Process and Decisions

Something I changed during development was: _____

I changed it because: _____

The decision that took me the longest was: _____

My Next Step

The next thing I need to do as an artist / curator is: _____

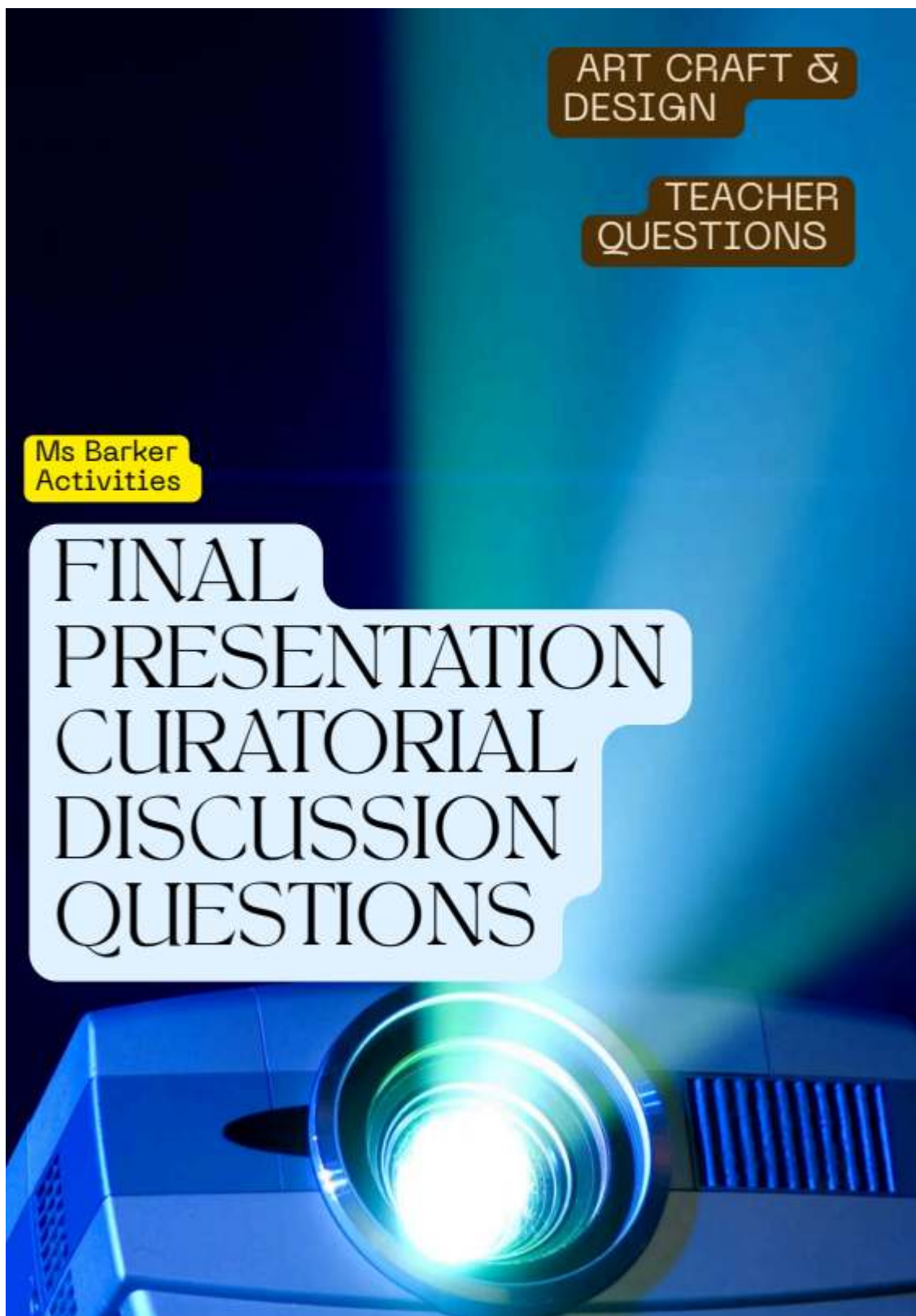
Design Thinking Check In

Circle the stage you think you are in right now:



Why do you think you are at this stage?

Section 3: Final Presentation Curatorial Discussion Questions



Final Presentation Curatorial Discussion Questions

- **What is the main idea behind your exhibition?**
- **How has your idea developed since the beginning of the project?**
- **What curatorial decisions did you make about selection and arrangement?**
- **How did you decide on the placement of your work?**
- **What atmosphere were you trying to create?**
- **Who is your intended audience?**
- **How do you think your audience will interpret your work?**
- **What was the most difficult decision you made?**
- **What helped you make that decision?**
- **What part of your exhibition are you most confident about?**
- **If you had more time, what would you develop further?**
- **What did you learn from curating your own work?**

These questions were used flexibly during student presentations to support discussion and reflection, rather than followed in a fixed order.

Appendix C: Thematic Coding Example

Student Response	Code	Theme
“I am still deciding... I do not know what kind of vibe I want yet”	Uncertainty in early decision making	Development of curatorial decision making
“I kept changing the order”	Revising and refining decisions	Development of curatorial decision making
“using certain colours to show mood and identity”	Use of visual elements to communicate meaning	Visual Literacy and Meaning Making
“I do not want it dark and scary... I actually want it to feel calm”	Intentional use of atmosphere and tone	Visual Literacy and Meaning Making
“Talking it out”	Discussion supports idea development	Role of Discussion and Reflection
“explaining it made it clearer”	Verbal reflection clarifies thinking	Role of Discussion and Reflection

Appendix D: Mid- Unit Tutorialised Discussion Transcript

Transcript: Semi-Structured Curatorial Discussion

Date: 3 February 2026

Time: 1:20 PM to 2:00 PM

Location: Temple Carrig School Greystones

Participants: Teacher Researcher and 5th Year Art Students

Class size: 11 students - Large art room 101

Recording method: Audio recorded using Genio software

1:20 PM

Researcher:

Before we begin, I just want to remind you that this discussion is part of my research project. You have all already received the information about the study and signed the consent forms. Taking part is voluntary. If at any point you do not want to answer a question, or if you would prefer to step out, that is completely fine. There are no right or wrong answers, and nothing you say here will affect your grade. This discussion will be audio recorded to support my notes, and everything used in the dissertation will be anonymised. I am interested in how you are thinking through your curatorial decisions, so I want this to feel like a natural conversation rather than a test.

Researcher:

Okay, let's start simply. What is your sub theme in one sentence?

Student 1:

Mine is nostalgia.

Researcher:

Good. What do you mean by nostalgia in your exhibition?

Student 1:

Like childhood memories, I think. Just going back to things that felt nice when you were younger.

Researcher:

So your exhibition is shaped by memory and personal experience. What do you want your audience to feel or think when they see it?

Student 1:

I want them to kind of remember their own childhood as well.

Researcher:

Good. So there is already a clear connection between theme, audience and intended response.

Researcher:

Would anyone else like to share their sub theme?

Student 2:
Mine is spirit through colour.
Researcher:
Can you explain that a bit more?

Student 2:
I mean like colour doing the work of the feeling. Like using certain colours to show mood and identity.

Researcher:
So you are already thinking in terms of visual literacy, where colour communicates meaning without having to explain it in words.

Researcher:
What is your exhibition about overall? Anybody can answer.

Student 3:
Mine is kind of about growing up and leaving things behind.

Researcher:
And who is your audience?

Student 3:
Probably other students. Maybe younger students as well.

Student 4:
And teachers or parents maybe.

Researcher:
Good. So you are considering audience beyond yourselves. That is an important part of the curatorial process. How the work is selected and presented depends partly on who you think it is for.

1:26 PM

Researcher:
Let's move to artwork choices. Which artworks are you selecting and why?

Student 5:
I am still deciding because mine is about friendship, but I do not know what kind of vibe I want yet.

Researcher:
That is fine. What kinds of options are you deciding between?

Student 5:
I have photos already, but I was also thinking of taking new ones so they all look more connected.

Researcher:

So you are weighing up consistency and meaning. What do you want all the artworks to have in common?

Student 5:

Probably the same mood. Like if they all looked too random, it would not work.

Researcher:

That makes sense. So cohesion matters to you. That is a strong curatorial decision.

Researcher:

Has anyone decided not to include something? Why?

Student 6:

Yeah, I decided not to make new work.

Researcher:

What made you decide that?

Student 6:

Mostly time. But also because I already had drawings that fit my theme, so it made more sense to use them.

Researcher:

So that decision came from time management, but also from recognising that existing work already connected to your sub theme.

Student 6:

Yeah. Mine is about nature, life and death, and I already had animal drawings that worked for that.

Researcher:

And how do those artworks connect to your theme?

Student 6:

They show life and death as part of nature. Not in a horror way, just like it is normal.

Researcher:

That is a very clear rationale.

1:32 PM

Researcher:

Did anyone change their mind about an artwork or direction during development?

Student 7:

I changed my mind about the artist I studied a bit, because at first I thought I should do photography, but then I looked more at the artist and curator I had chosen.

Researcher:

And what made you change?

Student 7:

I think I realised I could still use photography, but in a way that matched the theme better instead of just picking it because it was easy.

Researcher:

That is interesting because it shows your decision was not random. You were thinking about how the medium, the theme and the reference point fit together.

Researcher:

What are all your artworks likely to have in common?

Student 7:

Probably close up images and a kind of feminist theme.

Researcher:

So there is a visual link and a conceptual link.

1:36 PM

Researcher:

Now let's think more about curatorial thinking. How will you display or arrange your work?

Student 1:

Can we use only part of the room?

Researcher:

Yes, you can adapt the space depending on the effect you want. What are you thinking?

Student 1:

I wanted it to feel like a smaller childhood space, like with blankets and lights, not just the whole classroom.

Researcher:

So in that case the space itself becomes part of the meaning. Does placement change meaning for you?

Student 1:

Yeah, definitely. If it was all spread out, it would not feel as personal.

Researcher:

Exactly. So arrangement is not just practical. It shapes atmosphere and interpretation.

Researcher:

How do you want the audience to move through the exhibition?

Student 4:

I think I want it to feel like they are stepping into it slowly, not just seeing everything at once.

Researcher:

That is a strong curatorial approach because you are planning the viewer's experience, not only the objects on display.

Researcher:

Would anyone like to say more about atmosphere?

Student 6:

Mine is about death, but I do not want it dark and scary. I actually want it to feel calm.

Researcher:

And how might you create that?

Student 6:

Probably lighter colours, natural light, maybe not making everything black. I want it to feel normal, like death is part of life.

Researcher:

So your visual choices are helping you avoid one interpretation and guide another.

1:42 PM

Researcher:

Let's move to visual communication. What message are you trying to communicate visually?

Student 6:

That death is natural and not always something to fear.

Researcher:

And do you think different people could interpret that differently?

Student 6:

Yeah, probably. Some people might still find it sad or scary.

Researcher:

That is useful to recognise. Meaning is not fixed. Part of curating is thinking about how viewers may respond differently.

Student 7:

Mine is more about gender equality and assumptions about women in careers.

Researcher:

Who do you think might connect with that most?

Student 7:

Probably people our age because we are all thinking about jobs and college now.

Researcher:

So the audience and the message are closely linked there.

Researcher:

What part of your work are you most confident about right now?

Student 3:

Probably the idea itself. I know what I want it to be about.

Researcher:

And what still needs development?

Student 3:

Where everything goes. I know the theme but not fully how to arrange it yet.

Researcher:

That is useful to note because it shows a difference between having a concept and resolving the curatorial presentation.

1:48 PM

Researcher:

Now I want you to think a bit more about your process. What decision took you the longest to make?

Student 5:

Probably choosing whether to use old photos or make new ones.

Researcher:

What helped you make that decision?

Student 5:

Thinking about what would make the exhibition feel more together. Also having a plan helped.

Researcher:

So planning supported your decision making.

Student 3:

For me it is going to be placement. That is the hardest part.

Researcher:

Why do you think that is?

Student 3:

Because I do not have a timeline like some people do. I have the idea but not the order.

Researcher:

That is a really good observation. It shows that sequencing can be one of the more difficult parts of curating.

Researcher:

If you had more time, what would you change or develop further?

Student 6:

Probably the development pages. Just more time to test things.

Student 1:

I would probably experiment more with the space.

Researcher:

That is important too. More time often allows more experimentation, which can lead to clearer curatorial decisions.

1:54 PM

Researcher:

What helped you most in making decisions today? You can answer generally.

Student 2:

Talking it out.

Student 5:

Yeah, and having the questions.

Student 4:

The keyword bank helped because it kind of gave words to what I was trying to say.

Researcher:

That is helpful to hear. So discussion, prompts and keywords supported you in explaining your rationale.

Researcher:

You have used a lot of strong curatorial language already today, like audience, atmosphere, theme, placement, meaning and visual message. Keep using that language in your written reflections as well.

1:58 PM

Researcher:

We are going to finish there. Please use this discussion and the reflection sheet to write about your exhibition idea, your artwork choices, your curatorial thinking and the next step in your process. The aim is not just to describe what you are making, but to explain your decisions and how your exhibition is developing.

End of discussion

Appendix E: Final Presentation Tutorialised Discussion Transcript

Transcript: Semi-Structured Curatorial Discussion (Final Presentation / Group Critique)

Date: 2nd March 2026

Time: 1:20 PM to 2:00 PM

Location: Temple Carrig School Greystones

Participants: Teacher Researcher and 5th Year Art Students

Class size: 11 students - Large art room 101

Recording method: Audio recorded using Genio software

1:20 PM

Researcher:

Okay, we are going to begin the final presentations. As before, this discussion is part of my research. Everything will remain anonymous and nothing said here affects your grade. This is just about understanding your curatorial thinking and how your ideas have developed.

We will take it one at a time. You will present your exhibition, then I will ask a few questions, and others can respond if they want.

Student 1

(Student presents digital exhibition)

Researcher:

Can you briefly explain your exhibition concept?

Student 1:

Mine is about nostalgia, like childhood memories and comfort.

Researcher:

How did that develop from your earlier idea?

Student 1:

At the start it was really general, but then I focused more on specific memories, like objects and spaces.

Researcher:

And how did that influence your curatorial decisions?

Student 1:

I made everything closer together and used softer lighting so it felt more personal.

Researcher:

So the arrangement supports the emotional tone?

Student 1:

Yeah, I didn't want it to feel like a normal display.

Student 2

(Student presents)

Researcher:

What is the main idea behind your exhibition?

Student 2:

Mine is about identity through colour.

Researcher:

And how did you use colour curatorially, not just in the artworks?

Student 2:

I grouped them based on colour transitions so it kind of changes mood as you go through.

Researcher:

So the sequence is intentional?

Student 2:

Yeah, like it starts calmer and then gets more intense.

Researcher:

Do you think the audience will read it that way?

Student 2:

Hopefully, but maybe not exactly the same.

Student 3

(Student presents)

Researcher:

What are you most confident about in your exhibition?

Student 3:

The theme. It's about growing up and leaving things behind.

Researcher:

And what was the most difficult part?

Student 3:

Placement. I kept changing the order.

Researcher:

What helped you resolve that?

Student 3:

Just testing it out and thinking about what made sense emotionally, not just visually.

Researcher:
So sequencing became part of meaning making?

Student 3:
Yeah, definitely.

Student 4

(Student presents)

Researcher:
Who is your intended audience?

Student 4:
Probably people our age, but also like parents.

Researcher:
Did that affect your curatorial choices?

Student 4:
Yeah, I tried to make it clear but not too obvious.

Researcher:
What do you mean by that?

Student 4:
Like not explaining everything, but still giving enough clues.

Researcher:
So you are balancing interpretation and guidance?

Student 4:
Yeah.

Student 5

(Student presents)

Researcher:
You were unsure earlier about using old or new work. What did you decide?

Student 5:
I used mostly old photos but edited them so they felt more connected.

Researcher:
What made that decision work?

Student 5:
They all had the same kind of mood after that.

Researcher:
So cohesion was achieved through editing rather than new production?

Student 5:
Yeah, exactly.

Student 6

(Student presents)

Researcher:
Can you explain the atmosphere of your exhibition?

Student 6:
It's about life and death, but I wanted it calm, not scary.

Researcher:
And how did you achieve that?

Student 6:
Lighter tones, space between works, not too crowded.

Researcher:
So spacing became part of the meaning?

Student 6:
Yeah, I didn't want it overwhelming.

Student 7

(Student presents)

Researcher:
Your theme relates to gender. How did that influence your choices?

Student 7:
I focused on close-up images and certain symbols.

Researcher:
Did your idea change from the beginning?

Student 7:
Yeah, it got more specific. At first it was too broad.

Researcher:
What helped you refine it?

Student 7:
Talking about it and writing it down.

1:48 PM

Researcher:

Now I want to ask a general question. Looking back, what part of the curatorial process helped you the most?

Student 2:

Talking about it out loud.

Student 5:

Yeah, like explaining it made it clearer.

Student 1:

The keywords helped as well.

Researcher:

So language supported your thinking?

Student 1:

Yeah, like I knew what I meant but didn't have the words before.

Researcher:

What was the hardest part overall?

Student 3:

Placement.

Student 6:

Same, and deciding what to leave out.

Researcher:

Why was leaving work out difficult?

Student 6:

Because you kind of like all of it, but it doesn't all fit.

Researcher:

So selection involved compromise?

Student 6:

Yeah.

Researcher:

Do you think your exhibition communicates your idea clearly?

Student 4:

Mostly, but maybe some people wouldn't get all of it.

Researcher:

And is that okay?

Student 4:
Yeah, I think so.

Researcher:
If you had more time, what would you improve?

Student 7:
Probably test more layouts.

Student 5:
Maybe take more photos to have more options.

Student 2:
Refine the transitions more.

1:56 PM

Researcher:
Finally, what have you learned from curating your own work?

Student 3:
That it's not just about making the work.

Student 1:
Yeah, like **how you show it matters just as much.**

Student 6:
And that you have to actually think about the audience.

Researcher:
That's a strong conclusion. You've all moved from just making work to thinking about meaning, audience and presentation. That is the core of curatorial practice.

We will finish there. Well done everyone and thank you for participating.

End of discussion

Appendix F: Cooperating Teacher Interview Transcript

Transcript: Semi-structured interview

Date: 20th March 2026

Time: 1:38 PM

Location: Temple Carrig School Greystones

Participants: Researcher and Cooperating Teacher

Years Teaching in Temple Carrig School Greystones: 10 years

Recording method: Audio recorded using Genio software

1:38 PM

Researcher:

From your experience as an art teacher, how do students benefit from having more ownership over the decisions they make in their work or projects?

Interviewee:

I think it actually starts before the project even begins. Students need to understand responsibility first, things like safety and respect for materials in the art room. Once they have that, they begin to take more ownership naturally.

That sense of responsibility then carries into their work. When students are given opportunities to choose their own themes, influences or materials, they tend to be much more invested in what they are doing. They are more willing to experiment and take risks.

It also builds confidence. You can see it in how they talk about their work, they feel more responsible for it and more proud of what they have made. There is a stronger sense of achievement when the decisions are their own.

Researcher:

And what role do discussion and reflection play when students are developing and presenting their ideas?

Interviewee:

They are really important. Peer assessment, whether verbal or written, is very effective. Students often listen to each other more than we might expect, and it helps build confidence. It also allows them to recognise that everyone works differently, which can reduce negative comparison between students.

Presenting their work is also valuable. It prepares them for explaining their ideas, not just in art but in a wider context as well. It builds communication skills and confidence.

One to one conversations or written feedback from the teacher are also important, as they help guide students and give them a clearer understanding of expectations.

Reflection is key. It allows students to recognise what worked and what did not, and helps them to articulate this more clearly. Over time, they become more comfortable putting their thinking into words.

Researcher:

How important is it for students to make decisions about how their work is selected or presented, for example in exhibitions or displays?

Interviewee:

It really depends on the group. Some classes need more structure and clearer boundaries, while others are able to manage more independence.

In general though, it is important that students make those decisions themselves. Even something simple like choosing which work to display encourages them to think more critically about their work.

For example, when using digital platforms like Schoology, I sometimes give students the option to select which pieces they want to upload. That process of selecting and presenting is part of the learning.

They also need to develop practical skills, such as photographing, cropping and lighting their work, especially as so much of their work is submitted digitally. Making decisions about presentation helps them evaluate which pieces are most effective.

Researcher:

In your experience, how do students respond when they are asked to explain the thinking behind their work?

Interviewee:

Most students are generally comfortable with it, especially if they have been introduced to this approach from earlier years. However, some do need prompting to articulate what they mean.

Annotations are very important here. They support students in explaining their thinking and making their ideas clear.

Some students can be hesitant though. They may be unsure of how to express themselves or worried about saying the wrong thing, so they need support and reassurance.

Researcher:

How do digital tools or platforms influence how students present or share their work?

Interviewee: They make a big difference. Platforms like Schoology are very useful for creating a digital gallery and for keeping track of student work through images and feedback. Social media platforms like Instagram can also give students a sense of value in their work, as it allows them to share it more publicly.

Researcher:

More broadly, how do exhibition spaces, either physical or digital, support student voice and participation?

Interviewee: Displaying work, whether it is physically around the school or digitally, gives students a sense that their work matters.

It also encourages discussion. Students are more likely to talk about each other's work when it is on display.


That visibility adds value to the subject and helps to support student voice and participation.

End of discussion

Appendix G: Unit of Learning Overview

The following materials outline the structure, key activities and intended learning outcomes of the unit of learning.

Section 1: Unit Overview and Learning Outcomes

5th year Practical- Curation- Room: 101 - 19th Jan- 3rd March											
 <p>School of Education Unit of Learning</p>	<p>Students Name: Heather Barker Year in NCAD: PME2</p>										
<p>Topic: Curia School Eligibility Progression Co-Workshop ART ICT4D</p> <p>Class Name: 5th year practical Room: 101 Year groups: 5th years Programme: Art Craft & Design Total No of lessons in Unit: 19th Jan - 3rd March 5 weeks x 3 classes a week (15 lessons)</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Monday</td> <td>8:25-9:25</td> <td>1hr</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tuesday</td> <td>1:20-2:20</td> <td>1hr</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wednesday</td> <td>9:25- 10:20</td> <td>55min</td> </tr> </table> <p>Discussion: For all NCAD courses 3: Monday</p>	Monday	8:25-9:25	1hr	Tuesday	1:20-2:20	1hr	Wednesday	9:25- 10:20	55min	<p>Aim of Unit of Learning: To explore the theme <i>iCurate</i>, students will research curation, respond to the art classroom through design thinking and experimental drawing, and create a digital exhibition with a focus on composition, balance, and space.</p> <p>Leaving Cert: Research -> Respond -> Create Design Thinking: empathize -> Define -> Ideate -> Prototype -> Test</p> <p>Gross Curricular Link – Construction Technology (Leaving Cycle)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See in learning outcomes <p>Theme development: iCurate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • iCurate positions students as curators, giving them ownership over selection, editing, and display • The curator's role includes choosing and defining the exhibition theme • Students create their own curatorial themes to organize and connect the artworks in the space • The unit aims to guide decisions around layout, scale, colour, and placement • The theme develops student agency, visual literacy, and confidence in curatorial decision making • Drawing on Lee V. Seidman's ideas, the theme supports learning through student interest, contextual knowledge, and meaningful decision making, strengthening understanding through active engagement. 	
Monday	8:25-9:25	1hr									
Tuesday	1:20-2:20	1hr									
Wednesday	9:25- 10:20	55min									

Learning Outcomes for Unit of Learning

Learning outcomes aligned with the Leaving Certificate Art specification (NCCA, 2019):

Research

- Analyse artworks and visual elements
- Engage with artists and contextual references
- Develop an individual area of enquiry

Create

- Apply skills, techniques and media appropriately
- Translate visual research into practical work

Respond

- Discuss and interpret artworks using appropriate language
- Evaluate and explain artistic decisions

Section 2: Key Teaching and Learning Activities

The following key activities structured the development of curatorial thinking throughout the unit:

- Introduction to curatorial practice
- Use of keyword bank to support visual language and articulation
- Guided curatorial discussion (mid unit)
- Student reflective writing tasks
- Development of digital exhibition
- Final presentation and tutorialised discussion

Section 3: Student Materials

Project Brief (Student Version)

HEATHER BARKER PROJECT WORK AND EXHIBITION INSTALLATION: 19 JANUARY – 27 FEBRUARY

Curation Brief

Aim

To explore Curating the Classroom through the theme *iCurate*, students will research the role of curation, respond to the **art classroom** through **design thinking** and **experimental drawing**, and create a **digital exhibition** with a focus on composition, balance, and space.

What is iCurate?

iCurate is a theme that places students in the role of a curator. Instead of only making artwork, students will make decisions about:

- what is shown
- how it is displayed
- where it is placed
- how it is experienced by an audience

The classroom becomes an exhibition space.

What You Will Do

Learn what a curator does and how exhibitions are organised
Explore Room 101 as a space that can be curated
Develop a personal sub theme within iCurate
Plan ideas using drawing, annotation, and design thinking
Work collaboratively to curate the classroom
Create a digital exhibition using ArtSteps
You will include your own artwork in the exhibition.

Materials & Tools

Sketchbook (bring to every class)
Standard art materials provided in class
Schoology for resources
ArtSteps for the digital exhibition
Limitations & Considerations
Class time and timetable structure
Shared classroom surfaces for display
Safe storage and movement of existing work
Photographing work responsibly
Health and safety at all times

Limitations & Considerations

- Class time and timetable structure
- Shared classroom surfaces for display
- Safe storage and movement of existing work
- Photographing work responsibly
- Health and safety

Key Materials & Tools

- Sketchbooks (bring to every class)
- Access to Schoology for resources
- ArtSteps for digital exhibition
- Standard art materials provided in class

Key Word Bank

- Curation
- Exhibition
- Visual literacy
- Audience
- Selection
- Editing
- Display
- Composition
- Balance
- Scale
- Space
- Context
- Interpretation
- Evaluation
- Reflection

What You Will Hand In

- A sketchbook showing ideas, planning, and reflection
- Evidence of a digital exhibition
- Photos or screenshots where needed



Keyword Bank (Student Support Material)

Key Word Bank – *ICurate*

Ms H. Barker Art Craft & Design
5th year Practical

Curation

The process of selecting, organising, and presenting artwork to create meaning.

Curator

A person who decides what artwork is shown, how it is displayed, and why.

Exhibition

A planned display of artworks for an audience.

Theme

The main idea that connects all the work in an exhibition.

Sub Theme

A smaller idea within a main theme.

Visual Literacy

The ability to understand and communicate ideas through images.

Audience

The people who view the artwork or exhibition.

Selection

Choosing which artworks or ideas to include.

Editing

Deciding what stays in and what is left out.

Display

How artwork is shown to an audience.

Placement

Where artwork is positioned in a space.

Arrangement

How artworks are organised together.

Context

The situation or environment in which artwork is seen.

Interpretation

The meaning a viewer takes from artwork.

Intention

What the artist or curator wants to communicate.

Meaning

The ideas or messages in artwork.

Immersive

An experience that makes the viewer feel part of the work.

Atmosphere

The mood or feeling created by an exhibition.

Narrative

A story or idea communicated through artwork.

Process

The steps taken to develop ideas.

Development

How ideas grow and change.

Evaluation

Looking back at work to judge success and improvement.

Reflection

Thinking about what was learnt and why decisions were made.

Rationale

The reasons behind a choice or decision.

Cohesion

How well artworks work together.

Engagement

How the audience interacts with the work.



Appendix H: Anonymised Sample of Student Work



Appendix I: Plain Language Statement



School of Education National College of Art and Design

Plain Language Statement

Research Title: *Student Participation in Curatorial Decision Making in Post Primary Art Education*

Researcher: Heather Barker

Student Email: 19379141@student.ncad.ie

Date: 07/01/2026

This research is being undertaken as part of the Professional Masters in Education programme at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. The research explores how post primary Art, Craft and Design students participate in curatorial decision making during a unit of classroom learning. Curatorial decision making refers to how students select, arrange and present their own artwork for an audience. The study examines how students explain their choices and how this process supports visual literacy, reflection and ownership of learning. The reasons for the research are to develop the researcher's teaching practice and to better understand how curatorial processes can be used as a learning tool in the classroom.

The research will involve one fifth year Art, Craft and Design class and their cooperating art teacher. It will take place in the school during normal art lessons between 19 January and 25 February. All activities will be part of existing classroom teaching and learning, and no additional work will be required from students. Participation is entirely voluntary, and students may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

Information for the research will be collected through classroom observation, reflective notes taken by the researcher, tutorial style group discussions with students, and documentation of student curated digital exhibitions. Some group discussions may be audio recorded to support accurate reflection and transcription by the researcher. No video recordings will be made. Student artwork and class worksheets may be used as anonymised examples in the research and in a small teacher resource derived from the research findings.

All information gathered will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Students, the cooperating host teacher, and the school will remain anonymous and any identifying details will be removed or changed. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and accessed only by the researcher and supervisor. The research does not involve sensitive topics, and participation or non participation will not affect students' grades, assessment, or learning. The final thesis will be made available in the NCAD library, and any related academic outputs will also be fully anonymised.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please

contact:

**The Secretary, National College of Art and Design Research Ethics Committee, c/o
Head of Research and Postgraduate Development, National College of Art and Design,
100, Thomas Street, Dublin.**

Appendix J: Informed Consent Form



National College of Art and Design School of Education.

Informed Consent Form for Research Study Participant

Research Title: *Student Participation in Curatorial Decision Making in Post Primary Art Education*

Researcher: Heather Barker

Address: Apartment 49, Dargan Hall, Station Road, Bray, Co.Wicklow. A98N6F7.

Contact No:0873382322

Email: 19379141@student.ncad.ie

Date: 04/01/2026

Dear Participant,

I am writing to ask for your consent to take part in research I am conducting as part of my Professional Masters in Education at the National College of Art and Design. My research explores how post primary art students participate in curatorial decision making during a unit of classroom learning. Curatorial decision making refers to how students select, arrange and present their own artwork and how they explain these choices. The purpose of this research is to better understand how curatorial activities can support visual literacy, reflection and ownership of learning in art education.

The methods I will use in this study include classroom observation during normal art lessons, observation of student discussions and critiques, analysis of student artwork and digital exhibition layouts, and tutorial style group discussions with students. Some group discussions may be audio recorded to support accurate reflection and transcription. No video recordings will be made. Once research is completed the recordings and notes will be disposed of and not kept on file.

You are being invited to take part because you are involved in the research either as a participant, a supporting teacher, or member of management. I will record data through written reflective notes, observation records, photographs of student work, and audio recordings of group discussions where consent is given. All research activity will take place during scheduled art lessons between 19 January and 25 February 2026.

All information collected will be anonymised in the final dissertation. No participant will be named. Participation is voluntary and you may decline to take part or withdraw at any point without giving a reason. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and used only for academic purposes. Transcripts and any examples used in related academic outputs or a teacher resource will not include identifying information.

A Plain Language Statement is enclosed with this form. If you have any questions or need clarification

about the research, you can contact me using the details above.

Please read and answer the questions below. If you are willing to take part in the research, please sign this consent form and return it to me by physical copy by **23 January 2026**.

Signature:



Heather Barker

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement Yes / No Do you understand the information provided? Yes / No Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes / No Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes / No

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature:

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with parental consent provided where required. Signed consent forms are retained securely by the researcher.