

## ***History Bits, revisiting curation in the context of (digital) pedagogy***

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Most of us connect the concept of curation with the idea of refinement. Something that has been curated will spare us dealing with a wider and messier crowd of things. Curation has become a buzzword in diverse contexts where digital content is collected and presented in an organized manner. In these new contexts however, it is less discussed that curation is the first profession that appeared with and is specific of museum institutions. In this paper, by comparing the figure of the museum curator to young learners in the digital age, I revisit how curation has been transformed from an originally museal activity into a digital phenomenon. I subsequently argue that this centenary practice has been appropriated in the digital age, as a model to purposefully filter, sort, and recontextualize digital content, but that if understood in its museal context, it can be applied to further the understanding of complex and messy historical phenomena.

Museum curators perform two central tasks: to maintain large collections of physical cultural artefacts and to create exhibitions where a few of these artefacts are displayed to the public. In doing this, curators have been identified as key agents in the public perception of art, history or science (Greenberg, 2005; Karp & Lavine, 1991; Macdonald, 2002; Schulze, 2014). To fully grasp the tasks behind collection caring and exhibition making, I reviewed museology literature and conducted interviews with museum curators. A short inventory of the diverse tasks curators undertake include: acquiring and preserving artefacts along with objects' biographies (Gosden & Marshall, 1999), that is, investigate each artefact's social, technical and cultural significance through its history. Finally, curators ensure public access to these artefacts and their significance through digitization or exhibition. A common denominator I found in all these activities is a shared capacity to develop selection criteria. This capacity is what I consider the most significant aspect of museum curation. In recent years, curation has been adopted by media education scholars referring to youth re-creating their identities in digital and networked spaces (McDougall & Potter, 2015). John Potter's idea that curation is a skill that supports young learners in new media production (2012) has been echoed by many researchers (Mihailidis & Cohen, 2013; Wolff & Mulholland, 2013; Potter & Gilje, 2015). Reviewing literature about digital curation in media education, I found that the concept of curation has been accommodated to the youth. Young learners have been identified as having adopted digital and networked spaces as a channel to perform their identities. This is particularly adequate as in our youth we undergo an important period of negotiating own identities and sense of belonging (Benjamin, 2014; DeJaynes, 2015). This turn towards the self has been the focus when theorizing about digital curation. My research focuses rather on other aspects of digital curation, understood as a

process by which young learners develop selection criteria less based on personal interest or taste.

The motivation to revisit curation in the context of youth, is my ongoing ethnographic fieldwork in upper-secondary schools. So far, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with eight history teachers and participant observation in the classes of two of them. The teachers I have interviewed, were interested in their students adopting an active role in discovering history. In participant observation I focused on such activities where students were particularly responsible for the course matter. Although these teachers and students were all familiar with visiting exhibitions, the visit has little to do with active engagement of students or acquainting them with the museum curation process. However, in the two classes that I visited, both teachers organized repeatedly short-lived assignments where students, alone or in small groups, selected a historical topic or event, acquired materials, and as time run out, shared their interpretation with the class, often in form of an oral presentation or a small selection of digital images. For these young curators, digital sources, such as Wikipedia, or a preselection of trusted internet sources by their teacher constitute a digital collection, where they weight each piece of information that should be considered for the final presentation or exhibition. I find that these exercises procure students with the capacity to strip history to bits, that are joined back at the end of the assignment when the students present to the rest of the class. This results in a curated story of history.

Education is one of many contexts that has seen the emergence of digital curation, and its meaning is far from being a definite one. Digital humanities, for instance, is a field that has adopted curation, understood as a set of activities to preserve and provide access to research data. These activities bear resemblance to museum curation. The significance of recognizing the museal origin of this concept calls for a renewed interest in this centenary profession which is performed behind the scenes in museums and is seldom subject of exhibitions.

**Keywords:** Curation, Exhibitions, Digital Pedagogies, Media Education, Digital Cultural Heritage, History, Case Study, Upper-Secondary School.

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