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**How should Social Studies Lessons collaborate with Museum Curators?: A Case Study of Curator's Perceptions for School-museum Partnership in Japan**

**Tomoki Nakayama**

*Doctoral Student, Hyogo University of Teacher Education, Japan*

E-Mail: [zb110236@edu.gifu-u.ac.jp](mailto:zb110236@edu.gifu-u.ac.jp)

**Abstract**

This study reports the results of an empirical investigation of Japanese museum curators' perceptions of the role of museums in the school-museum relationship. Findings are based on data collected through semi-structured interviews with seven museum curators located in Aichi and Gifu prefectures and analyzed using M-GTA (Kinoshita, 2003; 2007; 2016). Interviews with seven curators indicate that perceptions of museums' role were formed not only by their relationship with the schools they worked with but also by the interconnectedness of the curators' individual work experiences and their responsibility to the expectations of the local community, including the government and visitors. These findings suggest that curators confront collections based on foundations while coordinating with relationships with schools and considering local community demands. Curator recognizes museums' role as a social space through interactions with schools and communities. In this case study, we observed a museum that faced difficulties in its relationship with the local community, including schools. Therefore, conceptualizing curators as "creators" in social studies classes may help schools and museums establish a closer relationship.

**Keywords:** School-museum partnership, Curators' perceptions, Social studies, Modified grounded theory approach

**Introduction**

This study reports the results of an empirical investigation of Japanese museum curators' perceptions of the role of museums in the school-museum relationship. In recent years, school-museum partnership has been positioned as an important research issue in social studies education research, and research is being accumulated internationally. There is growing interest in the interaction between museum visits and the social studies curriculum, for example, interaction between museum visits/resources and pre-service teachers (Kaschak, 2014;

Seeger et al., 2016) and possibility for museums to be an educational resource and pre-service teachers' perceptions (Görmaz, 2020; Er & Yılmaz, 2020). This background to grow interest in museums is that museum spaces have come to be seen as "places for meaningful learning" rather than simply as exhibition spaces. Also, the closer these relationships between schools and museums are the better, but according to report of a case study of teachers and museums in Israel showed that differences of relationship between teachers and curators according to the type of school and what the teacher wants from the museum (Tal & Steiner 2006). Thus, examining the relationship between schools and museums is an important opportunity for the social studies curriculum to encounter contexts outside of school, and an important issue for social studies education aimed at developing citizenship to achieve its objectives. In addition, there is an awareness of the issue of museum narratives in social studies education, and the importance of focusing on how the past is represented and staged (especially in history museums) in order to expand children's epistemological views (Stoddard, 2018). This is because museum exhibitions are affected by a variety of factors, including financial problems and external social and political pressures. However, museums has also "powerful role in shaping students' conceptions of their possibilities as civic actors" (Stoddard et al., 2015). From this point of view, the key to examining the relationship between schools and museums is not limited to expanding students' opportunities to visit museums, but also to how social studies teachers perceive and understand the exhibition space as a place of learning.

In the Japanese context, the 2017/18 course of study in Japan has strengthened the system of cooperation and collaboration between schools and society to provide a curriculum open to society. This initiative strives to ensure that school education helps students develop practical skills that they can use in their lives through cooperation and collaboration with society. In order to build such a system, it is important that collaboration between entire schools and communities exists. School-museum cooperation is one aspect of this initiative. There are various forms of exposition partnerships, but they all aim to educate children through cooperation with schools and society such as through museums. In museum studies in Japan, the relationship with schools has been traditionally understood as a major issue (Ueno, 1985; Shiokawa, 1990; Taru et al, 2001). The main focus has been on the development of educational programs, evaluation, and its effectiveness (Nagahata, 1994; Nishigaki & Nunotani 2005; Nishio, 2008). Previous studies have mainly focused on the content provided by museums, the communities that connect schools and museums, and sharing the philosophy and purpose of collaboration (Ogawa, 2019). As such, there is growing interest not only in the institutional aspects that define the cooperation system, such as the content of educational projects, but also the factors that led to its establishment and social context. This study examined the perspectives of research on social studies education in Japan on school-museum partnership.

Research on social studies education in Japan has investigated the significance of learning in museums by experiencing reality and arousing interest and has considered its educational effectiveness (Ogasawara, 2010; Matsuoka, 2006; Fukuyama, 2010). For example, Fujita (2003) focused on learners' worksheet and attempted to categorize social studies in museums. Nakamura (2010) focused on the gap between school and museum education and proposed education in which learners construct their own historical images based on the premise of a multitude of historical images. These studies analyze learning in museums from the perspectives of social cognition and interpretive learning. As such, previous studies have attempted to connect social studies lessons and learning in museums, using learners' worksheet as a guide.

However, these studies have focused on educational content, such as learners' worksheet, to understand

the learning system in museums from the perspective of social studies. These studies have not sufficiently considered the interactions between schools and museums. Interaction between school and society is a new perspective for Japanese curriculum research and development, which has traditionally focused on interaction within-subjects (Yamada et al., 2019). This is an important issue in social studies education research in Japan. It is necessary to rethink school-museum partnership in relation to the subjects and elucidate how the subjects interact with the museums they cooperate with in order to respond to social demands. In particular, curators, who are directly involved with teachers and serve as contact points for museums play an important role in the cooperation system; however, their role is not fully understood. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the perspectives of museum curators on the museums' role in school-museum partnership in the field of social studies.

## **Methods**

To investigate the perceptions of that curators<sup>1</sup> have of the museums' role in the school-museum partnership, we conducted a qualitative study of curators who had worked cooperatively with the schools. We obtained responses from 23 museums and conducted semi-structured interviews with seven curators working in museums who agreed to participate in an additional survey, and conducted analyses using modified grounded theory approach (M-GTA).

The M-GTA is a qualitative research method based on the grounded theory approach (GTA), which was developed by Glaser, Barney G. & Strauss, Anselm L. M-GTA reorganized the conventional GTA, which was criticized for its objectivist nature in response to the expansion of qualitative research, and systematized and modified the analysis process (Kinoshita, 2003; 2007; 2016). In recent years, research has grown in human service areas such as nursing and education. Specifically, M-GTA in educational research is now considered a methodology that can offer a broadly descriptive and predictive framework focusing on the commonalities and laws of experience that occur among multiple cases (Sakai et al., 2012). M-GTA is a way to generate theories that explain human interactions, especially "motion" (Kinoshita, 2003, p.67). The analysis procedure involves:

- generating concepts based on interview data,
- considering the relationship between concepts through continuous comparative analyses,
- creating subcategories that have relationships with multiple similar concepts, and
- creating categories based on the relationship among them.

We considered it especially appropriate for this study because our interest was in the interactions with schools and communities that occur in the process of curators' perceptions of museums' role in school-museum partnership. Furthermore, our knowledge of how curators think about school-museum partnership is still at such a nascent stage that we could not hope to identify the role of the museum that they consider important at their own level of experience. Thus, M-GTA seemed to be an appropriate way to examine the process by which curators perceive concepts they consider important and the role of museums.

### ***Study Participants***

We conducted semi-structured interviews with seven curators from July to August 2021 (Table 1). In these interviews, we used the responses to the questionnaire as a guide and included questions regarding school-museum partnership at the participants' museums. The interviews inquired about the cultural participation of

children and citizenship education, including the museums' educational practices and their purpose, methods, and content. In addition, the participants were presented with the new definition of museums proposed at the Kyoto conference of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2019 and were asked to discuss their opinions.

Each interview was conducted one-to-one with the researcher in a conference room in the museum and lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed. This study was approved by the research ethics committee of Gifu University (approval #2020-224).

Table 1. Study participations

	Location of the museum	Specialty
A	Toyota, Aichi	Social studies teacher (send out)
B	Toukai, Aichi	Archaeology
C	Toyohashi, Aichi	Archaeology
D	Takayama, Gifu	Art
E	Tajimi, Gifu	Exhibition
F	Tajimi, Gifu	Early modern history of Japan
G	Minokamo, Gifu	Education administration

Table 2. Analysis worksheet (excerpt)

Concept	diverse values
Definition	Museums are not limited to common values, but embrace a variety of values. As such, museum should be neutral while including certain values.
Example	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I do not know what to say. I think it is a valid argument to have keywords such as -democratic-, -non-conflict- and -equality- centered on children. However, I think that if a museum is limited to such things, it is uninteresting. (A)</li> <li>- Citizens centered on publicity are important. However, I think that museum can educate citizens with more diverse values rather than just publicity. (A)</li> <li>- Some values are the basis for collecting. Therefore, it is important for us to encourage people who believe values are not important. (B)</li> <li>- Some people who come to museums have extremely radical ideas. We want them to think neutrally. Some people question exhibits from extreme perspectives, such as thinking that the exhibits are wrong. (C)</li> </ul>
Theoretical notes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Construe this script as the curators stance on values. How do curators think interaction with society, such as schools and communities?</li> <li>2) What role does this concept play in understanding cooperation between museums and schools?</li> </ol>

### *The Process of M-GTA Analysis*

The M-GTA utilized an analysis worksheet for each concept to enable continuous comparative analyses, including the generation and revision of concepts and comparison of definitions, to avoid one-sided interpretations

(Table 2). Interview data related to school-museum relationship were interpreted and organized by definition.

We will use the concept of “diverse values” as shown in Table 2 as an example. In the analysis, we first focus on a part of the interview data related to school-museum partnership, interpret its meaning and organize it as a definition. For this concept, we focused on the following points.

- I do not know what to say. I think it is a valid argument to have keywords such as democratic, non-conflict, and equality centered on children. But, on the other hand, I always think that if a museum is limited to such things, it is uninteresting. (A)

This also means that museums are spaces that are not limited to common values but embrace a variety of values. Therefore, we named the concept “diverse values”, and the definition “museum is a place that is not limited to common values, but embraces a variety of values. This also means that museums should be neutral while including certain values.” In addition, in order to avoid one-sided interpretation in the analysis, we promoted a continuous comparative analysis.

Continuous comparative analyses, based on the principle of “grounded on data”, require the analysis of counterparts and counterexamples in addition to comparisons between similar items (Kinoshita, 2007, p.9). Concept validity can be presented by assuming counterexamples of data, checking for the existence of data, and writing the results in theoretical notes on the worksheet. First, we focused on the following data as similar examples of this concept.

- Values were used as the basis for the collection. Therefore, it is important for us to encourage people to say that is not worth it. (B)
- Some of the people who visit the museums have extremely radical ideas. We want them to think neutrally. So, there are people who ask questions about exhibits from an extreme point of view, such as “Isn’t it wrong?”. (C)

Interview data were analyzed to reveal trends by identifying similarities. Following this, counterpart comparisons were conducted. Concepts that were counter to already established concepts were created as new concepts based on specific perspectives. Next, in this concept, we proceeded with the counterpart comparison based on “How does the curator think about interaction with society, such as schools and communities?”. Therefore we generated the concept “expectation of the community” by focusing on the following data.

- Well, we preserve the Japanese tradition. Of course, we must preserve the tradition, but I think we should not pass it on to the next generations but also add something is of that our era. (E)

Participant E indicated that their museum decided on the cultural property collection policy at the request of the city. Participant E reconfirmed the value of the Japanese cultural properties, including that (they) wanted their children to inherit Japanese traditions, which is counter to the concept of “diverse values”.

As such, the validity of individual concepts was checked using the analysis worksheet. The analysis was terminated when it reached “theoretical saturation” (Kinoshita, 2003, p.223), a state in which no new concepts were generated and the data were logically coherent. The data were organized using the analysis worksheet.

Thus, we can focus on the commonalities and regularities of the curators when cooperating with schools, conducting an ongoing comparative analysis across multiple interview data sets. Through this process, we can develop assumptions about perceptions of the museum’s role that will be important in collaborating with curators in social studies classes. The M-GTA methodology allows us to analyze the curatorial experience in terms of commonalities and laws, and our analysis of the data allows us to understand how the curator interacts

with the school/community. We found that the curators progressively understood the role of the museum in their interactions with the school and community. As described below, we identified 18 concepts, seven subcategories, and five categories all organized through the above process.

## Results

The M-GTA analysis generated 18 concepts, including seven subcategories, and five categories (Table 3). Figure 1 shows the results of the analysis, which examined the interrelationships among these categories.

The first step in recognizing the role of museums in school-museum partnership is to understand the {foundation} of the community in which the museum is located. Museums have always been connected to specific local communities. Therefore, it seems that the relationship with the local community is inseparable from the curator's perception of the museum's role. In addition, this study uses historical museums, local museums, memorial museums, and art galleries/general museums belonging to local communities as case

Table 3. Concepts

Concept	Definition
diverse values	Museum are not limited to common values but embrace a variety of values. As such, museum should be neutral while including certain values.
culture as regionalism	Museums exist for the benefit of the people in the community.
standardized citizens	An exemplary image shared by society, which refers to people who examine things in a public way and have an image of humanity that is considered ideal by society.
standards for values	The standard material based on which curators select items for museum collections.
non-verbal beliefs	Beliefs regarding society through reality, as represented by exhibits. In particular, it is important for interpreting the value of things that do not have obvious value.
experiencing while being flexible	A child's perspective that should be maintained in the exploration of daily life.
culture as part of individuals	A way of life, such as one's behavior and habits. It is a perspective from which one compares oneself with others and indicates a reflective attitude.
accepting the material as is	When collecting materials at a museum, curators should select materials without subjectivity to ensure fairness.
wonders of history	Perspectives that can be realized by learning new information about history.
critical thinking	A competency that is important in building one's own opinion.
presenting beliefs	Measures that museums need to be neutral.
passing on to the next generation	To use the museum as a starting point to learn and communicate about our own society.
the power of the reality	The impression that comes from viewing the museum's collection.
community expectation	Social demands on the museum from the local community.
generalize local history	The role of the museum as an institution that organizes and conveys the history of the region.
bureaucratic sectionalism	Taking a limited perspective of the museum's role and engaging only in tasks within the scope of the work.
common experience at school	A learning experience that is common to all children, independent of their home environment.
home environments	Children's learning experiences as influenced by their parents.

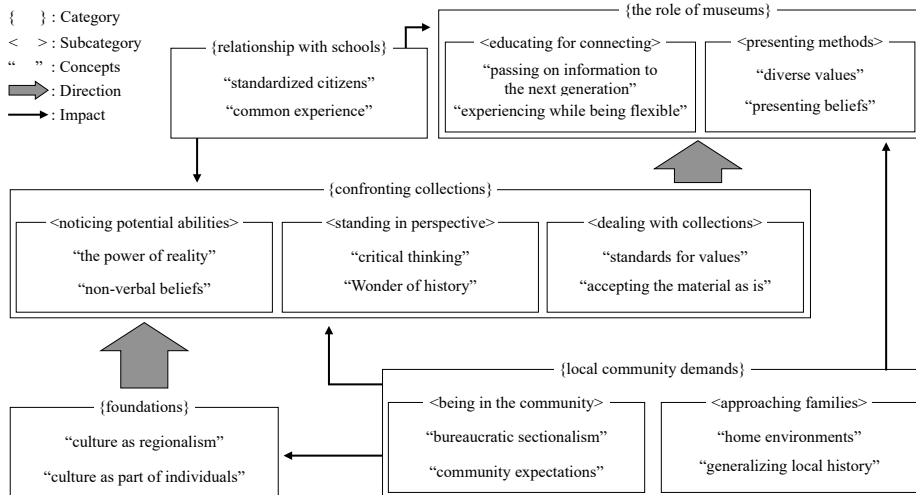


Figure 1. Analysis result

studies. On this basis, the category of {confronting collections} advances the work of the curators. In this category, curators <noticing potential abilities> through activities such as collection and conservation of cultural properties and understand the importance of the subcategory of <stand in perspectives> through exhibitions and educational activities. Therefore, in our analysis, we focused on curatorial work in museums in addition to collaboration with schools. Even for curators in charge of school collaboration, organizing, storing, and exhibiting collections is an important part of their work. We believe that this experience will lead to a better understanding of the curator’s professionalism and the museum’s role in cooperating with schools and the museum’s role in cooperating with schools. Curators learn <dealing with the collections> through their work as curators. However, the category of {confronting collections} fluctuates and is affected by the two other categories accordingly. and fluctuates. Local community demands require museums to be <being in the community> and <approaching families>. In the category of {relationships with schools}, curators examine the relative role of museums in the process of cooperation with schools. Following this, curators become aware of {the role of museums} through interaction with schools and local communities. Accordingly, we identified schools and communities as elements of the socio-cultural influences on the curator’s perception of {the role of museums}. The curator perceives the needs of the community and, as a lifelong learning facility, devises exhibits that provide a variety of educational opportunities. The experience of the curator in working with children in collaboration with schools provides a new perspective to the curator and reconfigures {the role of museums} in exhibition activities.

### Foundations

This is the basis of the category of {confronting collections} during curating work, which is a prerequisite for recognizing the role of museums, and contains two concepts, “culture as regionalism” and “culture as part of individuals”. The concept of “culture as regionalism” determines the audience of a museum exhibition and examines whether the museum is set up for the local community. In addition, the concept of “culture as part of individuals” describes the learning environment in museums, in which one creates oneself by reflecting on one’s

own position in the past in a museum that deals with tools of daily life and traces of habitation.

The category of {foundations} is influenced by {local community demands}. For instance, Participant A noted, “The mayor wants the museum to take care of the town and make things that foster a love for the town”. Thus, {foundations} determine the subject of the museum and the position of the curator.

### ***Confronting Collections***

The category of {confronting collections} during curating work consists of three subcategories: <noticing potential abilities>, <standing in perspective>, and <dealing with collections>.

The former consists of “the power of reality” and “non-verbal beliefs”. This category was formed based on the responses of children who participated in educational practice while the curator preserved and exhibited the collection. “The power of the reality” confirms the value of the collections based on the children’s surprise at seeing cultural properties that they had only seen in photographs in textbooks. “Non-verbal beliefs” illustrate the museum’s significance for providing experiences that cannot be obtained from written materials.

The subcategory of <standing in perspective> consists of “critical thinking” and “wonder of history”. This confirms the educational effects that curators can obtain from museum exhibitions through their educational practices. “Critical thinking” encompasses the need for children in post-truth situations to acquire a variety of views on local subjects to construct their own opinions through the Internet. “Wonder of history” illustrates that learning new things about history can influence the community.

The subcategory of <dealing with collections> consists of “standards for values” and “accepting the material as is”, which addresses the conservation and exhibition of collections, which are at the heart of curating work. “Standards of values” addresses the decisions that curators make when preserving artifacts that are generally judged to have no value. Participant B said, “Naturally, there are times when value judgements are wrong, and in such cases, the part being left behind and what is being conveyed needs to be scrutinized more than ever”. This demonstrates the necessity for curators to be in a position to make judgements on a daily basis and guarantee the value of exhibited collections. “Accepting the material as is” highlights the necessity of confronting collections while eliminating values when selecting items.

### ***Local Community Demands***

The category of {local community demands} influence curator’s work with collections, including the two subcategories: <being in the community> and <approaching families>.

The former consists of “bureaucratic sectionalism” and “community expectations”. This concerns the social position of the museum in which the curator works and its relationship with the local community. “Bureaucratic sectionalism” refers to curators perceiving the role of museums as limited in areas with strong social demands. Participant F stated, “Well, we have always been working from the perspective of cultural properties and cultural heritage (F)”. This indicates that they specialized in the protection of cultural properties as an administrative framework and were reluctant to consider other values and roles. “Community expectations” indicate that the role of museums is defined to obtain administrative approval.

The subcategory of <approaching families> consists of “home environments” and “generalizing local history” to confirm the impact that museums have on local citizens. “Home environments” indicate that children’s learning opportunities are influenced by the interests of their parents, suggesting that directly influencing families is challenging for museums. “Generalizing local history” addresses local community demands for museums as social education facilities during generational division and municipal integration.



### ***Relationships with Schools***

The category of {relationships with schools} includes two concepts: “standardized citizens” and “common experience”. This category indicates the process by which curators relativize their own positions by cooperating with schools.

“Standardized citizens” describes the differences between the image of citizens assumed by schools and museums. Participant A stated that: “Citizen is an important keyword in school. In schools, we educate citizens on publicity. On the other hand, museums are supposed to nurture a more diverse citizenry, though it would be strange to call them maniacal”. This demonstrates that, while the image of citizenship in schools is oriented toward democratic values and social justice, museums add a broader sense to it. “Common experience” requires schools to utilize museums to provide learning experiences that are important for educating children.

### ***The Role of Museums***

The category of {the role of museums} contains two subcategories: <educating for connecting> and <presenting methods>, which are the processes of becoming aware of curating work through cooperation with schools and relationships with the local community.

Subcategory of <educating for connecting> consists of “passing on information to the next generation” and “experiencing while being flexible”. This suggests that museums as educational facilities should educate the next generation of children. “Passing on information to the next generation” addresses how children can learn about their own society and pass it on, with the museum as the medium. “Experiencing while being flexible” encompasses the necessity for curators to gain a variety of experiences from children through educational practice. Participant B stated, “Children find things that we do not notice. I think that discovering something on their own and feeling what was interesting on their own will be very important after you grow up”. This indicates that expanding children’s experience helps them understand society.

The subcategory of <presenting methods> consists of “diverse values” and “presenting beliefs”, including the fact that museums can provide children with a new perspective through educational practices. “Diverse values” indicates that museums are social spaces that embrace diverse values through educational practices and exhibition activities. By presenting diverse values, museums aim to provide children with a perspective to analyze society. “Presenting beliefs” addresses the museum’s attitude toward values. Participant D stated, “I think being an example is our role as a museum. We cannot say which one is right, can we?”. This suggests that museums should not disseminate specific values but only show them to visitors in the form of examples.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The overall aim of this research is to identify the process of recognizing the museum’s role in school-museum partnership using M-GTA analysis. This study revealed 18 concepts with seven subcategories and five categories. The relationship between the concepts and categories captured the process of the curator’s recognition of the role of museums in school-museum partnership.

For the curators to understand the museums’ role in school-museum partnership, the museum’s relationship with the local community is fundamental. The local community is both the object and the subject of the exhibition. Curators examine the local community, confirm their roles and significance, and continuously

update their perceptions. For curators, the presence of children is not only an object but also something that changes their perspectives on education and the community. Through educational programs at museums, curators attempt to understand future communities from the perspectives of children. Thus, cooperation with schools encourages curators to examine themselves and the role of museums. In particular, the difference in educational views between schools and museums was seen as an opportunity for curators to reconsider the educational significance of museums.

The findings of this study suggest that curators consider museums to be social spaces. Through interactions with local communities and schools, curators can rethink the significance of museums. In this interaction, museums are not merely exhibitions or viewing spaces. Through responses from schools, communities and interpretation, museums attempt to rethink their role. This is evident from the concept of “presenting beliefs”, including that society between people. Considering the museum as a social space is something that has been proposed from the standpoint of museum education research. For example, Dierking (2014) stated that “Successful museums in the 21st century will be those who figure out how to develop long-lasting, meaningful relationships with their public; that means thinking of those they serve as assemblages of individuals and not as some undefined, mass ‘public’” (p. 211). Also, diverse engagement with the community has enhanced the curator’s skills as a communicator as well as their self-awareness to act responsibly because “exhibiting will always be a contested terrain” (Longair, 2015). This view of the traditional museum as a social space for civic participation is indicative of the current museum’s constant questioning of its relationship with the local community.

Thus, curators confront collections based on foundations while coordinating their relationships with schools and considering local community demands. Through interactions with schools and the community, curators become aware of the museum’s role as a social space<sup>2</sup>.

The results suggest that the curators should be considered creators. Curators are also researchers and interpret the local community. However, the region and history that a museum exhibits are always a selection of the past. It is also clear that historical events and social phenomena of interest to curators are the impetus for the creation and presentation of exhibits. Social studies education can change the social space of the museum into a space for critical dialogue space by considering the curator as a “creator”. This is because social studies classes expose the power and violence hidden in exhibitions and create a society that continues to be renewed through dialogue with the curators about its realities. In the course of the research, curators were seen to be responsive to the needs of the community. This shows the potential for the museum to represent the local community in a certain (biased) way. This is why it is important for social studies classes to expose the “creator” aspect of curators located in the fictional sanctuary of the museum and to involve children in the interactive social space of the exhibition. The case study in this research was a history museum located in a rural area among Japanese museums. Therefore, for museums that are constantly faced with the challenge in how to build relationships with local communities, the fact that social studies classes view curators as “creators” may help change the relationship between schools and museums to one that is closer. Thus, if partnerships with curators in Japanese social studies classes can be considered, it will be possible to view “History is not static but is fluid” (Stoddard, 2018) in a more collaborative way.

When students recognize curators as “creators” in social studies classes, and when students involve children in the interactive social space of the exhibition, it is possible to consider how related expression and

perspective about history or exhibition can be connected to citizenship education. Partnership with curators in social studies classes is not only a Japanese issue but also an international one. Examining the ideal form of such partnerships based on the socio-cultural context of the relationship between schools and museums in various countries may provide an opportunity to consider public pedagogy in future social studies education research.

## Notes

1. The role of museum curators is different in Japan and other countries such as Europe and the United States (European Group on Museum Statistics, 2004; Japanese Association of Museums, 2014). For example, in public museums, curators are more focused on their ability to handle general administration jobs such as finance, and in addition, they are required to have more communication skills with the local community (Hamada, 2020). In the Japanese context, curators need to perform multiple aspects of museum work sometimes as registrars, restorers, and educators. Therefore, the authorship of curators is not often discussed, as in Bishop's (2007) and Fowle's (2007) discussion of the independent curator.
2. For example, Maley (2013) pointed out that concerns between teachers and curators are caused by their communication about museum visits. He suggests that revealed certain identifiable gaps in knowledge and expectations between teachers and museum educators, which if effectively addressed, may help to bridge the gulfs in their mutual practice.

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