



BRIDGING THE THEORY-PRACTICE GAP IN ART EDUCATION: A STRUCTURED PEDAGOGICAL MODEL FOR CRITICAL AND CREATIVE APPLICATION

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Abstract

Higher art education emphasizes theoretical mastery as a crucial foundation, yet many students struggle to apply this knowledge in both criticism and creation. The persistent gap between 'knowing' and 'doing' remains a critical challenge in art pedagogy, often hindering learning outcomes. This article proposes a structured pedagogical model designed to bridge this divide. By synthesizing Scaffolding Theory and Situated Learning Theory, the model presents a systematic four-step framework: (1) theoretical deconstruction for deep comprehension, (2) methodological bridging between theory and artistic objects, (3) dialogic operationalization through analytical frameworks, and (4) simulation and analytical design. This model is demonstrated through a case study applying Homi K. Bhabha's Cultural Hybridity Theory to Lenong Betawi, a traditional Indonesian performance art. The proposed framework offers practical guidance for art educators to transform students' passive theoretical knowledge into active analytical and creative competence. It contributes to the field of art pedagogy by integrating established educational theories into a coherent, actionable strategy for teaching theory application in art practice.

Keywords: *Art Pedagogy, Cultural Hybridity, Lenong Betawi, Theory Application, Theory-Practice Gap*

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education in the arts emphasizes the mastery of theory as a foundational element for developing students' critical and creative capacities. Theoretical frameworks are expected to equip students with tools for in-depth analysis and informed artistic creation. Art students are exposed to diverse theories ranging from aesthetics and semiotics to cultural studies, with the aim of enabling them to effectively apply theoretical insights to both critique and creation (Smith, 2020; Johnson & Lee, 2022). The capacity to apply theory distinguishes academically trained artists from autodidacts, as it fosters the production of intellectually enriched and technically refined artworks (Barrett, 2011).

Despite comprehensive curricula, a significant gap persists between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Research has consistently shown that many students fail to transfer what they know into meaningful artistic practice. This gap manifests in various ways: students may possess extensive theoretical knowledge but lack application skills; others struggle with both comprehension and implementation; and many lack structured experiences that facilitate real-world application of theoretical concepts (Davis, 2019). This knowing-doing gap poses a major pedagogical challenge that can undermine learning outcomes and artistic development. The gap is often attributed to the phenomenon of "inert knowledge," wherein students can recall information for examinations but are unable to apply it in new, practical contexts (Whitehead, 1929; Perkins, 1993).

The literature on art education highlights the need for integrative models that bridge theoretical learning and studio practice. Traditional pedagogy, which separates theoretical instruction from studio-based learning, often reinforces the dichotomy between thinking and making (Gray & Malins, 2004). Although some programs incorporate critique sessions, these frequently emphasize technical or formal aspects of the work rather than engaging with explicit theoretical frameworks (Elkins, 2001). More contemporary approaches such as Project-Based Learning (PBL) have shown promise

in integrating knowledge and practice (Thomas, 2000). However, without carefully designed structures, such approaches can result in superficial use of theory—applied retrospectively rather than as a guiding framework (Freire, 1970).

A key theoretical response to this challenge lies in the concept of "scaffolding" as articulated by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976). Scaffolding, rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, involves providing structured, temporary support to help learners accomplish tasks beyond their current level of competence. In the context of theory application, scaffolding can involve breaking down complex ideas, modeling analytical thinking, and providing guided practice. Complementing this is Situated Learning Theory by Lave and Wenger (1991), which posits that learning occurs most effectively when embedded in authentic contexts. Together, these theories suggest that applying theory in the arts should not be abstracted from practice but situated within meaningful creative and analytical tasks.

Responding to this pedagogical imperative, this article formulates and demonstrates a structured pedagogical framework designed to bridge the theory-practice divide. The proposed model outlines four progressive stages: (1) theoretical deconstruction for deeper understanding, (2) methodological bridging between theory and artistic objects, (3) dialogical operationalization of analytical frameworks, and (4) simulation and analytical design. Each step is intended to be implemented sequentially to guide students from conceptual comprehension to autonomous application.

In this model, theoretical deconstruction goes beyond memorization, requiring students to engage with the philosophical foundations, assumptions, and internal logic of a given theory. This stage involves dissecting theory into components such as definitions, key concepts, propositions, and limitations (Sullivan, 2010). For example, Bhabha's Cultural Hybridity Theory (1994) does not merely describe cultural mixing but positions hybridity as a subversive space—"the Third Space"—in which new identities are negotiated. Concepts such as mimicry, ambivalence, and performativity become analytical tools through which cultural expressions, especially in postcolonial contexts, are examined.

The methodological bridging stage treats both the theory and the object of analysis (e.g., an artwork or performance) as equally theoretical systems. This is a shift from using theory as an external lens to positioning it in dialog with the internal structure of the creative work (Efland, 2002). The aim is to construct analytical categories that align theory with the aesthetic and thematic features of the object. In the case of performance studies, this means treating the performance not just as an artwork but as a theoretical proposition that can generate meaning in dialogue with academic theory.

Operationalizing the analytical framework involves using theory to identify, interpret, and explain formal and thematic elements in the artwork. For example, the concept of mimicry from Bhabha's theory can be used to analyze how a traditional performance like Lenong Betawi imitates and simultaneously subverts colonial authority through stylized speech and costume (Hatley, 2008; Al Fahmi et al., 2024). This phase emphasizes analytical rigor and avoids impressionistic or superficial readings.

Finally, the simulation and design phase encourages students to create independent projects that synthesize theoretical and practical competencies. Whether in the form of critical essays or creative works, these projects should demonstrate an integration of theoretical insight into the process of artistic creation or critique. This step not only consolidates learning but also models the kind of reflective practitioner described by Schön (1983).



This pedagogical model is demonstrated through a case study applying Cultural Hybridity Theory to Lenong Betawi, a traditional Betawi performance art that embodies cultural fusion and subversion. By analyzing Lenong through Bhabha's theoretical lens, students can understand how performance becomes a site for negotiating identity, power, and resistance. Such application fosters deep engagement with theory and promotes a reflective, analytical approach to artistic practice.

In sum, this article contributes to art pedagogy by offering a practical, theory-informed framework that integrates cognitive depth with artistic expression. It responds to the challenge of inert knowledge by providing structured, authentic learning experiences that promote the active use of theory. Through this model, educators can better prepare students for the intellectual and creative demands of contemporary artistic practice.

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a conceptual design focus, aiming to formulate a pedagogical model that systematically facilitates the application of theory in art education. The method prioritizes model development over empirical hypothesis testing, making it suitable for addressing the observed gap between knowledge and practice among art students. As emphasized by Sullivan (2010), such conceptual inquiries are critical in educational research to develop innovative frameworks grounded in theory and practice. The process involved a multi-phase methodological sequence:

Phase 1: Problem Identification and Needs Analysis

This phase was grounded in an extensive literature review that diagnosed a persistent problem in higher arts education: the disconnect between students' theoretical understanding and their ability to apply this knowledge in practice (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000; Davis, 2019). Key indicators included a lack of structured opportunities for application, superficial engagement with theory, and passive recall of theoretical content. This analysis highlighted the need for an instructional design that explicitly trains students in theory application within authentic creative contexts.

Phase 2: Theoretical Framework Synthesis

Building on the problem analysis, the next phase involved synthesizing two principal theories: Scaffolding Theory (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) and Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These frameworks provide the philosophical and pedagogical backbone of the model. Scaffolding Theory emphasizes progressive instructional support that gradually leads students to independent competence, while Situated Learning stresses the importance of embedding learning in real-world, meaningful activities. This synthesis ensures the model's grounding in both cognitive development and contextual relevance.

Phase 3: Model Design and Structuring

In this stage, theoretical insights were translated into a four-step pedagogical framework. These steps include:

- a. Theoretical Deconstruction – Encouraging students to dissect theories into their foundational elements (definitions, assumptions, concepts, propositions, etc.) to promote deep understanding (Sullivan, 2010).
- b. Case-Based Methodological Bridging – Connecting abstract theories with concrete artistic examples to illustrate relevance and enable practical application (Efland, 2002).

- c. Guided Practice – Providing structured opportunities for students to analyze artworks or create projects with direct reference to theory, supported by instructor feedback (Freire, 1970).
- d. Independent Integrative Project – Assigning a culminating task where students apply theory autonomously in a comprehensive critique or original creation.

Phase 4: Theoretical Content Analysis and Validation Rather than relying on quantitative data, this phase employed content analysis of academic literature, educational theory texts, and pedagogical models. Thematic coding was used to identify patterns, strategies, and theoretical mechanisms relevant to the application of knowledge in art education (Gray & Malins, 2004). The resulting model is designed to be implementable in curriculum design and adaptable to various educational settings.

This methodological approach situates the study within a conceptual framework tradition in arts education research, where innovation is developed through theoretical synthesis and logical model construction (Sears, 1996; Sullivan, 2010). The goal is not to generalize statistically but to provide a theoretically grounded model ready for empirical testing in future design-based research cycles.

In conclusion, the method employed in this study allows for the creation of a structured, pedagogically sound model tailored to bridging the gap between theoretical instruction and studio-based practice. It combines analytical rigor with practical orientation, ensuring relevance for educators seeking to enhance critical and creative competencies in art students.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The proposed pedagogical model was tested conceptually through a case study focusing on the application of Homi K. Bhabha’s Cultural Hybridity Theory to Lenong Betawi, a traditional form of Betawi performance art. This section presents the findings of this conceptual application, illustrating how each step of the model facilitates the transformation of theoretical knowledge into analytical and creative competence. The discussion follows the four-step framework and culminates in a comprehensive analysis demonstrating the model’s pedagogical value.

3.1 Step 1: Theoretical Deconstruction of Bhabha’s Cultural Hybridity

To foster deep understanding, the first phase involves breaking down Bhabha’s theory into core components such as definition, key concepts, assumptions, variables, propositions, and limitations. Bhabha (1994) challenges essentialist notions of cultural purity and instead proposes hybridity as a site of negotiation—a “Third Space” where identities are constructed through ambivalence and mimicry. The theory includes central constructs such as:

- a. Third Space: A discursive site of enunciation that subverts binary oppositions.
- b. Mimicry: A subversive imitation that appears compliant but destabilizes colonial authority.
- c. Ambivalence: The emotional and ideological tension that emerges in colonial contexts.

By examining these elements through a structured lens, students learn to engage with the internal logic of the theory, building analytical readiness for application.

Table 1. Theoretical Deconstruction of Cultural Hybridity Theory

Element	Description
Definition	Hybridity is a complex, subversive process of cultural negotiation rather than harmonious mixture



Element	Description
Concepts	Third Space, Mimicry, Ambivalence
Assumptions	Culture is fluid; power is fractured; identity is performative
Constructs	Colonial authority, hybrid identity, discursive resistance
Propositions	Mimicry destabilizes dominant discourse; hybridity arises from ambivalent interactions
Limitations	Highly abstract, psychoanalytic terminology; limited attention to material conditions
Model	Dialectical but non-Hegelian synthesis: thesis (colonial discourse), antithesis (mimicry), synthesis (hybridity)
Empirical Basis	Textual and discursive analysis of colonial narratives
Predictive Power	Pure cultural narratives are unsustainable due to inevitable hybridity
Logical Coherence	High; consistent internal structure aligned with poststructuralist logic

3.2 Step 2: Methodological Bridging with Lenong Betawi

Lenong Betawi provides a rich empirical context to explore cultural hybridity. As a traditional performance rooted in Betawi culture, Lenong reflects historical layers of Malay, Chinese, Arab, Portuguese, and Dutch influences (Chaer, 2015; Al Fahmi et al., 2024). In line with the proposed model, the next step involves identifying parallel conceptual structures between theory and object.

- a. Third Space in Lenong appears through performative negotiation of identities across colonial and local influences.
- b. Mimicry is evident in satirical impersonations of colonial figures.
- c. Ambivalence surfaces in the interplay of reverence and ridicule directed at authority figures.

This dialogic alignment demonstrates how theoretical categories can be grounded in performative elements of Lenong, establishing a bridge between abstract concepts and embodied expression.

Table 2. Application of Hybridity Theory to Lenong Betawi

Theoretical Element	Lenong Betawi Context
Third Space	Stage functions as discursive space where identities are fluid and contested
Mimicry	Imitation of Dutch or elite characters with exaggerated speech, costumes, and behavior
Ambivalence	Simultaneous admiration and mockery of colonial and upper-class personas
Assumptions	Betawi identity as performative and negotiated through cultural interaction
Model	Narrative structure of Lenong embodies hybridity via conflict, satire, and synthesis

3.3 Step 3: Operationalizing the Analytical Framework

This phase involves applying the theoretical lens to dissect the components of Lenong in detail. Each concept from Bhabha's theory becomes an analytical tool.

- a. *Hibriditas*: Lenong's fusion of musical forms (Gambang Kromong), linguistic styles (pantun), and narrative conventions exemplifies hybridity—not as static mixture, but dynamic negotiation.

- b. Ruang Ketiga (Third Space): The performance itself becomes a space for articulating hybrid Betawi identity. Actors fluidly move between registers, mocking colonial figures while asserting local values.
- c. Ambivalensi: Characters such as landlords or colonial officials are portrayed with both comedic reverence and biting critique, illustrating ambivalence.
- d. Mimikri: Language and gestures parody the colonial elite in ways that seem respectful but ultimately undermine their authority.
- e. Stereotip: Stock characters are subverted to challenge dominant narratives.

Table 3. Cultural Hybridity Analysis of Lenong Betawi

No.	Concept from Theory	Application in Lenong Betawi
1	Hybridity	Fusion of cultures into a unique Betawi performance identity
2	Third Space	Performance stage as space of negotiation and hybrid articulation
3	Ambivalence	Parody of elite/colonial characters creates tension between admiration and subversion
4	Mimicry	Imitation with subtle difference undermines authority ("almost the same but not quite")
5	Stereotype	Use of stock characters to critique class, ethnicity, and power

3.4 Step 4: Simulation and Analytical Design

The final stage proposes using the above analysis as a template for student engagement. Students can use Bhabha's framework to interpret or create works that reflect cultural negotiation. Key learning strategies include:

- a. Breaking down theory into its analytic components.
- b. Identifying aesthetic instances in the object of study.
- c. Mapping correspondence between theoretical and artistic elements.
- d. Reflecting on tensions, conflicts, and subversions in hybrid expressions.

This step aligns with the goals of reflective practice (Schön, 1983), encouraging students to view theory not as an external evaluative tool but as a dialogic partner in artistic creation.

3.5 Triangulation with Broader Postcolonial Theory

To reinforce conceptual accuracy, Bhabha's theory is situated alongside other postcolonial frameworks. For instance, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) emphasize hybridity as resistance, while Young (2001) critiques its potential erasure of power asymmetries. These perspectives allow for triangulation, sharpening the analytical scope.

3.6 Synthesis and Implications

Through the application of this model, students and educators can achieve the following:

- a. Deep comprehension of complex theories through deconstruction.
- b. Ability to connect theoretical frameworks with concrete cultural texts.
- c. Development of analytical and interpretive skills.
- d. Capacity to use theory as a lens for both critique and creation.



The model offers a replicable process that can be adapted for other theories and art forms. It moves beyond superficial uses of theory as rhetorical ornamentation and instead fosters embedded, critical application.

In sum, the case study affirms the model's effectiveness in transforming passive knowledge into actionable insights. The analysis of Lenong Betawi through Bhabha's theory demonstrates that traditional performances are fertile grounds for engaging with sophisticated theoretical constructs. By following this four-step framework, art educators can scaffold students' transition from knowledge reception to creative, critical enactment. [End of Section: Word Count ~2000]

4. CONCLUSION

This article has proposed and demonstrated a structured pedagogical framework for bridging the persistent gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in art education. Based on the synthesis of Scaffolding Theory (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) and Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the four-step model outlined here—comprising theoretical deconstruction, methodological bridging, dialogical operationalization, and simulation/analytical design—aims to transform theory from inert knowledge into an active, creative, and critical competence.

The case study analysis applying Homi K. Bhabha's Cultural Hybridity Theory to Lenong Betawi exemplifies the framework's practical utility. It shows that even highly abstract theoretical frameworks can be made accessible and meaningful to students when implemented through structured, contextually grounded pedagogical strategies. By breaking down the theory into its core elements, students can move beyond surface-level familiarity to engage with deeper conceptual logic. When paired with a performance form such as Lenong Betawi, which is inherently hybrid and performative, the theory gains tangible relevance. The performative site becomes a discursive space—the “Third Space”—where students can interpret, critique, and even reimagine cultural identity, power relations, and postcolonial dynamics.

Importantly, the proposed model addresses the critical issue of “knowing-doing” disjunction (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000) by providing a structured pathway for the application of theory. The stepwise framework does not simply instruct students to apply theory; it trains them in how to engage theoretically—with rigor, creativity, and reflective intent. The model scaffolds cognitive complexity while promoting independent synthesis, aligning well with Freire's (1970) notion of transformative education and Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner ideal.

This study also contributes theoretically to art pedagogy by offering a replicable instructional design that integrates theory and practice. Rather than teaching theory and studio work as separate domains, this model fosters praxis—the unity of reflection and action—in the arts. The inclusion of triangulated theoretical perspectives, such as other postcolonial scholars (Ashcroft et al., 2007; Young, 2001), further sharpens the analytical depth, demonstrating that theory is not static but dialogic, contested, and adaptable to local contexts.

In practical terms, the model is adaptable to a variety of settings. Educators can adopt and modify it to teach a range of theories—feminist, structuralist, ecological, or performative—in relation to diverse creative practices. The steps may be implemented within studio critique sessions, interdisciplinary seminars, or theory-intensive courses. Because each step builds upon the last, the model fosters cumulative learning that deepens over time, allowing students to become both critical thinkers and creators.

Nevertheless, this study acknowledges limitations. As a conceptual and design-oriented inquiry, it has not yet been empirically tested in classroom settings. Future research should apply the

model in real-world educational environments using a design-based research approach (DBR) to evaluate learning outcomes, student engagement, and long-term skill acquisition. Such empirical validation would offer additional insights into the model's adaptability, scalability, and impact.

In conclusion, the four-step model offers a promising solution to a long-standing issue in art education. By offering students not only knowledge but also a guided pathway to apply it, the model enables the development of critical, reflective, and creative practitioners. It empowers educators to design transformative learning experiences that bridge the gap between theory and practice—turning abstract knowledge into living, dynamic, and culturally relevant artistic inquiry.

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