Art Horizons
ISSN Print: 3079-5176
ISSN Online: 3079-5184
https://doi.org/10.63313/ah.9062

The Logic and Practical Pathways of a "Three-in-One" Approach to Cultivating Humanistic Literacy among Pre-service Art Teachers — A Case Study of Xinyang Normal University

Chen Chen
School of Fine Arts and Design, Xinyang Normal University, Xinyang 464000, Henan, China

How to cite this paper: Chen, C. (2026). The logic and practical pathways of a "three-in-one" approach to cultivating humanistic literacy among pre-service art teachers — A case study of Xinyang Normal University. Art Horizons, 3(3), 10–18. ISSN Print: 3079-5176, ISSN Online: 3079-5184.
https://doi.org/10.63313/ah.9062
Published: 2026-10-16

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Erytis Publishing Limited.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Abstract

Fine Arts teacher education sits at the intersection of professional art training and the preparation of future school teachers. Students therefore need more than technical proficiency. They also need to understand the historical, social, and cultural meanings carried by works of art and, more importantly, to recast that understanding in forms that are teachable in primary and secondary schools. Drawing on the context of Xinyang Normal University and the cultural resources of southern Henan, this paper develops a “three-in-one” model that links curriculum integration, practical experience, and cultural immersion. The model does not create a separate humanities track. Instead, humanistic learning is woven into art history and theory, studio work, teacher-education courses, field investigation, microteaching, and school-based practice. Particular attention is given to Luoshan shadow puppetry, Xinyang paper-cutting, Xinyang Maojian tea culture, and Dabie Mountains revolutionary art. Growth portfolios and multi-source assessment are proposed as practical ways to document development in cultural understanding, artistic expression, pedagogical transformation, reflection, and cultural responsibility. The aim is to offer a workable reform approach for local normal universities rather than a large-scale institutional redesign.

Keywords

Pre-Service Art Teachers; Humanistic Literacy; Three-In-One Approach; Teacher Education; Regional Culture

1. Statement of the Problem

The preparation of future art teachers contains a practical contradiction. As students move through university, professional study becomes increasingly specialized: painting, design, art history, materials, techniques, and studio practice are often taught in separate blocks. Yet the school classroom asks teachers to

reconnect what higher education has separated. A lesson on an artwork rarely concerns form alone. Teachers must also discuss historical background, social life, cultural values, and the ways younger learners might respond. Humanistic literacy, then, is not an optional addition to professional training. It is part of what makes professional knowledge teachable.

This point has become more visible in recent policy and curriculum reform. The Ministry of Education's accreditation framework for teacher-education programs emphasizes student-centered learning, outcome orientation, and continuous improvement, requiring programs to organize teaching and assessment around the competencies expected of graduates [1]. National policy on aesthetic education likewise places aesthetic and humanistic development within the broader aims of talent cultivation [2]. The Compulsory Education Arts Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) position "cultural understanding" alongside aesthetic perception, artistic expression, and creative practice [3]. Yin Shaochun and Chen Meifeng note that this change signals a move away from fragmented knowledge-and-skill training toward competency-oriented curriculum design [4]. For universities, the implication is clear: future art teachers must learn not only to make and interpret art, but also to organize meaningful cultural learning for school students.

The difficulty lies less in whether universities offer humanistic content than in how that content enters professional preparation. Adding several elective courses in literature or history may enrich students' knowledge, but it does not automatically connect that knowledge with studio practice or classroom teaching. Likewise, museum visits, sketching trips, or lectures can become episodic experiences if students are not required to document, interpret, transform, and reuse what they encounter. Assessment creates another problem. When evaluation focuses mainly on technical skill and finished artworks, cultural understanding, educational communication, and reflective judgment remain largely invisible. The reform proposed here therefore centers on connection rather than addition: linking professional courses, authentic practice, and the cultural environment so that humanistic learning becomes part of the normal rhythm of teacher preparation.

2. The Role of Humanistic Literacy in Pre-service Art Teacher Education

"Humanistic literacy" is broad enough to become vague unless it is translated into observable learning expectations. In the context of Fine Arts teacher education, four dimensions are especially relevant. First, students should be able to place artworks and visual practices within concrete historical and social settings. Second, they should be able to explain aesthetic judgments with reasons rather than rely on personal preference alone. Third, they should be able to express cultural experience through artistic media such as painting, design, and mixed materials. Fourth, and most distinctively for teacher education, they should be able to transform cultural

understanding into learning content that is suitable for school students. The first three dimensions support professional art study; the fourth turns that study toward the work of teaching.

Once these dimensions are made explicit, the relationship among courses changes. In Chinese Art History, for instance, students need not stop at names, dates, and stylistic labels. They can investigate how images relate to ritual, local customs, social values, and everyday life. Studio courses can then ask students to respond visually to those cultural questions. Teacher-education courses such as Art Pedagogy can take the process one step further by asking what part of that knowledge is age-appropriate, how difficult concepts might be reframed, and what kind of activity could preserve cultural meaning without becoming impractical in a school setting. Knowledge, making, and teaching thus form a sequence rather than three isolated tasks.

Research on intangible cultural heritage in university aesthetic education has increasingly moved in this direction. Han Dan and Cheng Sijia argue that heritage education in normal universities should not remain at the level of display or occasional activity, but should be supported through sustained curricular mechanisms [5]. Zou Tong and Zou Dongsheng likewise stress the need to connect cultural literacy, technical practice, and innovative transformation in university art education [6]. These studies suggest that local culture becomes educationally meaningful not when a traditional craft is simply introduced into a class, but when students repeatedly move between understanding, making, and teaching.

3. Foundations for Integrating Xinyang's Local Cultural Resources with Professional Training

The Xinyang context provides a concrete setting in which this model can be developed. The School of Fine Arts and Design at Xinyang Normal University offers undergraduate programs in Fine Arts, Environmental Design, and Visual Communication Design, along with professional master's programs in art and in Subject Teaching (Fine Arts). It has also developed practice spaces such as the Dabie Mountains red-culture art creation center, painting and design studios, a ceramics studio, and a teaching recording room [7]. These facilities are already used for professional training; with modest adjustment, they can also support locally grounded creation, microteaching, and the development of teaching resources.

Local culture offers a rich but manageable set of materials. Luoshan shadow puppetry brings together opera, music, literature, paper-cutting, painting, and handcraft. Its figures, color systems, performance conventions, and local language form a coherent folk-art ecology; as part of Chinese shadow puppetry, it is included on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity [8]. Xinyang Maojian tea culture has a different structure, linking production, utensils, customs, spatial aesthetics, and visual communication. Municipal plans encourage

the use of tea history, customs, songs, techniques, and related cultural resources in schools and communities [9], while broader development planning also supports the creative transformation of local intangible cultural heritage through design, cultural products, and study-tour activities [10].

Yet the existence of local resources is not enough. Educational use requires selection. Some materials have a clear documentary basis and are suitable for field inquiry; others lend themselves to visual analysis or studio experimentation; still others can be transformed into tasks for younger learners. The central question is therefore not how many "Xinyang elements" can be inserted into the curriculum, but whether a resource can move through a complete process of verification, interpretation, artistic transformation, and pedagogical redesign. Only then does local culture become a teacher-education resource rather than a decorative theme.

4. Operational Mechanism of the "Curriculum Integration-Practical Experience-Cultural Immersion" Model

4.1. Curriculum Integration: Embedding Humanistic Content in Professional Learning

Curriculum integration begins with existing courses rather than with the creation of a new compulsory module. Art history and theory courses can include small research tasks on topics such as images and local society, traditional craft and everyday life, or revolutionary art and visual narrative. Studio courses can use local cultural inquiry as part of the preparation for making, asking students to explain the origin of visual materials, the cultural meaning of selected motifs, and the reasons behind their artistic choices. Teacher-education courses can then work with those earlier outputs and turn them into lesson plans, questions, demonstrations, or learning activities. The purpose is not to overload students but to make work completed in one course useful in another.

Luoshan shadow puppetry illustrates how this can work. Students might first examine figure types, color conventions, and performance contexts in a history or theory course. In studio work, they could explore proportion, cut-out rhythm, color organization, or light-and-shadow relationships without mechanically copying traditional forms. During lesson planning, the same topic can be reorganized for junior secondary students into a sequence of cultural background, visual observation, hands-on exploration, and discussion of student work. When one cultural question travels through several courses, students are more likely to see that technique and culture are inseparable rather than competing parts of the curriculum.

Xinyang Maojian tea culture can be treated in a similar way. Design students might examine packaging, utensils, tea spaces, or historical visual materials; painting students might work with tea-picking labor, plantation environments, or scenes of local life. In Art Pedagogy, the issue changes again: the concern is no longer simply

how to represent tea culture, but how to create an activity through which school students can observe, compare, design, and make. This shift mirrors the work teachers actually do—selecting content, organizing experience, and explaining significance.

4.2. Practical Experience: Moving Beyond One-off Study Trips

Outdoor sketching and field visits have long been strengths of art education, but their educational value depends on the task structure. Without clear expectations, students may return with drawings and photographs yet have little material that can later be used in a classroom. For pre-service teachers, field experience should therefore include documentation, interpretation, and transformation. A three-level arrangement is workable: campus simulation, local fieldwork, and school-based teaching. Different courses can take responsibility for different stages, so the sequence can be completed across a semester rather than within a single module.

Campus simulation focuses on the question of how to teach. In a recording classroom or microteaching setting, students can present short lessons based on a local cultural topic. Peer feedback can move beyond delivery skills and consider whether the cultural explanation is accurate, whether questions are sequenced effectively, and whether practical activities support rather than distract from the central idea. Local fieldwork addresses a different question: where does teaching material come from? Small groups can visit cultural centers, heritage practice sites, tea-culture spaces, or rural communities and produce concise resource files that record image sources, interview summaries, craft processes, key concepts, and any limitations on use.

The strongest test comes when selected materials enter school classrooms. Where partnerships are available, university teachers, school art teachers, and pre-service teachers can prepare lessons together. After teaching, the lesson should not immediately be labeled a "successful case." Student work, observation notes, and teacher reflections should be retained, compared, and used to revise the design. This is the point at which action research becomes concrete: improvement is driven by what actually happened in the classroom, not by conclusions written in advance.

4.3. Cultural Immersion: Extending Learning Beyond the Formal Lesson

Humanistic literacy develops slowly. If local culture appears only in a few classes or during a short practice week, students are unlikely to develop a lasting sensitivity to cultural context. Cultural immersion therefore concerns duration as much as content. Corridors, studios, exhibition areas, and digital platforms can operate as open learning spaces. Small exhibitions, student-curated displays, and the writing of labels or short curatorial texts can make local culture part of everyday academic life rather than a one-off event.

Digital resource building should also remain practical. Instead of beginning with a

large database, the School can accumulate verified materials from normal coursework: a carefully sourced set of shadow-puppet images, an authorized interview with a heritage practitioner, a classroom-ready collection of tea-culture visuals, or a lesson plan revised after two teaching cycles. Over time, such materials can become a local art-education resource package owned and maintained by the School. Students then participate not only as users of culture, but also as responsible contributors to a shared professional resource.

5. An Implementation Plan Oriented toward Authentic Teaching

A semester-based structure can keep the model manageable. In the first four weeks, students complete introductory reading and choose a local cultural topic. Weeks five to eight are used for field investigation and professional creation. Weeks nine to twelve focus on lesson planning and microteaching. Weeks thirteen to fifteen are reserved for classroom use or, where school access is not possible, structured simulation. The final week is used for presentation, peer discussion, and reflection. Each course contributes only the stage that matches its own learning outcomes; continuity comes from the way assignments are handed from one course to the next. This arrangement also helps control workload. A Chinese Art History paper can become the textual basis of a cultural resource file. An artwork from a studio course can later be used as an example in a lesson plan. A microteaching recording can be included in a growth portfolio before the formal practicum. In this way, existing assignments are connected rather than multiplied. For local normal universities, this matters: a reform model is more likely to survive when it can operate inside the existing curriculum instead of depending on an additional layer of courses and projects.

Ethical boundaries should be written into the process. Oral histories, artworks, and craft processes belonging to heritage practitioners need clear attribution and, where appropriate, permission. Materials linked to ritual, belief, or community identity should not be reduced to attractive motifs for decorative use. Revolutionary cultural resources likewise require historical grounding. Respect for evidence, authorship, labor, and community agency is not separate from humanistic literacy; it is one of its clearest practical expressions.

6. Assessment: Making Student Growth Observable

Humanistic literacy is not well captured by a single test, but it can still be assessed through evidence. A growth portfolio is more suitable than a large, abstract scale because it keeps attention on what students actually produce. Five areas are particularly useful: cultural knowledge and understanding, aesthetic judgment and artistic expression, pedagogical transformation, practice and reflection, and cultural responsibility. Since the students are preparing to become teachers, pedagogical transformation deserves the greatest weight.

Table 1. Observation Dimensions and Main Evidence for Assessing Humanistic Literacy among Pre-service Art Teachers

Assessment Dimension	Core Observation	Main Evidence	Suggested Weight
Cultural knowledge and understanding	Explains relationships among artworks, techniques, historical context, and local social life.	Course papers; resource files; reading records	20%
Aesthetic judgment and artistic expression	Makes context-based judgments and translates them into visual expression.	Artworks; design statements; curatorial texts	20%
Pedagogical transformation	Reorganizes cultural resources as age-appropriate learning content for primary and secondary schools.	Lesson plans; microteaching; classroom recordings	30%
Practice and reflection	Revises plans in response to issues encountered in fieldwork and classrooms.	Interview records; practice journals; reflective reports	20%
Cultural responsibility	Uses materials responsibly and respects cultural subjects, authorship, and sources.	Permission records; source citations; project statements	10%

7. Assessment: Making Student Growth Observable (continued)

Assessment should be distributed across the semester. A useful sequence is baseline diagnosis, process documentation, practice feedback, and final presentation. Baseline work might involve an artwork interpretation or a short lesson plan rather than a large standardized test. Process documentation can rely on ordinary course tasks. Practice feedback can come from school mentors, peers, and learners. The final stage compares evidence produced by the same student at different points. For a developmental construct such as humanistic literacy, this kind of longitudinal evidence is often more informative than a single score.

Assessment also needs to influence curriculum decisions. If students can make competent artworks but cannot produce a well-supported cultural interpretation, earlier reading and art-history work may need strengthening. If lesson plans are sophisticated on paper but prove inaccessible to school students, the problem lies in pedagogical translation. If fieldwork produces abundant material but little that can be reused, documentation and resource organization need attention. Continuous improvement becomes meaningful only when evaluation leads back to changes in teaching [1].

8. Supporting Mechanisms and Limits of Transferability

The model requires coordination, but not a large administrative structure. A small working group can bring together teachers from art history and theory, studio practice, and subject teaching. Each semester, the group can select one or two cultural themes, agree on shared tasks, and define basic outcome standards. School

art teachers, cultural workers, and heritage practitioners can participate when their expertise is relevant. Their roles should remain distinct: university instructors safeguard academic quality and curriculum coherence; school teachers judge classroom feasibility; local cultural practitioners contribute situated knowledge.

The approach also has limits. Not every local cultural item belongs in every course, and cultural immersion cannot replace systematic professional training. More importantly, this paper presents a workable reform framework rather than empirical proof of "significant effects." Claims about impact require further evidence from pre- and post-intervention tasks, interviews, classroom observation, and student portfolios. That slower, evidence-based process is preferable to overstating results that have not yet been demonstrated.

9. Conclusion

The challenge in cultivating humanistic literacy among pre-service art teachers is not simply a shortage of content. Xinyang already has rich cultural resources, and teachers generally recognize their educational value. The harder task is to build stable links among professional learning, cultural experience, and school teaching. The three-in-one model responds to that challenge by embedding humanistic work in the curriculum, testing it through authentic practice, and extending it through the everyday cultural environment of the School.

For Xinyang Normal University, Dabie Mountains revolutionary culture, Luoshan shadow puppetry, Xinyang Maojian tea culture, and the folk arts of southern Henan are valuable because they are nearby, accessible, and suitable for repeated inquiry. Their significance lies not in adding a local label to the curriculum, but in enabling students to observe, document, interpret, create, teach, and revise within the same cultural context. As more survey data, action-research records, and school-based materials become available, the present framework can be tested across year levels, course types, and forms of practice, providing a stronger empirical basis for future teacher-education reform.

Acknowledgements

Funding: Henan Province Teacher Education Curriculum Reform Research Project, "Research on a Three-in-One Pathway for Enhancing Humanistic Literacy among Fine Arts Majors within Teacher Education."

References

[1] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. Notice on Issuing the Implementation Measures for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs in Regular Higher Education Institutions (Interim) [EB/OL]. (2017-10-26) [2026-09-21]. https://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A10/s7011/201711/t20171106_318535.html. (in Chinese)

[2] General Office of the CPC Central Committee; General Office of the State Council. Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education

in the New Era [EB/OL]. (2020-10-15) [2026-09-21]. https://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/moe_1777/moe_1778/202010/t20201015_494794.html. (in Chinese)

[3] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. Compulsory Education Arts Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) [S]. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 2022. (in Chinese)

[4] YIN Shaochun, CHEN Meifeng. Major Changes in the Fine Arts Curriculum Standards in the Compulsory Education Arts Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) [J]. Fujian Education, 2022(27): 21-24. (in Chinese)

[5] HAN Dan, CHENG Sijia. The Value, Current Situation, and Pathways of Integrating Intangible Cultural Heritage into University Aesthetic Education: A Case Study of Theme-based ICH Aesthetic Education in Normal Universities [J]. China University Teaching, 2025(3): 44-51. (in Chinese)

[6] ZOU Tong, ZOU Dongsheng. Optimizing Practical Pathways for Integrating Intangible Cultural Heritage into University Art Education [J]. Education Development Review, 2025. (in Chinese)

[7] Admissions and Employment Office, Xinyang Normal University. Undergraduate Program Introduction - School of Fine Arts and Design [EB/OL]. (2026-06-09) [2026-09-21]. https://zs.xynu.edu.cn/info/1007/1290.htm. (in Chinese)

[8] Xinyang Municipal People's Government. Shadow Puppetry [EB/OL]. (2025-11-17) [2026-09-21]. https://www.xinyang.gov.cn/2025/11-17/727976.html. (in Chinese)

[9] General Office of Xinyang Municipal People's Government. Three-Year Action Plan for the High-Quality Development of Xinyang's Tea Industry (2023-2025) [EB/OL]. (2024-04-12) [2026-09-21]. https://www.xinyang.gov.cn/2024/04-12/554760.html. (in Chinese)

[10] Xinyang Municipal People's Government. Outline of the Fifteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of Xinyang City [EB/OL]. (2026-06-17) [2026-09-21]. https://www.xinyang.gov.cn/2026/06-17/790500.html. (in Chinese)