



INVESTIGATING THE AESTHETIC DOMAIN OF THE “EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK” FOR YOUNG STUDENTS IN TAIWAN

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ABSTRACT

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Aesthetic education is fundamental to young children’s holistic development and future lives. The development of aesthetic sensibility has been promoted in early childhood education in various countries and is an important issue in Taiwan’s current educational practice. This paper aims to examine the aesthetic domain of the *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework*, promulgated by the Taiwan’s Ministry of Education, highlighting the importance of aesthetic education for young children in Taiwan. The objective of this research study is to better understand the aesthetic education of Taiwan’s young children, and provide insight for preschool teachers who implement aesthetic education. The findings are as follows: (1) the goals of aesthetic domain in the curriculum framework is to help young children enjoy aesthetic experience and artistic creation, and develop rich imagination, and respond to feelings and preferences for artistic creation of young children; (2) the aesthetic domain includes the development of “exploration and awareness”, “performance and creation”, and “response and appreciation”; (3) the learning aspect of the aesthetic domain is divided into two parts: “affection” and “artistic media”; (4) teachers should also pay attention to appropriate arts and cultural activities so the young children can experience their own local culture. If preschool teachers open their eyes and ears, they can guide young children to share in the beauty and joy of life. This paper provides discourses of preschool teachers who design an aesthetic education curriculum and offers practical, concrete suggestions that can support the aesthetic education of young children in Taiwan.

Contribution/Originality: This paper contributes to early aesthetic education in Taiwan by examining the aesthetic domain of the *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework*. It provides valuable insights about the praxis of aesthetic education for young children in Taiwan.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Aesthetic domain” refers to an experience of discerning good things that is actively constructed by an individual’s inner feelings. The aesthetic domain aims to help young children perceive beauty in the environment, enrich their imagination and engage in artistic creation, while developing their aesthetic sensitivity and preferences. The ability to perceive beauty is generally interpreted through personal imagination or experience and keen senses. When used in education or learning context, this “aesthetic domain” leads to inner feelings and pleasure, and helps

young students perceive the beauty of things and enjoy rich aesthetic experience. This also inspires young children to respond to their outward exploration with enthusiasm, and generate emotions connected with their environment, thereby developing concern for the natural environment and the identity of social culture. The aesthetic domain is the format for personal aesthetic preferences and literacy, and it cultivates young children's sensitivity to their environment, evoking rich thoughts and creative potential (TMoE, 2017). Young children are born with the potential to explore and perceive good things, but this potential needs to be accumulated and gradually developed through aesthetic experiences. The aesthetic experiences of early childhood are mainly based on the ability to explore and the ability of awareness. Young children are full of curiosity about all kinds of things in the environment around them, and they like to explore and perceive different things. When young children are interested, they will use artistic media such as visual images, sound rhythms, body rhythms and dramas, or performance. Young children display their imagination, creativity and self-expression when they face their or others' artistic creations. Young children also have personal feelings and opinions (TMoE, 2017).

Aesthetic development is promoted right from early childhood education in many countries. In Taiwan, too, aesthetic education is fundamental to young children's holistic development. The Ministry of Education in Taiwan acknowledges the importance of aesthetic education in early schooling. Early childhood education is the foundation of all later stages of education; accordingly, the Ministry introduced the *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework*, which incorporates the aesthetic domain in children' curriculum. This framework is a guideline for preschool curricula in Taiwan and pursues goals for young children such as: to support physical and mental health, to develop good habits, to enrich life experience, to promote ethical concepts, to cultivate gregarious habits, to expand the aesthetic experience, to develop creative thinking, to help construct early childhood cultural identity, and inspire care for the environment. The *Framework* contains six domains, one of which is aesthetic. Thus, it is required in Taiwan that the implementation of preschool education should support aesthetic education. This paper examines the aesthetic domain of the *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework* in order to understand the aesthetic domain in preschool curriculum as followed in Taiwan pre-schools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Connotations in the Aesthetic Domain

The aesthetic domain has diverse connotations. In daily life, young children often have the opportunity to explore natural phenomena such as flowers, grass, fish, animals, plants, rain, rainbows, etc. At the same time, young children are interested in utensils used in daily life, devices they see, and even architectural elements in the environment. These experiences build up the aesthetic domain which can include tenets such as : the development of "exploration and awareness", "performance and creation", and "response and appreciation". Through the process of exploration and awareness, young children can sharpen their visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory and tactile sensations. "Exploration and awareness" means that young children explore with keen senses and perceptions, perceiving the beauty of things around them. Young children use things such as trees, shrubs, sand or bottles to enjoy life, and they use their own voice, body, or spoken language to express inner feelings and imagination. Individuals or groups can display their creativity through performance (TMoE, 2017). Second, "performance and creation" indicates that young children try to use various forms of artistic media to stimulate their imagination with unique expressions and creations. "Response and appreciation," the third principle in the aesthetic domain, refers to young children's diverse artistic creations or expressions in their environment, and expressing their feelings and preferences. In daily life or in games, young children have many opportunities for artistic creation or performance. Usually younger children respond intuitively to these creations with physical movements or vocal expressions, such as watching, clapping, and smiling. Older children will gradually come to describe or express their feelings and opinions in more complex ways (TMoE, 2017). In Taiwan's context, the introduction of *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework* has facilitated the use of the aesthetic domain for the education of young children.

For young children, it is appropriate to adopt the aesthetic domain to acknowledge their creative potential and ability for creative expression (Sharp, 2001). Likewise, Chen (2017) advocates “aesthetic domain” for intermediate as well as long term plans in education and argues that aesthetic education should be introduced from early schooling. This can be achieved by developing young children’s aesthetic perception and enriching their aesthetic experiences through arts education. In consistent with these principles, aesthetic programs are being promoted in Taiwan’s preschools with the goal of development of early childhood.

2.2. Goals in the Aesthetic Domain

The goals of aesthetic domain in the *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework* in Taiwan (The Ministry of Education, 2017) are to help young children:

- (1) Explore the beauty of the material world.
- (2) Enjoy aesthetic experience and artistic creation.
- (3) Develop rich imagination.
- (4) Respond to feelings and preferences for artistic creation.

The goals of aesthetic domain in the curriculum framework are therefore to help young children enjoy aesthetic experience and artistic creation, and develop rich imagination, and respond to feelings and preferences for artistic creation of young children.

2.3. Learning Aspect in the Aesthetic Domain

The learning aspect of the aesthetic domain is divided into two parts: “affection” and “artistic media”. “Affection” means that young children should be able to feel positive affection and pleasure in different aesthetic experiences, as well as in their creative activities. In other words, young children should engage in aesthetic activities, and their teachers should let them have fun in the process (TMOE, 2017). “Artistic media” includes visual arts, music and drama. It refers to the artistic expression of personal emotions and imaginative creativity in art or craft through craft tools and materials. These tools include pens, scissors, glues, plastic tables, staplers, and punchers. The source of visual artistic appreciation is mainly found in the creation of young children or their peers. Picture books, online materials, or exhibitions can help expand children’s appreciation of visual art. Young children should be encouraged to pay attention to forms, colors, shapes, line, materials and other forms of expression, expressing their opinions according to their own feelings or preferences (TMOE, 2017).

2.4. Curriculum Aspect of the Aesthetic Domain

For building the curriculum of pre-schools in Taiwan, the domain of aesthetics includes a host of principles which are as follows (TMOE, 2017):

- 2.4.1. Have Pleasant Aesthetic Experiences in the Living Environment
- 2.4.2. Use the Five Senses to Feel the Various Forms of Beauty in the Living Environment
- 2.4.3. Plays Imagination and Carries out Personal Creations
- 2.4.3. Use Various Forms of Artistic Media for Creation
- 2.4.4. Engage With Diverse Artistic Creations and Respond to Personal Feelings
- 2.4.5. Appreciate Artistic Creations or Performances, and Express Personal Views

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study sampled randomly 30 pre-school teachers in Taiwan employed under the Ministry of Education and teaching Aesthetic curriculum to young children. Interviews with open ended questions were conducted with all these pre-school teachers. The primary purpose was to find out whether aesthetic education aroused young children’s instinct for aesthetic experience and whether they derived joy and satisfaction from the

interactive process of “doing” and “accepting”. These preschool teachers were adequately trained in the aesthetic curriculum which helped in creating a rich aesthetic environment. With the help of multiple artistic media, text books, with sufficient time and space, they provided artistic activities appropriate to the characteristics of each child, giving them the opportunity to explore and develop their creative potential. According to the different subjective and objective conditions of individual preschools and urban-rural differences, these preschool teachers often used the resources of local communities and parents. They also paid attention to appropriate arts and cultural activities so that the young children can experience their own local culture.

4. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The findings evident from the interviews with pre-school teachers showed a diligent effort made by young children to create or appreciate while teachers focused on their thoughts and feelings so that they can experience the joy of self-expression and enjoy their aesthetic experiences. It was understood that if preschool teachers keep their eyes and ears open, young children can guide enjoy the beauty of life.

The aesthetic domain enables young children to explore and make artistic creations in various types of beauty, and doing so, they can have fun and accumulate a wealth of aesthetic experience (TMoE, 2013). This assessment enables the pre-school teachers to observe the development and expression of young children’s aesthetic feelings and unique creativity. It is not needed to emphasize training skills or display finished products for their learning. Through daily observation and analysis, preschool teachers checked the environment and educational activities of their schools. They fostered positive feelings with rich aesthetic experience and ensured there was sufficient time, stimulating environment, diverse artistic media and in-depth guidance. This helped young children use their imagination to express their own ideas and accumulate personal aesthetic experiences from the responses Below are a few observations and analyses of young children’s performance, and key points of the teaching and thinking of preschool teachers as prescribed by the ministry (TMoE, 2017). These observations helped them to guide children and appreciate their own or others’ artistic creations, and develop their own preferences and tastes.

4.1. Weekday Observation

According to the various aesthetic curriculum objectives, the information collected by preschool teachers included (TMoE, 2017):

From the perspective of “exploration and awareness”:

- 4.1.1. Are young children curious about things? Are young children always interested in exploring the surrounding environment?
- 4.1.2. Can young children use five senses to observe, listen, and feel the changes in people, and things in nature or their lives.
- 4.1.3. Do young children hear the sound of an airplane and look up?
- 4.1.4. If young children see falling, petals, branches, stones, etc. will they pick them up and play with them?
- 4.1.5. When young children is playing, will they say to pretend food on the table: “It’s delicious! It’s smells wonderful.”

From the perspective of “performance and creation”:

- 4.1.6. Are young children full of joy and happiness during creative, musical or musical activities?
- 4.1.7. Do young children like graffiti, scrapbooking, jigsaw, weaving, stacking blocks?
- 4.1.8. What different materials or methods do young children like to create in two- or three-dimensional works?
- 4.1.9. What visual art tools or materials do young children often use?
- 4.1.10. Can young children use pictures or symbols to express their own experiences, imaginations, things or emotions?

4.1.11. Do young children like to sing, knock and beat time to music?

4.1.12. Can young children strike a musical instrument such as a triangle or a wooden fish to follow a fixed rhythm or melody?

4.1.13. Are young children ready to go out with shoes and shopping bags?

4.1.14. Will young children imitate the characters or sounds of familiar stories or cartoon films?

4.1.15. Is a child always playing a game alone or with his peers?

From the perspective of “Response and Appreciation”:

4.1.16. Do young children have a special preference for their own clothing or certain colors?

4.1.17. Can young children express their feelings about activities verbally or in other ways?

4.1.18. Do young children like to participate in art or cultural activities in the community?

4.1.19. Are young children interested in enjoying the characters or patterns in picture books?

4.1.20. After enjoying a cartoon film, drama or dance performance, do young children like some of the plots?

4.1.21. Can young children relate the characters after enjoying the drama? Can young children talk about the characters’ costumes? What are their likes and dislikes?

4.2. Regular Analysis

Finally, preschool teachers observed and briefly analyzed the works of young children in daily games or activities such as playing games, rhythmic or musical performance, and making artworks. Information was also collected by records of daily observation record or longer works (TMoE, 2017). For their “Anecdotal Records”, preschool teachers carried paper and pen to note aspects of young children’s games, file the notes chronologically for subsequent analysis. “Learning portfolios” were prepared for the works of young children in various activities or the young children picked their favorite pieces for their “learning portfolios.” These portfolios were related to the records and collections of preschool children, their teachers and parents. The process and results of young children’s various activities not only recorded the growth of the children, but also helped understand the development of their bodily movements, language, social and emotions.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, the following implementation principles could be emphasized upon:

5.1. Provide Experience and Material: Young Children Need, Encouraging and Guiding Them to Explore

Young children innately have keen senses and perceptions, observing changes in clouds, listening to drops of rain, or touching a doll, gradually accumulating feelings, experience and a taste for beauty. In addition to motivate young children, preschool teachers could guide them to use their senses to explore things around them, such as blowing bubbles, changing colored water, listening to a heartbeat with a stethoscope, looking at mirrors or changing sounds, etc. This joy of “discovery” is the best way to stimulate early childhood learning. .

5.2. Provide an Aesthetic Environment for Young Children to Explore, with a Rich Variety of Rooms, Situations and Materials

Preschool teachers could plan for visual arts, music, drama, body rhythms, and provide a variety of art tools and materials, CD music, and young children’s songs. In addition, they can use ingenuity, paying attention to the learning area, cabinets, walls, doors and windows, corridors or bulletin boards in the preschool or activity room. They can respond to different seasons, using colors, plants, children’s works or decorations. Teachers and students can work together to complete contextual arrangements related to a theme. Teachers can avoid stereotypes in their choices of color, so products for boys are not necessarily blue or green, and girls’ supplies are not necessarily pink

or red. And there are more than dolls, cooking props or princess costumes in the playing area. Instead, preschool teachers should change the theme regularly and place multiple situations such as shops, clinics, and restaurants (TMoE, 2017).

5.3. Provide Ample Time for a Variety of Aesthetic Experiences and Artistic Elements

Preschool teachers should provide young children with multi-exploration and creative time, so the children have more opportunities to discover visual elements (lines, shapes, colors) in their environment, musical elements (rhythm, melody, height, speed, strength). Teachers can use performance elements (actions, expressions, speaking, and props) to enhance young children's awareness and response to beauty (TMoE, 2017).

5.4. Guiding Children's Creative Process Is More than Displaying Results; Young Children Should Experience the Fun of Creation

In the creative process, young children may be interested in operating, combining or taking apart various materials, as well as using many ways of expression. This process may consume all their energy, so that no "results" are created at the end. However, preschool teachers should not only attend to the skillful performance of learning outcomes or skills; they should appreciate the exploration process from the perspective of young children. Preschool teachers should strengthen the attitude of being willing to explore or create actively so that young children can enjoy the fun of creation (TMoE, 2017).

5.5. Accepting Young Children's Thoughts and Feelings, and Encouraging Young Children's Original Self-Expression

Young children have innate creativity, so each child's performance is unique, and preschool teachers should accept and encourage their creative performance by affirmative means such as listening, smiling, caring gaze or verbal praise. This helps young children to confidently demonstrate their understanding and feelings in the external world (TMoE, 2017). Preschool teachers should also try to avoid guiding young children to practice various skills by demonstration. It is better to encourage young children to familiarize themselves with different materials and tools through guidance, letting them think about solutions when problems arise. This will help develop their creative and aesthetic abilities (TMoE, 2017).

5.6. Combining Artistic and Cultural Resources of the Community to Expand the Artistic Experience of Young Children

The community is a familiar living environment for young children. Artists, festivals, music or performances in the community are excellent resources to expand the artistic experience of young children. Preschool teachers can invite performers in the community to perform for young children, or teachers can take young children out to the children's studios, art galleries, cultural centers or community festivals. Materials and tools appropriate for young children can be provided in an activity room for the visit. Young children's experience of artistic creation or drama can help develop a curriculum for teaching activities. For example, after visiting a sculpture exhibition or a local festival in a cultural center, related pictures, works, performance props or music can be placed in the young children's activity room, so the young children can experience artistic associations and creation related to the theme (TMoE, 2017). Finally, it is commonly understood that aesthetic education should be centered around the teaching of artistic competences, such as in-school or after-school art or music lessons. All young children should be able to partake in art and music courses and they should learn about art and the history of art – not only so they can develop their "cultural capital", but more importantly because aesthetic education enables young children to understand artworks and promotes their artistic-symbolic (self) expression (Steinforth, 2019).

6. CONCLUSION

Aesthetic ability is a symbol of national progress, social maturity, the quality of modern citizenship, and an indicator of global social progress.

Although Taiwan has advocated the balanced development of education for many years, the basic classes on aesthetic education are only the schools' art and music classes, so people have insufficient longing for beauty. Therefore, to further develop and enhance the aesthetic literacy so Taiwan can be aesthetically competitive, TMOE (2013) prepared the first five-year plan for aesthetic education. The plan has six major points. The first point concerns aesthetic education from early childhood.

Aesthetic education is important for all young children, in childhood itself and for their adult life. Aesthetics is a crucial concept in early childhood education, concerned with knowledge based on sensory experiences or perceptions because young children's sensory skills enable them to respond to qualities of things in their immediate surroundings.

Aesthetic development in young children requires them to be aware of perceptions such as color, figure, form, texture, size, balance, volume, and movement (Ko and Chou, 2014). The current practice of young children's aesthetic education is very important in Taiwan, and a national aesthetic education project for young children called *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework* is vigorously promoted in preschools, promulgated by the Ministry of Education.

The curriculum framework reveals the importance of aesthetic education for young children in Taiwan, and this paper considers the aesthetic domain of this framework. Thus, the paper examines connotations, learning aspects, curricula, implementation principles, and assessment of aesthetic education in the curriculum framework. Through this discussion, preschool teachers can better understand the aesthetic education of young children in Taiwan, and have better understanding when they practice aesthetic education.

This study concludes that preschool teachers can unify the arts into a holistic concept of aesthetic education for young children. For an effective daily curriculum; preschool teachers should know how to use the arts to develop young children's interest, motivation and learning in various subject areas (Jalongo and Stamp, 1997).

In addition, the author hopes that through such a discussion, preschool teachers can demonstrate how they can draw on a wide array of arts resources to enrich their curriculum of aesthetic education. They can also address the developmental appropriateness of arts activities and show their support for the goals of aesthetic education. This paper provides discourses of preschool teachers who designed an aesthetic education curriculum and offers practical, concrete suggestions that can support the aesthetic education of young children in Taiwan.

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