



TEACHING PRINCIPLES FOR AESTHETIC EDUCATION: CULTIVATING TAIWANESE CHILDREN'S AESTHETIC LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

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Teaching students to appreciate the beauty of life in the world through aesthetic education, using a variety of teaching principles to extend their aesthetic experience, will promote “aesthetic intelligence” for children in Taiwan. This can enrich their aesthetic literacy, and give them a desire to perceive and appreciate beautiful things, allowing them to grow into world citizens. By reading, reviewing, analyzing and discussing related studies, this article explores the teaching principles of aesthetic education for children to cultivate children’s aesthetic literacy. This discussion can make Taiwan become a more aesthetically oriented lifeworld. The aspects of aesthetic education for children are as follows: (1) artistic teaching, (2) life-based teaching, (3) diversified teaching, (4) teaching through experience, (5) teaching by doing, (6) individual teaching, (7) imaginative teaching and (8) perceptual teaching.

Contribution/Originality: This article contributes to the teaching principles for early aesthetic education and provides recommendations to cultivate children’s aesthetic literacy in Taiwan. This study can help provide valuable insights about the praxis of aesthetic education for Taiwanese children.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of “aesthetics” was first used by the philosopher Alexander von Baumgarten in the mid-eighteenth century derived from the Greek *aisthetike*, meaning sense perception. For Baumgarten, aesthetics was concerned with the perfection of perception and with the perception of perfection, or beauty (Mahgoub, 2016). “Beauty” is a part of nature, which everyone feels, and “aesthetic sense” is the ability to perceive the existence of beautiful things, a sense that is actively constructed by the individual’s inner heart. This ability to perceive beauty requires the reception of various external messages through keen senses, and at the same time it can connect with the individual’s imagination and experience (Lin, 2012). Children have rich imagination, and are naturally fond of drawing. As we know, although most children are trained for some things, such as counting or reading, they are still interested in art and are happy to accept it (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1987). Pleasant aesthetic experience can inspire children’s curiosity, exploration and positive affection for the environment around them, indirectly forming the basis for the individual’s concern for nature, social awareness, and cultural identity (Lin, 2012).

Furthermore, aesthetics is the branch of philosophy dealing with such notions as the beautiful, the ugly, the sublime, the comic. And aesthetic education is a way of regaining contact with the process of learning something new, of being introduced to a medium never known in a particular way before. It is the incorporation of the arts

across the curriculum in a way that fosters a heightened awareness of and appreciation for all that touches our lives (Doane University Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, 2019). Thus, it is important for students to develop intrinsic satisfaction in school. The aims of the educational process inside schools is not to finish something, but to start something. If we can show students how to appreciate the beauty of life in their world through aesthetic education, and through various teaching means to extend their aesthetic experience, this can develop greater “aesthetic intelligence”. This can enrich the children’s aesthetic literacy, and give them a desire to perceive and appreciate beautiful things continually, allowing them to grow into world citizens (Yang, 2013).

In Taiwan, for example, the Natural Way Kindergartens are based on the talents of human beings. Stemming from the cultural aesthetics of Eastern philosophy and the evolution of human consciousness and the civilization process, with education centered on both educators and learners. Learning, knowledge and educational practice strive to let children understand, think, imagine, and create from practice and experience, thereby cultivating sensory memory, intelligence, and ability that children can internalize. These kindergartens cultivate children’s concern for people, society, and nature (Natural Way Kindergarten, 2016). However, this ideal can be accomplished only through the aesthetic education of children. In addition, to cultivate children’s aesthetic literacy is a core part of Taiwan’s educational policy (The Ministry of Education, 2013). Accordingly, by reading, reviewing and analyzing related studies, this article explores teaching principles of aesthetic education for children in Taiwan. We hope this exploration can broaden the teaching vision of aesthetic education for children in Taiwan and cultivate children’s aesthetic literacy.

2. EXPLAINING THE IMPORTANCE OF TAIWANESE CHILDREN’S AESTHETIC EDUCATION

2.1. Aesthetic Education is the Core of All Education

Education can change the future of individuals and is key to raising the competitiveness of a nation (TMOE, 2018) and in Taiwan the cultivation of children’s aesthetic ability is seen as a way to enhance national competitiveness. Thus, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China announced the “Challenging 2008: National Development Plan (2002-2007) The Dynamic Review- Cultivation Program for E Generation Talent”, which emphasized the era of competition in an intellectual century. But aesthetic literacy still needs to be developed, and aesthetic education is the core of all education. Relevant policies have emphasized the importance of aesthetic literacy improvement (TMOE, 2013) and aesthetic education is implemented in primary and secondary schools to enrich children’s aesthetic experience. Aesthetic education includes not only artistic expression, but also aspects of children’s daily life (Yan, 2015). In the final analysis, “beauty” is omnipresent. Beauty is in nature. Beauty is in life, in architecture, in objects, and in everyone’s heart. Cultivating the aesthetic literacy of children depends on how teachers construct the concept of aesthetic education for children and how they change the process of guiding children’s art and craft classes (Wu, 2016).

2.2. The Function of Aesthetic Education is to Promote the Balanced Development of Children

There is a broad conception of aesthetic education which has its roots in the philosophical writings of John Dewey. For Dewey, the aesthetic is an essential qualitative aspect of those genuine experiences that contribute to the process of personal growth, or the “experiential continuum”, that is education. The aesthetic is by no means confined to the arts. Scientific, mathematical, historical, artistic or other experiences can be said to have an aesthetic quality. In other words, the learning of all subjects could include aesthetic quality, and this can promote children’s balanced development (Plummeridge, 1999).

Second, Article 158 of the Constitution of the Republic of China, Article 1 of the National Education Law states that national education should foster a sound person with balanced development of morality, intelligence, physical

health, social cohesion and aesthetic feeling. In 1980, the Ministry of Education revised the “National Primary and Secondary Schools to Strengthen the Teaching Plan of Aesthetic Education”. This demonstrated that the function of aesthetic education is to promote the balanced development of morality, intelligence, the body, the group and aesthetic feeling (Yan, 2015). Thus, aesthetic education should promote the balanced development of children.

3. EXPLORING THE TEACHING PRINCIPLES OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN TAIWAN

In teaching, it is important to stimulate children’s appreciation and creative abilities for their living environment. The “Art and Humanities” field of the nine-year syllabus of National Primary and Secondary Schools released in 1993 in Taiwan stated that “art is the crystallization of human culture and one of the focuses of life. Art learning can promote linking and integrating learning in other areas of study.” This shows that aesthetic education must be integrated into teaching activities in various fields (Yan, 2015). However, the integration of aesthetic education into learning activities requires teaching. Thus, this section discusses teaching principles of early aesthetic education. Furthermore, teaching principles can imbue art classes with creativity, surprise, fun and beauty, so children can be happy and immerse themselves in a creative atmosphere (Wu, 2016).

Our literature review (Parker, 1896; Parker *et al.*, 1901; Parker and Helm, 1902; Buber, 1970; Greene, 1973; Lin, 1998; Papalia *et al.*, 1999; Yan and Ho, 2002; Zheng, 2005; Chen and Hong, 2007; Lo, 2008; Chan and Chen, 2011; Chen, 2015; Fan, 2016; TMOE, 2017) identified the following teaching principles of aesthetic education for children:

3.1. Artistic Teaching

Education is mainly to cultivate an individual child into a “person”, and let students understand their living situations, inspire their social responsibility, and develop civic awareness of service participation. Dewey maintained that the art of teaching comes from the teacher’s four ideal qualities: teaching with insights into the world, sincere compassion, keen sense of humor, and consistent execution (Chen and Hong, 2007). The philosopher Martin Buber believed that teaching is an art and should be purposeful (Buber, 1970). Since teaching is an art, teaching should be artistic, and successful artistic teaching can give people a sense of enjoyment.

Further, aesthetics is an aspect of philosophy that deals with visual arts, music, taste, nature, beauty and several other factors. Studying aesthetics enhances creativity of the brain and helps children's positive development, which can help children to acquire discreet knowledge in a particular subject through entertainment. According to Anna Reyner, artistic activities help children develop skills in several ways. For example, children are taught to draw letters and pronounce them, grasping the letters through their image and sound. The letters’ images encourage them to draw similar objects and understand their meaning. This is a positive way for children to learn things because it helps them develop their literacy to learn new objects using arts and designs (Chou and Lee, 2016). The medium of arts can lead to aesthetic teaching, and cultivate children’s aesthetic literacy. Since the arts are part of human civilization, they have a central role in the identities and cultural practices of all peoples (Ewing, 2010).

3.2. Life-Based Teaching

Dewey emphasized the link between teaching and life, advocating “education as life” and life as a continuous reconstruction and transformation of experience. Therefore, if teaching is separated from life experiences, learning cannot be holistic. In other words, teaching must promote empirical learning within the broader context of life as experienced by the students. For example, the best way for a natural science teacher to show students how to distinguish the ecology of butterflies or the growth of plants is to have students observe nature. On the social level, teachers should understand the various forms of democratic participation in their world. Regardless of how teachers

teach, the most important principle is to return to the daily life that students can feel and experience (Chen and Hong, 2007).

Therefore, teachers should be able to practice life-based teaching. The complete experience of “doing and receiving” for children should be accumulated from daily life. For example, teachers can let children use their keen perception to explore the beauty of things around them and to be aware of changes in their environment. In daily life, children often have access to aspects of the natural environment, such as flowers, grass, insects, fish, or natural phenomena, such as rain or rainbows; as well as aspects of the human environment, such as manmade forms. In a learning environment, these different aesthetic experiences can inspire children’s curiosity and exploration, so they can perceive their own changes (TMOE, 2017). Since life is an experience, teaching is a lifestyle, not a lesson, so there is no such thing as an isolated class, only life and work. Education needs to be lived, once again demonstrating that the teachers should practice life-based teaching, and cultivate children’s aesthetic literacy.

3.3. Diversified Teaching

Greene (1973) found that art can reveal spiritual feelings that philosophy cannot explain, and help us to understand these feelings, and works of art are often interwoven in Greene’s philosophical discourse. Teachers also teach students to read literary works, look at paintings, watch dramas, and listen to music, so students can have multiple learning opportunities to understand the world and expand their horizons from multiple perspectives. Thus, teaching should be diverse and use various forms and means to stimulate the students’ interest and personal connection to learning (Yan and Ho, 2002).

Teachers should diversify their aesthetic instruction so children can have diverse learning opportunities to learn about the world through various teaching activities, and through diverse and balanced learning experiences, have more opportunities for participation and higher interest in learning (Zheng, 2005). Doing so can increase children’s interest in learning arts, and can cultivate children’s aesthetic literacy. For example, Lo (2008) implemented aesthetic teaching of children through appreciation of drama. Zhong (2005) used physical activity, element exploration, and sound and rhythm learning for children. These rhythmic classes increased students’ physical acuity, coordination and responses, and stimulated children’s imagination and creativity, so they were better able to accept themselves and others. To enhance the expression of children’s affection and beauty, teachers should practice diversified teaching in aesthetic education, and cultivate children’s aesthetic literacy for their future life.

3.4. Teaching through Experience

Teachers should let children grasp the aesthetic characteristics of various aesthetic activities and personally experience the joy of aesthetics in the process of artistic creation. If the aesthetic world has a door, how can teachers let children open it? The most important job of teachers is to guide students to open the door to the world of beauty, and open their hearts, ears and eyes, to experience the beauty of things, becoming people who actively seek beauty (Chen, 2015).

Piaget described the different stages of cognitive development and pointed out that each stage of a child’s development is a new way of working, thinking and responding to the external environment (Papalia *et al.*, 1999). Generally speaking, children learn about the world through sensory experience. Lin (2012) pointed out that the foundation of “aesthetic literacy” must start from “sense perception”. From a developmental view, a child is born to be an “explorer”, and they often use keen senses to explore and recognize the outside world. Through visual, auditory, kinesthetic, emotional and other perceptions, children actively interact with the surrounding natural or social environment, and with the subtle feelings of an individual accumulate their own aesthetic experience. Therefore, teachers should let children have the sensory experience of experiencing beauty. Wu (2015) also

suggested that parents and teachers should give their children a beautiful picture on weekdays. Children will naturally recognize beauty and accumulate aesthetic literacy from their life, effectively learning aesthetics. Finally, [Chen \(2015\)](#) took the aesthetic experience of his own dance as an example, emphasizing the personal cultivation of beauty. According to Chen, we must first live through own emotions and the five senses. In the process of perception, after being exposed to beautiful things, personal preferences and experiences will also shape the values of beauty and goodness. Through this we may derive the ability to care for others, the environment, and society, thereby improving our personality and mind. Therefore, teachers should practice aesthetic education through experience, and cultivate children's aesthetic literacy.

3.5. Teaching by Doing

Give your child enough space to be complete, free and flexible: by giving the child motivation to express something, and art will emerge. Children need to be patient, meticulous and tough in accomplishing these creative tasks. This includes not only training and knowledge of the principles of history and technical design, but also the artistic spirit of fully expressing ideas ([Dewey, 1900](#)). Teachers should be creative in aesthetic teaching. In other words, teachers should allow students to actually engage in artistic creation, allowing students to "perceive" the beauty of art in "doing" and enhance their artistic literacy ([TMOE, 2017](#)). For example, [Shih, Lai and Wang's](#) research explores the process of a day-care teacher's art course teaching. By such an exploration, children can encounter art. To fulfill this purpose, weaving a "spider web" is used as an example to illuminate children's art making process. It was hoped that art can enter children's minds through doing ([Shih et al., 2017](#)).

American educator Parker pointed out that the main purpose of traditional education is the acquisition of knowledge ([Parker et al., 1901](#)). Traditional education attempts to separate children from themselves, ignoring the power gained through play, manipulation, observation, and doing. Traditional education devalues the best value and creates unfounded value in vain ([Parker and Helm, 1902](#)). In other words, traditional education fails to allow children to work by hand, ignoring the educational value of manual operations. In fact, the operation of all schools should be a real operation. We learn to do by doing ([Parker, 1896](#)). So teachers should be creative in teaching aesthetics and let children learn to operate. In the process, let students "perceive" the beauty of art, and cultivate children's aesthetic literacy.

3.6. Individual Teaching

Aesthetic learning is personalized, and aesthetic education should not be uniform or standardized, with standardized works of art or feelings ([Yan and Ho, 2002](#)). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children's art curriculum for the development of children's fitness, the development of appropriate art education is centered on children, providing many opportunities for them to create art. This child-centered approach is different from traditional art activities: in the traditional teaching of childhood art, sometimes adults are completely uninvolved, while some activities completely instructed by teachers.

Teachers should personalize aesthetic education for children. In fact, the orientation of art education should be centered on providing for children and constructing a learning environment suitable for children's development. Teachers should avoid placing emphasis on skill training and achievement-oriented teaching. Teachers must understand and adapt to the artistic developmental characteristics of children and respect the differences in individual development. Through multiple choices and full creative freedom, using open and guided teaching methods to stimulate children's self-expression, we should cultivate their rich artistic creativity and keen appreciation, integrating art into life and thus cultivating children's personality through art ([Fan, 2016](#)). Moreover, the presentation of children's creative works should not be standardized or consistent. Teaching must be

personalized, and respond to the different learning needs of children. Thus, teachers should practice individualized teaching in aesthetic education, and cultivate children's aesthetic literacy.

3.7. Imaginative Teaching

Aesthetic education should cultivate students' creativity, protect students' thinking ability, foster students' imagination, enable students to express their feelings, express their ideal form, and establish aesthetic values and attitudes, and cultivate children's aesthetic literacy (Yan and Ho, 2002). When teachers guide their students to imagine the future, the students should be encouraged to use their creativity, not to reject fantasy. In fact, humans rely heavily on fantasy; for example, many children have imaginary friends or talk with God or animals. Psychologists have found that such behavior is helpful for children's language development and creativity; many children like fairy tales or cartoons, most of which are full of fantasy. Many cases from past history show that human imagination or creative imagining of the future may initially seem ridiculous or contrary to common sense. For example, ancient fantasies of making machines in the sea, flying in the sky or playing on the moon may have been dismissed as unrealistic illusions, but now these products of the imagination have been realized in real life. Therefore, in educational situations, even if there is no encouragement, learners should not fear the nonsensical and unrealistic, and even violate knowledge and logic as they follow their creative imagination (Chan and Chen, 2011).

In aesthetic teaching, teachers should let children reconstruct their life experiences through imagination. Teachers can also give them various forms of artistic media to develop their imagination for their own unique expressions and creations. In daily life, children often use readily available materials, such as watercolors, tree branches, sand, and bottles. They also use their own voices, bodies, made-up words, and actions, along with group performance and creation (TMoE, 2017). Thus, teachers should practice imaginative teaching in aesthetic education.

3.8. Perceptual Teaching

Life is full of sensibility and, in fact, it is a way of life experience (Yan and Ho, 2002). When teaching sensibility, the teacher's art has to make an impression on the students so their morale is raised and for this, emotional input is also a factor. The early Swiss educator Pestalozzi is known for incorporating love in education, where love is the key to unlocking children's potential. He advocated the happiness of children and students, saying, "I have seen how my wish can be fulfilled, and I believe that my feelings will soon change the situation of children like the sun in spring awakens the frozen life of the earth (Lin, 1998)." Therefore, teachers should be perceptual in the teaching of aesthetics and use their own emotions for aesthetic teaching in order to make an impression on children, and liberate their instinct for artistic creation by awakening their frozen aesthetic literacy. The teachers's love for the students can be an amazing source of vitality, which Pestalozzi refers to as "the sun of the spring." When meeting with a student, he used this energy to bring the student to another world (Lin, 1998). Thus, teachers should use their perceptions and emotions when teaching aesthetics, so as to liberate the children's instinct for artistic creation and awaken their aesthetic life.

Finally, we should point out that in the teaching of cognition and skills, teaching should also achieve the goal of affection. Teaching, in other words, must have "touching ability", and "touching teaching" is a reflection of aesthetic experience (Lin, 1998). Furthermore, if a teacher can face a student in a "sensible and intuitive" way, he will expand the student's learning connotation with "intellectual cognition" and understand the relationship between himself and students. The teacher can also enrich the aesthetic experience of children's life, bringing the child to another world, so that art becomes one of the ways for children to experience their lives. In this way, children's life can be full of happiness. Thus, teachers should practice perceptive teaching in aesthetic education to cultivate children's aesthetic literacy.

4. CONCLUSION

Education is a “human-centered” and unique activity. Consider why animals do not use education to shape their educational visions, whereas humans construct educational ideas and use them to shape their educational visions. Thus, with the emergence of written records, the history and discussion of education began. In China, consideration of education activities began with the description of the ancient education system in the classic *Zhou Li* and explanation of the principles of teaching methods in the *Book of Rites*. The Western tradition can be seen as early as Plutarch’s “On Children’s Education” (Yang, 2002).

Throughout history, education has been vital for children’s development, and the recent surge of public awareness has heightened awareness of childhood education, while research has confirmed its importance. Aesthetics is the study of beauty, which can stimulate children’s senses through music, drama and art, while aesthetic awareness is increased by feeling for the environment, sound, color, taste and aroma (Chou and Lee, 2016). Aesthetic education is thus an important part of children’s education. Every child should have carefully planned aesthetic education to support the experience and enjoyment of beautiful things as a counterbalance to our increasingly rationalized world. Contemporary schooling strives to develop professional knowledge and skills on the basis of intellectual actions, while neglecting other aspects of personality. Therefore, it is important for children to develop the ability to enjoy art and beauty, and act in accordance with a sense of proportion, harmony and beauty (Denac, 2014). This article analyzes teaching principles for cultivating children’s aesthetic literacy through a literature review, and encourages teachers to practice carefully considered aesthetic education so children can perceive beauty and have enhanced aesthetic literacy.

In summary, aesthetic education is not about shaping children into artists, but shaping children into citizens who have aesthetic literacy. Children’s aesthetic education is crucial for early education. People have innate aesthetic talent, and education must cultivate it through daily life and interaction with other people. So teachers can better practice aesthetic education for children, this article proposes the following aspects: (1) artistic teaching, (2) life-based teaching, (3) diversified teaching, (4) teaching through experience, (5) teaching by doing, (6) individual teaching, (7) imaginative teaching and (8) perceptual teaching.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion in this article, the author recommends the following: First, recognize the uniqueness of each child, adapt to individual differences in children, and teach step by step. In addition, music can be used to transform children’s negative emotions integrate their personality. Second, let children “do and receive” from the cumulative experience of everyday life, let them use their keen perception to explore the beauty of life around them, and make them aware of the changes around them. Third, let children participate in a variety of teaching activities, giving them multiple learning opportunities to understand the world and obtain a diverse and balanced aesthetic experience. Fourth, expose children to a variety of sensory experiences and feelings so their creativity abilities can make them more complete and harmonious. Fifth, let children learn by doing, develop children’s creativity, enhance their artistic creativity, and enrich their aesthetic experience. Sixth, avoid standardizing the presentation of children’s creative works, and respond to the different needs of individual children. Seventh, let children recreate their experience by imagination, and use various forms of art to develop their imagination and make their own unique creations. Eighth, put feeling into aesthetic teaching to make a deeper impression on the children and liberate the artistic instincts of children. If a teacher can practice these aesthetic teaching principles, he/she can expand children’s aesthetic experience and enhance their aesthetic literacy. As TMOE (2015) has proposed, we need provide a foundation for aesthetic education, so children can feel beauty everywhere. Let children turn their aesthetic experience into unique creativity and imagination so they can feel “beauty.” Let each child see the “light of beauty”, and step forward into a happy life. By knowing beauty, our society can be imbued with an atmosphere of

truth and goodness (TMoE, 2015). In this way, people can live and work in peace. And the author believes such an exploration can broaden the vision of aesthetic education for children in Taiwan, and construct the image of teaching of children's aesthetic education in Taiwan.

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