

Revisiting Art Teaching Models Based on Core Skills of the Era

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Abstract: *The 21st century has brought about a historic transformation in people's living environments. The education of the new era must focus on learning to apply knowledge, which is an inevitable major reform for the future. Art, as the spiritual home of humanity, not only influences the value orientation of the masses but also is the most powerful and effective subject for cultivating new skills in the 21st century. However, current art education still follows the educational model formed under special circumstances a century ago, with memory, indoctrination, and technique-focused teaching still occupying the main position, which is far from leveraging the true educational value of art.*

Keywords: *Art Education; Core Skills; Thinking; Transfer*

1. Introduction

The future has arrived. The 21st century, with the widespread adoption of information technology and digitalization, has profoundly affected people's lives and ways of thinking. The efficiency and convenience of digital information not only enrich people's daily lives but also pose new demands on work and learning. In other words, educational content, teaching objectives, and learning methods are also changing with the development of technology. For example, centuries ago, the social transformation from the agricultural age to the industrial age brought about a profound change in educational content. Today, facing the unprecedented digital age, what changes will educational content undergo? This is a question of the times and a hot topic in the field of education. Against the backdrop of the digital information era, what innovations should art education teaching make? This paper attempts to re-examine new models of art education and teaching from the perspective of deep experiential learning.

2. Basic Elements of Core Skills

In 2022, the U.S. Department of Education established the 21st Century Skills Partnership, initiating the development of basic skills required in the 21st century. Scholars have derived a widely applicable set of three major categories of 21st-century core skills through an informal thought experiment. The experiment included four questions, roughly: "Compared to the world 20 years ago, what do you think the world will be like in 20 years?" "Based on your imagination, what skills will your children need to succeed in this society in 20 years?" "What drove the peak learning periods in your past life?" "Design learning around the answers to the first three questions, what will learning look like?" Regarding the second question, values and behavioral orientations such as curiosity, empathy, self-confidence, and courage were inevitably introduced, leading to the proposal of learning and innovation skills, digital literacy capabilities, and career life skills as the three major categories of 21st Century Skills. They believe that "no matter where our educational journey is aimed, it seems to be targeting the same themes and issues, engaging in a long global conversation with all kinds of people..."^[1] By 2010, the organization had issued the "21st Century Arts Skills Map", which includes 13 core skills in the arts, such as Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Innovation, Information Literacy, Media Literacy, Information Communication and Technology Literacy, Flexibility and Adaptability, Initiative and Self-direction, Social and Cross-cultural Skills, Productivity and Accountability, Leadership and Responsibility. They propose that the most powerful and effective way to improve students' 21st-century skills is through art education.

Influenced by this, in 2014, the United States officially released the "National Core Arts Standards,"

which clarify the core artistic literacy that students should possess from five educational values and goals. These are "Art as Communication," "Art as Personal Creativity," "Art as Culture, History, and Connection," "Art as a Means of Happiness," and "Art as Community Participation." It can be seen that if only from the expression of these five aspects, the educational goals of art education have shifted from a focus on knowledge and skills to the refinement of human qualities. In other words, people have recognized the educational functions hidden behind art knowledge and skills, and have begun to gradually pay attention to the deeper educational value of art education, rather than superficially copying and transporting the knowledge and skills of art itself.

In 2022, the General Office of the State Council of China issued the Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the New Art Curriculum Standards). It explicitly stated three crucial messages at the outset: art represents spiritual civilization; artistic images and aesthetic beauty in art education serve to enhance aesthetic appreciation and humanities literacy; the core of art education lies in promoting truth, goodness, and beauty, and shaping beautiful souls. Evidently, enhancing the humanities literacy of the entire populace has become a pressing issue of the current era. Rapid economic development has also led to a distorted group consciousness, making it difficult to transmit profound cultural heritages. Adolescents increasingly exhibit anxious and empty mental states, and their lives are permeated with utilitarianism. The exam-oriented education system renders the learning process monotonous, ultimately causing numerous adolescents to passively receive education driven by tasks and engage in social productive labor in a state of confusion. In response to this situation, the New Art Curriculum Standards provide teaching suggestions for curriculum implementation in Section 1 of Chapter 7. The author has extracted five keywords: literacy orientation, content integration, contextual experience, inheritance and innovation, and artistic potential. It is evident that traditional, outdated, and rigid teaching methods can no longer meet the educational philosophy of the New Art Curriculum Standards. Moreover, the New Art Curriculum Standards consistently place "cultivating virtue through education" as the fundamental task of teaching and propose three new curriculum concepts: "persisting in aesthetic education," "emphasizing artistic experience," and "highlighting curriculum integration." It emphasizes the need to always adhere to "aesthetic education," using "beauty" as a medium to cultivate new generations for the times. The approaches and methods involve artistic experience in learning methods and curriculum integration in teaching methods. What requires in-depth analysis here is what constitutes the content and approaches of artistic experience and how artistic experience activities are related to acquiring core skills of the times.

Specifically, the teaching manifestation of "artistic experience" is not only about external achievements but also about internal experiences in humanities, thoughts, and emotions. It is also an experience of collaborative abilities such as teamwork, holistic perspectives, and planning and coordination. For example, when the teaching content is bronze ware, the innovative development of today's aviation technology can be inferred from the smelting techniques of the Shang and Zhou dynasties; the complicated casting processes of craftsmen can inspire students to adopt a meticulous learning attitude; visiting museums to visually observe artifacts can evoke a shocking sense of the passage of time spanning millennia; self-expression can be achieved through writing, drawing, and other methods. Another example is feeling the loneliness of a generation's warrior hero from the Six Steeds of the Zhao Mausoleum, inspiring students to deeply ponder the meaning of life; the dispersal of the Six Steeds can stimulate students' feelings of protecting national culture and loving and contributing to their motherland; students can be guided to understand the role of horses in ancient times and the importance of the military-industrial complex to the future of the nation while contemplating why horses are used as subject matter; analyzing the innovative sculptural craftsmanship and painting themes of the Tang Dynasty through the Six Steeds can inspire students to ponder the true meaning and role of "innovation." Furthermore, in the film and television (including digital media art) appreciation course within the "new three subjects," high-quality audiovisual content can be compared with vulgar content, analyzing the reasons for the formation of high-quality audiovisual cultural output from various aspects such as copywriting, shooting and editing, dubbing and music, and values, guiding students to correctly distinguish between the quality of online content and seek positive self-expression windows, and so on. Aesthetic education is not dry preaching, and "artistic experience" is not merely an external experience, nor is it armchair strategist. It must penetrate into students' lives, allowing students to perceive, experience, and understand in a tangible manner to be effective. Therefore, genuine experiences from the inside out are a necessary pathway to acquiring core skills of the times and an indispensable aspect of cultivating students' creativity and divergent thinking.

3. New Models of Art Teaching

3.1. Stimulating Students' Thinking Awareness

Thought is the premise of creation. Interest is the inexhaustible driving force for stimulating and maintaining thought. The directly perceived external environment provides the material for thought. As a product of human spiritual civilization, art's direct experience and perception of things are necessary conditions for triggering active thinking and deep thinking, and also necessary means for obtaining creative ability. However, looking at the current art education and teaching, it still tries to obtain the creative ability of artists through copying, imitation, and moving, without realizing that classic works of art are often the ideological products of artists after reading the world and life. If we ignore the reasons and environment for the artist's creation and focus on understanding the artist's performance techniques and memorizing the categories of artists summarized by later generations, and then piece together these concepts, it is essentially a secondary and even more secondary replication of second-hand products. In-depth experiential learning, on the other hand, is a direct perception of original things, like the fleeting light and shadow of Monet's garden, the spiritual experience of "obtaining from the heart" by Zhang Zao, and the original creative power of Zhang Xu watching the dance and writing. Excellent artists and thinkers regard in-depth experience and thinking about the world and life as an inexhaustible source of creation, which is exactly what is most lacking in current school art education.

Art, compared to other disciplines, necessitates a deeper contemplation of life, evoking diverse insights and thereby fostering students' creative abilities. The renowned German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer stated, "Pedantic scholars are those who merely read books, but thinkers, geniuses, and those who illuminate the world and propel human progress are those who directly read the great book of life's events." However, our current art education places excessive emphasis on students' interpretation, imitation, and study of previous artistic works, neglecting the fact that artists' creative wellspring stems from personal reflection and insight gained from this grand book of life's events. Therefore, in the new era, innovative art education should strive to create environments, provide materials and opportunities for learners to the fullest extent, utilizing, restoring, and constructing real-life scenarios as much as possible, allowing students to engage with life as "eyewitnesses" and thereby develop artistic thinking. Subsequently, this artistic thinking, after being processed through self-perception, fully integrates the acquired truths into the individual's being, ready to be summoned and utilized by us, thereby transferring to various professional fields. This is also the core teaching element in achieving the goal of "learning for application."

John Dewey, a renowned American philosopher regarded as one of the greatest educational reformers of the 20th century, pointed out the value of thinking from three aspects: thinking can give purpose to reasonable actions; thinking enables systematic preparation and invention; and thinking enriches the meaning of things. Meanwhile, the British mathematician and educational theorist Alfred North Whitehead, when discussing "the purpose of education," stated that the central issue of all education is to keep knowledge vital and prevent its stagnation. To achieve this, teachers must awaken students' curiosity and judgment, cultivating their ability to manage complex situations. He emphasized that education must convey a profound understanding of the power, beauty, and logic of thought, linking knowledge with practical life, thereby constituting our lives. It is not difficult to see that cultivating students' awareness of thinking and triggering deep modes of thinking are prerequisites for forming critical thinking, enhancing autonomous learning abilities, and improving innovation. They are also essential core skills required of new talents in the new era.

3.2. Creating an Open Learning Environment

Sukhomlinsky said, "Experienced teachers often just slightly open a window to a boundless knowledge wilderness." Zong Baihua, in connection with the aesthetic feeling of "window" in the "*Li Gua*" of the "*I Ching*", expounded the Chinese aesthetic thought of being separated and connected, the interplay of virtual and real, and the permeation of inside and outside.^[2] Indeed, teaching methods and artistic creation have much in common. There are no two completely identical leaves in the world, nor are there exactly the same people. As the subjects of producing and consuming art, people are diverse, and art naturally has no so-called "standard answer." Compared to other subjects, art requires a more "open" mindset and a "window." Voltaire said, "The art that is hated is the one that has said everything." Therefore, in the teaching design of art classes, whether teachers fill the classroom with theory or techniques, they will inadvertently close the window for students to reach creativity, innovation, and

creation." At the beginning of teaching design, teachers must leave opportunities for students to taste themselves. Just like the "blank" technique in artistic creation, the blank space in "Ma Yijiao" is the inner world of countless viewers; the "diao window" on the Chinese opera stage is the "Wang Shipeng" living in everyone's heart; the few seconds of black screen in film editing are the contemplation of every viewer. Therefore, it is crucial to leave time and space for students to arrange freely in classroom teaching. For example, theory classes require time for students to think and express; design classes require opportunities for cooperation and verification (decorating classroom walls or public places in schools); film and television classes require platforms for planning and practice (participating in the promotion and production of school public accounts, video numbers); understanding of art and culture requires personal experience and experience (communicating with local intangible cultural heritage inheritors or art enthusiasts to learn from each other's experiences; holding a certain number of art festivals, planned, arranged, and hosted by students, etc.). Such teaching methods, although seemingly complicated and time-consuming, once students have a personal artistic experience, it is a lifelong benefit, just as the Italian educator Montessori said, "I saw it, I forgot; I heard it, I remembered; I did it, I understood." The "window" for students is a space for expressing themselves, divergent thinking, and the integration of internal (subjective) and external (objective) communication. Through the transparency of the "window" and the management of "blank space," students can transfer the inherent knowledge and skills through their personality to various fields, which is in line with the educational concept of the new era and is also a necessary way to obtain innovative ability.

4. Committed to the Transfer of Capabilities

As early as 1956, Benjamin Bloom proposed that the two most important goals of education are "promoting retention" and "promoting transfer." Retention requires students to remember what they have learned, while transfer requires students to remember and understand and apply what they have learned. He believed that retention focuses on the past, while transfer focuses on the future. [3] Therefore, we can consider that "knowledge" is a tool and medium for obtaining capabilities, and it is not the main purpose of learning itself. Bloom's taxonomy divides knowledge into four categories: factual knowledge, which refers to "bit information" knowledge; conceptual knowledge, which refers to "more complex and organized forms of knowledge"; procedural knowledge, which refers to "how to do things" and "when to do what" is the appropriate standard of knowledge; and metacognitive knowledge, which refers to "general cognitive knowledge and knowledge about one's own cognition, awareness, and knowledge." He used "no learning," "mechanical learning," and "meaningful learning" to illustrate three learning outcomes, explaining that "meaningful learning requires teaching to go beyond simply presenting factual knowledge, and assessment tasks need students to go beyond simply recalling or recognizing factual knowledge." However, looking back at the front-line art classroom, education has become teaching, requiring students to memorize isolated, fragmented "knowledge points," such as professional vocabulary, information on famous works, etc., and then directly graft these "knowledge points" onto the application of skills. Such mechanical memorization and forced grafting make it seem that students have gained a lot of factual knowledge, but they do not understand them at a deeper level or organize them comprehensively, systematically, or in a useful way. [4] The lack of the intermediate link of "understanding" makes the educational goal illusory, like an empty shell. In addition, the lack of attention to and one-sided understanding of art in front-line art teaching is also a problem faced in implementing educational goals. The internal and external difficulties lead to a cycle, resulting in mediocre outcomes, pressing the pause button on the inheritance of art and culture.

Compulsory education is universal, and compared to taking the mastery of professional skills as the teaching goal, it is more important to understand where this skill comes from, how it is now, and where it is going. For all students, each learning knowledge point should be as beneficial as possible for a lifetime, practical, and general; in terms of art, it should be correct and meaningful; in terms of society, it should be developmental and beautiful; and in terms of the country, it should be confident and contributive. In short, most people are consumers of art, not producers of art. Just like most people do not have professional skills in film and television production and product design, but they will spend time, energy, and resources on it. Therefore, art education teaching needs to distinguish between public education and professional education. Public education focuses on cultivating art "consumers" with the ability to distinguish "beauty and ugliness," while professional education cultivates excellent art "producers." For public education, it is necessary to focus on the transfer of art capabilities and apply the core skills of art to various fields, so as to bring out the greater and wider educational value of art.

5. Conclusion

Humans are social beings. Education is a cause, a cause for cultivating qualified citizens and talents for society. Every subject established in schools is like this, and the art subject is no exception. Art, as an important part of human spiritual civilization, is an ideology, a "recognition" of social life, intangible, and presented through material media. It originates from social life and is a reflection of social life. Compulsory education is an important stage in "cultivating well-rounded individuals." According to Erikson's theory of personality development, the age of 12 to 18 is the stage of pursuing personal self-identity. At this time, adolescents will think clearly about "who I am," "what kind of person I am," and "what kind of person I will become." Therefore, for adolescents, spiritual needs and cultivation have become a rigid demand. "Art production" is one of the departments of spiritual production, and its manufacturing purpose, compared with material needs, is "more to meet people's spiritual needs, thereby affecting people's spiritual consciousness, thoughts, emotions, aesthetic psychology, etc., and ultimately affecting actual social life" through its influence on people's spirit.^[5]

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