

Implementation Path of Extracurricular Aesthetic Education Practices Based on Interdisciplinary Theme Learning

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Abstract: *Interdisciplinary research originated in the United States in the 1920s, where teachers planned inquiry-based science courses for students, developed topics with research significance, and encouraged students to apply knowledge from multiple disciplines to solve practical problems. The 2022 edition of China's "Compulsory Education Curriculum Standard" added the section on "Interdisciplinary Theme Learning," becoming an effective pathway and important measure for cultivating talents in basic education. This article analyzes the implementation strategies of extracurricular aesthetic education practices based on interdisciplinary theme learning, using art as the foundation for teaching practices, and conducting thematic learning activities around subjects such as art, technology, sports, and nature. It effectively implements the goal of cultivating "idealistic, competent, and responsible" individuals of the times, further delving into and improving the research path of aesthetic education in the new era.*

Keywords: *Interdisciplinary theme learning, Extracurricular education, Aesthetic education*

1. Introduction

The National Education Work Conference on January 12, 2023, pointed out the clear objectives of education: whom to educate, how to educate, and for whom to educate, to ensure the provision of education that satisfies the people. Implementing interdisciplinary theme learning at the basic education stage is an effective way to achieve the goal of cultivating individuals for the times. In the teaching process, using the content of a particular subject as a starting point and setting life-oriented themes, continuously guiding students to engage in inquiry-based learning, cultivates students' research, innovation, and cooperation abilities while mastering knowledge. The purpose is not only to help students master systematic disciplinary knowledge but also to enable them to apply interdisciplinary knowledge to discover, analyze, and solve problems, undergo thinking training, learn the application of knowledge, and engage in research and exploration. The construction of extracurricular aesthetic education courses can help students discover their potential qualities, cope with complex and changing situations, develop problem-solving abilities, cultivate integrity, learn to study, innovate, shoulder responsibilities, unite and assist each other, and influence others with their perceptions and experiences, truly achieving "integration of knowledge and action."

2. Research Significance of Interdisciplinary Theme Learning

2.1. Theoretical Significance

The issuance of the new curriculum standards has provided a clear direction for the cultivation of core literacy in the era of core literacy. The "Guidelines for Comprehensive Practical Activities in Primary and Secondary Schools" also emphasizes the method of theme-based learning, recommending 152 themes covering grades 1-12, with the goal of implementing the cultivation of core literacy. Moreover, the curriculum value of interdisciplinary theme learning lies in its conformity to the inherent laws of disciplinary development. Discipline education is continuously developing and improving in the unity of synthesis and specialization. [1]

2.2. Practical Significance

2.2.1. Implementation of Core Literacy Cultivation for Students

The development model of core literacy for Chinese students is divided into three aspects: social participation, autonomous development, and cultural cultivation. Different disciplines have proposed their respective core literacy. Taking the art subject as an example, it proposes five core literacies: image recognition, artistic expression, aesthetic judgment, creative practice, and cultural understanding. The purpose is to enable students to understand and solve various problems, including artistic issues, through artistic means and interdisciplinary thinking. Interdisciplinary theme learning integrates the content of two or more disciplines to conduct learning activities, characterized by comprehensiveness, practicality, inquiry, openness, and operability. By designing educational and teaching activities related to interdisciplinary theme learning, knowledge and skills from different disciplines can be combined, which is conducive to fully realizing the synergistic function of education between disciplines and is of great significance for implementing the cultivation of core literacy for young people.

2.2.2. Adaptation to the Needs of Future Social Development

As China enters a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, becoming an education powerhouse can provide sustained momentum for realizing Chinese-style modernization. This also indicates that the talents needed for future society are those with innovative thinking and a spirit of teamwork, who can discover and solve problems through autonomous exploration. Engaging in interdisciplinary theme learning is precisely in line with the future social development needs for talent, and it is an effective way to cultivate comprehensive abilities and qualities in Chinese youth for the new era.

3. Implementation Path of Extracurricular Aesthetic Education Practices

3.1. Deepening Research Based on the Goals of Aesthetic Education in the New Era

Research on interdisciplinary learning in China began in the 1950s, with a series of interdisciplinary research projects proposed in the first long-term plan for scientific and technological development laying a solid foundation for interdisciplinary research activities in the country. In the late 1970s, China embarked on a new era of reform and opening up and socialist modernization construction, accelerating the process of scientific and technological modernization. Interdisciplinary research activities spanning natural sciences and humanities and social sciences flourished, marking a new stage of comprehensive development in China's interdisciplinary research. [2]

Through literature review, it is found that interdisciplinary research is mostly concentrated in higher education, with relatively few manifestations in basic education. In recent years, more and more scholars have begun to pay attention to interdisciplinary learning in primary and secondary schools. However, many are limited to simple superimposition of multiple disciplines or even a "hodgepodge" situation. Some schools and teachers, in pursuit of interdisciplinary education, design learning activities that do not truly reflect the value and significance of subject integration. Some scholars believe that theme-based learning can play an important role in addressing the phenomenon of "patchwork" interdisciplinary education.

Comprehensively improving the quality of independent talent cultivation has become an important task for talent cultivation in basic education in China, with practical abilities, innovative spirit, and pioneering spirit being essential qualities for students. After the issuance of the 2022 curriculum standards, Professor Cui Yunhui from East China Normal University mentioned in his article that in the context of new curriculum reforms, interdisciplinary theme learning refers to achieving interdisciplinary teaching through theme-based learning to cultivate students' comprehensive core literacy. He proposed implementation strategies for interdisciplinary theme learning, providing a reference basis for designing interdisciplinary theme practice activities for basic education teachers.

There is relatively little research on interdisciplinary theme learning from the perspective of extracurricular aesthetic education. Professor Qian Chuxi from East China Normal University stated, "In basic education, we not only need to learn knowledge and skills but also focus on cultural cultivation. Art has unique advantages in cultivating students' humanistic heritage and scientific spirit." It can be seen that interdisciplinary theme learning is an effective implementation approach for aesthetic education in the new era. [3]

3.2. Strengthening Interdisciplinary Theme Learning and Implementing Aesthetic Education Practices

As one of the earliest extracurricular educational institutions in the country, the Beijing Youth Palace was established in 1956 to provide a platform for young people to learn and engage in activities. It offers interest group courses in art, fine arts, science and technology, sports, nature, and others, and has organizational structures such as the Beijing Teaching Botanical Garden and the Office of Social Classroom Management. Leveraging these advantages, we have undertaken various attempts at interdisciplinary theme learning. [4]

Firstly, we design interdisciplinary theme learning activities to enhance the interconnection between subjects, promote the implementation of comprehensive curriculum, and emphasize practical requirements. Teaching research is rooted in the requirements and suggestions of the new curriculum standards. We conduct thematic aesthetic education practice activities by integrating art, language, science and technology, nature, and other subjects, starting from daily life, aiming to educate with beauty and nurture with beauty. [5]

Secondly, the design of activities involves authentic situations, guiding students to engage in independently exploration. By involving students in complex and new problem-solving processes, we overcome the disconnection between knowledge learning and thinking practice, which is an effective way for interdisciplinary theme learning to play an educational role.

Furthermore, various countries around the world are considering whether the children educated by our current education system can handle uncertain future challenges and contribute to the progress and development of world civilization. In fact, China has conducted in-depth investigations and research on this issue, and we have conducted numerous specific teaching practices focusing on extracurricular aesthetic education.

3.2.1. Textbook Writing

Since July 2022, as a core member, I have participated in the compilation of the People's Education Press's "Compulsory Education Textbook: Fine Arts." We closely adhere to the requirements and suggestions of the new curriculum standards, designing theme-based unit teaching activities, setting up authentic problem scenarios, allowing students to start the entire unit with questions and engage in inquiry-based learning. Students experience real-life problems in the scenario and solve them through teamwork. [6]

3.2.2. Discussion and Exchange

Twice, we visited designated poverty-stricken counties in Shanxi Province assisted by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League to conduct thematic interdisciplinary aesthetic education practice activity exchanges and discussions. We brought new theoretical ideas and practical experiences from the capital to impoverished mountainous areas, aiding the growth of teachers in these regions and the development of their practical activities. In October 2023, during the "New Era Extracurricular Art Education Based on Core Literacy" thematic exchange conference organized by the China Youth Palace Association, I gave a keynote speech on the "Model of Extracurricular Teaching Practice Activities," sharing and summarizing the practical achievements of interdisciplinary theme learning at the Beijing Youth Palace. [7]

3.2.3. Projects and Papers

We have undertaken several research projects and paper writing based on interdisciplinary theme learning, such as the Beijing Municipal Extracurricular and Extramural Education "13th Five-Year Plan" research project "Practical Research on Enriching and Innovating Extracurricular Art Education Teaching with Multidisciplinary and Multiregional Cultures" and the Beijing Youth Palace "14th Five-Year Plan" research project "Research on Art Derivative Product Design Teaching Practice Activities Based on Traditional Culture," achieving certain results and effects. [8]

3.2.4. Planning Practice Activities of Aesthetic Education

Relying on the educational and teaching activity advantages of the Beijing Youth Palace, we have planned and organized more than 30 various aesthetic education practice activities.

(1) Incorporating nature education and labor education, we organized the "Autumn Thoughts - Leaf Collage Activity" (see Figure 1). During the golden autumn season, we invited botany teachers from the teaching botanical garden to explain plant-related knowledge to students. Students then picked

leaves in the beautiful botanical garden and collaged them into their favorite patterns. Throughout the activity, students actively used their imagination, hands-on experience, and verbal communication.



Figure 1. Organizing Students to Conduct "Thoughts of Autumn — Leaf Collage Activity"

(2) Integrating Nature and Design: "Ginkgo Nut Packaging Design Activity" (see Figure 2). This activity, based on knowledge from the art discipline, incorporates botanical science and design thinking. Students are grouped into ginkgo nut packaging design studios, playing the role of designers. This setup allows students to experience the entire workflow of a designer from start to finish. Through communication, collaboration, and exploration, students gradually solve problems encountered during the design process.



Figure 2. Organizing Students to Conduct "Ginkgo Nut Packaging Design Activity"

(3) Integrating Technology and Chinese Language: "Love in Homeland - Discovering the Most Beautiful Workers Activity" (see Figure 3). In this activity, students are encouraged to find the most beautiful workers in their daily lives and show their respect in their own way. Some students design folding fans and give them to sanitation workers who work hard under the scorching sun, while others carve images of firefighters and present them to the firefighters fighting on the front lines of urban safety. They discover and appreciate in their own way, reflecting, experiencing, and creating during the activity.



Figure 3. Organizing Students to Conduct "Love in Homeland - Discovering the Most Beautiful Workers Activity"

3.3. Analyzing the Essence of Interdisciplinary Education and Cultivating Core Literacy and Virtue

The 2022 edition of China's Compulsory Education Curriculum Standard explicitly introduces the concept of "interdisciplinary theme learning." Professor Guo Hua proposed: "In interdisciplinary theme learning, 'interdisciplinary' is the premise, and 'theme learning' is the focus. Resolving the difficulties of interdisciplinary theme learning is the key to students truly engaging in learning and becoming the subject of learning." Therefore, we believe that interdisciplinary theme learning aims to cultivate students' interdisciplinary literacy. It uses a specific subject as a carrier, integrates thematic tasks with knowledge from other disciplines, generates interdisciplinary theme learning units, and allows students to engage in learning activities centered around thematic tasks and characterized by cooperative practice.

President Xi mentioned in a reply letter to several professors from the Central Academy of Fine Arts the need to strengthen aesthetic education, root it in the times, follow the characteristics of aesthetic education, promote the spirit of Chinese aesthetic education, and ensure that the young generation of China grows up healthy in body and mind. He emphasized the need to guide students with socialist core values, aim to improve students' aesthetic and humanistic literacy, promote the spirit of Chinese aesthetic education, and truly achieve "cultivating virtue and nurturing people".

Based on interdisciplinary theme learning, the construction of extracurricular aesthetic education in the new era is the focus of our current work. Conducting teaching and practice activities with aesthetic education as the core is an effective path to cultivate core literacy among young people. [9]

4. Innovative Aspects and Future Thoughts of Extracurricular Aesthetic Education Practices Based on Interdisciplinary Theme Learning

4.1. Nurturing Individuals through Extracurricular Activities

Public extracurricular education institutions serve as the main research field, leveraging the characteristics of extracurricular education in "nurturing through activities" and "nurturing through practice." The objective is to conduct interdisciplinary theme learning courses with the goal of projectizing educational activities, curriculumizing project construction, and systematizing curriculum development. In terms of implementation strategies, the following five principles are followed:

- (1) Balancing Professional Skills and Core Literacy
- (2) Promoting Improvement through Popularization, and Driving Popularization through Improvement
- (3) Coexistence of Classroom Teaching and Practical Activities
- (4) Emphasizing both the Learning Process and Achievement Results
- (5) Cultivating students' humanistic sentiments of loving the motherland, loving Beijing, and loving life

4.2. Nurturing Individuals Comprehensively Based on Curriculum Standards

Based on the new version of the compulsory education stage curriculum standards for arts (fine arts), Chinese language, labor, science, morality, and law, conduct comprehensive horizontal and vertical analysis and comparison of corresponding age group's teaching objectives, learning activities, and evaluation criteria. Design interdisciplinary theme teaching activities according to the physical and mental characteristics of students at this age stage and academic requirements. Implement comprehensive education goals shifting from "teaching" to "nurturing individuals".

4.3. Designing a Student-centered Evaluation Concept

The "100+" evaluation concept is designed, which is integrated throughout the teaching activities. The evaluation criteria designed by teachers include five dimensions, each with 20 points, totaling 100 points. The "+" in "100+" lies in the evaluation sheets autonomously designed by children from their own understanding perspectives. The issues students pay attention to can inspire teachers in designing future teaching activities. In addition to focusing on disciplinary expertise in teaching activity design, attention is also paid to guiding students to focus on gains beyond the discipline, including gratitude,

respect, empathy, self-confidence, etc., gradually improving students' core literacy. [10]

4.4. Leading Future with Science and Technology

In today's rapidly developing era of artificial intelligence, technological means can have a positive impact on our aesthetic education practice activities. In the future, we can fully utilize the advantages of artificial intelligence technology to innovate aesthetic education activity methods and improve the effectiveness of aesthetic education practice.

Using artificial intelligence technologies such as image recognition and natural language processing can help students appreciate artistic works more intuitively. With the help of AI technology, various interdisciplinary aesthetic education practice activities can be carried out, combining fine arts with literature, history, science and technology, etc., such as digital painting, virtual reality art, etc., which can increase students' sense of experience and participation and stimulate their creativity and imagination.

Establishing a shared platform for aesthetic education resources to integrate and share excellent educational resources, providing richer learning resources for students.

Establishing a more scientific and objective aesthetic education evaluation system, digitally analyzing and evaluating students' works to more accurately assess students' professional level and progress, providing more powerful support for teaching practice activities.

5. Conclusion

Although the current research results provide significant data support for our educational practice, the exploration of how to conduct interdisciplinary theme learning practices in extracurricular education venues at the basic education stage is still in its infancy. It is worth further exploration by educators in specific practices. Rational transformation of theoretical achievements into teaching practices can apply forward-looking theoretical knowledge to practical teaching activities, gradually forming interdisciplinary theme-based aesthetic education activities with more innovative characteristics in line with educational modernization, striving to truly benefit students.

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