

Application of empirical teaching activities in children's aesthetic education: A case study of a kindergarten in Fuzhou City

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Abstract: Aesthetic education is an educational pursuit with the core of cultivating students' perception ability, aesthetic understanding ability, aesthetic evaluation ability and aesthetic creativity. In the past few decades, aesthetic education in China has experienced various developments and reforms. However, there is still a big gap in the understanding of children's aesthetic education. Through the observation of aesthetic education teaching activities in a kindergarten in Fuzhou City, this study summarizes the teaching methods of infant aesthetic education and preliminarily evaluates the effectiveness of empirical teaching practice in Chinese students' aesthetic education. The research shows that the teaching activities of children's aesthetic education basically use empirical teaching, but the degree of application is different. Empirical teaching has been proved to be effective in promoting aesthetic education teaching activities. Aesthetic education teaching activities should adopt more flexible and interesting teaching design.

Keywords: aesthetic education; teaching; current situation; children; China

1. Introduction

The term "aesthetics" was coined by philosopher Alexander von Baumgarten in the mid-eighteenth century, rooted in the Greek word "aesthetic" for sense perception. Baumgarten emphasized refining perception and recognizing beauty. "Beauty" is inherent, and the "aesthetic sense" is the ability to perceive it, cultivated within an individual. This perception of beauty involves keen senses, imagination, and personal experience (Huang-Shi, 2020). Aesthetic education, introduced by Baumgarten, is about nurturing a sense of beauty. He defined aesthetics as "the science of perceptual understanding." Aesthetic education is commonly recognized as a facet of aesthetics closely linked with pedagogy. Aesthetics studies aesthetic activity, a spiritual engagement from practical human activities and transcending utility. Artistic beauty represents the most concentrated form of beauty within the human aesthetic experience, expressed through theoretical aspects of aesthetic consciousness. (Li et al., 2023). Engaging in the exploration, assessment, enjoyment, and production of objects of beauty encompasses various endeavors within the realm of aesthetics. Aesthetic education fosters superior learning experiences and comprehensive student growth to enhance quality (Liu, 2022).

Implementing aesthetic education in China involves three main components: family-focused, school-based, and societal engagement. Families play a crucial role in nurturing aesthetic awareness in children, who naturally exhibit an inclination toward artistic expression and beauty appreciation. Early exposure to captivating elements like cartoons, toys, and music reinforces these innate tendencies. Parents are advised to provide tools and create a nurturing environment, thus establishing a foundation for aesthetic education. Educational institutions are central to China's aesthetic education framework (Li, 2023). Their aim encompasses fostering morality, intellect, physical health, and aesthetic appreciation. Compulsory education emphasizes classroom instruction, covering core subjects such as language, mathematics, and English alongside auxiliary areas like music, nature, crafts, and practical skills. Extracurricular activities, such as enhancing campus aesthetics or organizing contests, enhance the multifaceted approach to aesthetic education. Higher education institutions establish dedicated artistic departments and host events like debates, concerts, and exhibitions to promote aesthetic education, engaging students more deeply with aesthetics. This comprehensive strategy spans various educational levels, fostering a well-rounded appreciation for aesthetics and enhancing the educational experience (Zhu, 2022).

Aesthetic education is commonly associated with art instruction. However, the advancement of aesthetic education through art classes within higher education institutions still needs to be improved. The availability and quality of aesthetic education courses universities offer exhibit significant variation. This situation is closely tied to the role of universities in promoting aesthetic education. Primary exposure to aesthetics and art often occurs through public elective courses for students pursuing non-art majors. Regrettably, a substantial portion of these aesthetics-related electives are directly replicated from the curricula of art departments. Consequently, students needing more familiarity with art aesthetics may encounter difficulties, and the principle of tailoring teaching to individual capabilities often needs to be revised. This leads to a scenario where students prioritize grades, resulting in the mechanization of what was originally an imaginative approach to aesthetic education (Bai & Lu, 2020). In the swiftly evolving landscape of contemporary art, novel aesthetic works and concepts continue to emerge. University educators hold a responsibility to engage with these innovations actively. However, some educators adhere rigidly to conventional approaches or exhibit complacency, resisting change and maintaining narrow perspectives. This rigidity stifles the potential for aesthetic thought to make a genuine impact. Consequently, the university's educational philosophy gradually drifts away from society's rich and diverse arts and culture, fostering a sense of detachment (Zhu, 2022). Educators should focus on imparting aesthetic concepts and perspectives in contemporary universities rather than specific artistic techniques. Aesthetic learning diverges from the rationality-driven approach of science and engineering disciplines, relying more on sensibility. Marx once underscored that human development thrives on creativity, contradictions, and diversity, promoting humanization and coherence. Aesthetic learning embraces a romantic and pleasurable process characterized by fluidity and uncertainty. Educators should inspire students to recognize their unique value and emphasize the significance of embracing multiple facets of aesthetics (Bai & Lu, 2020).

Throughout millennia of history, the evolution of aesthetic education has traversed phases of advancement and standstill, yet it has endured without interruption. Following China's era of reform and openness, the nation has steered a favorable course, implementing various strategies to integrate aesthetic education within the national educational framework, yielding discernible progress. As the 21st century unfolded, and in response to the demands of economic and societal evolution, the consistent refinement and strengthening of the educational policies led by the Party, coupled with resolute execution and oversight across diverse sectors, have propelled significant growth in aesthetic education within the realm of school systems (Sang & Xu, 2022).

Aesthetic education in China is marked by convergent viewpoints centered on cultural enrichment, wherein it is widely believed to enhance individuals' comprehension of culture, history, and societal values, serving as a means to deepen cultural appreciation and safeguard traditional heritage. Additionally, a shared perspective emphasizes aesthetic education's role in holistic development, nurturing creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence, with exposure to the arts believed to enhance cognitive and emotional facets of personal growth. Moreover, promoting social harmony through aesthetic education finds resonance among many, as it fosters empathy, tolerance, and cross-cultural understanding, utilizing artistic expression as a universal language capable of bridging differences and fostering cooperation (Li & Xue, 2020; Chen, 2022).

Nevertheless, aesthetic education in China needs some help. The quality of aesthetic course instruction needs to be improved, straying from contemporary art and needing standardized and culturally enriched teaching. Simultaneously, the art activities have veered away from their initial "universal type" intent, and the absence of systematic safeguards and policy backing undermines aesthetic education. Dominant exam-oriented ideology overshadows humanistic sensitivity, neglecting "people-oriented" perspectives. Additionally, a tendency to excessively admire foreign influences has resulted in a lack of self-cultural value identity (Bai & Lu, 2018). Addressing the prevailing practical challenges, researchers resorted to comprehensive investigations utilizing methodologies like surveys and interviews to gain insights into our country's present state of aesthetic education (Wang & Huang, 2023). For instance, Yong and Guorui (2018) have identified utilitarianism and rote learning issues within aesthetic education, accompanied by severe faculty shortages and an ineffective evaluation system. Diankun and Yinghong (2018) have highlighted discrepancies between the aesthetic education goals set for colleges and universities at the national level and the current implementation status, revealing concerns such as inadequate emphasis, a lack of cohesive mechanisms, and overly simplistic teaching methods. Introducing the ecological niche concept from the realm of ecology, noble studies underscore the existence of phenomena within aesthetic education instruction, such as the juxtaposition of aesthetic education and specialized teaching, the coexistence of aesthetic education theory and its practical application, and the contrasts between exam-focused education and the pursuit of holistic quality education (Wang & Huang, 2023).

On this basis, it is necessary to re-examine aesthetic education teaching activities and evaluate their effectiveness. Before that, this study aims to grasp the application and teaching effect of empirical teaching in aesthetic education teaching activities by observing the aesthetic education teaching activities of a kindergarten in Fuzhou City with the methods of observation and literature data, and put forward improvement measures[1-7].

2. Significance and Methods of the study

The findings and recommendations of this study could be beneficial to the following:

Children/Students: This study seeks to identify teaching methods that enhance children's creativity, cognitive growth, emotional development, aesthetic understanding, confidence, and inclusivity. Additionally, it could impact educational practices, cultivate lasting arts appreciation, and support evidence-based teaching across subjects. This ultimately enriches children's learning and encourages lifelong engagement with the arts.

Parents: The study provides parents with insights to harness their children's artistic talents, enabling informed decisions, enhancing parental involvement, boosting children's confidence and engagement, and promoting effective teaching strategies at home and school. This enriches children's artistic development, nurtures family aesthetics, and empowers parents to advocate for better aesthetic education practices.

Educators: The study's significance lies in its potential to inform instructional strategies through empirically informed teaching activities, leading to enhanced learning outcomes and student-centered approaches in children's aesthetic education. By identifying effective methods and promoting creativity and critical thinking, educators can refine their practices and advocate for integrating aesthetic education within broader curricular frameworks, contributing to professional development and underscoring the vital role of aesthetics in children's holistic development.

Academic institutions: By finding effective methods and promoting creativity, educators can enhance learning outcomes and student-centered approaches. This supports integrating aesthetic education in curricula, aiding professional development, and highlighting aesthetics' role in children's holistic growth.

Ministry of Education: The findings will directly inform curriculum, teacher development, and policy-making decisions. This contributes to holistic student growth, matches global education trends, and aligns with the Ministry's aims for comprehensive education, cultural preservation, and global educational competitiveness. The research also guides resource allocation and standards to support these goals.

Government: The findings can guide the Chinese government in forming education policies, preserving cultural heritage, and improving student development, global competitiveness, emotional growth, public engagement, equity, and innovative curriculum. This research shapes effective strategies for modern education, enriching experiences, and nurturing well-rounded individuals in a fast-changing world.

Private educational institutions: This study is crucial because it can improve teaching, give a competitive edge, align curriculum with goals, involve parents, foster student development, and promote research. The findings empower these institutions to offer evidence-based aesthetic education, stand out, boost student satisfaction, and create a meaningful learning experience.

Education-affiliated Non-Government Organizations: The findings provide important insights for program development, advocacy, resource allocation, and educational institution collaboration. These insights help NGOs create evidence-based initiatives, secure funding, and improve their impact on children's aesthetic education. The study equips educators with evidence-based strategies, enhancing professional development. It supports NGOs' mission to offer quality education for children in resource-constrained environments.

Future researchers: This study provides methodological guidance for future researchers designing similar investigations. It enhances pedagogy, informs policy, encourages interdisciplinary exploration, and enables comparative studies. As these findings are built upon, a growing body of research will shape the impact of empirically-informed teaching on children's aesthetic development[8-16].

This section describes how researchers will use observational and documentary methods to conduct

research.

Observational method: Non-participatory observation method was used to observe the teaching methods of aesthetic education in a kindergarten in Fuzhou, such as:

What kind of aesthetic education teaching activities have been carried out? How to organize teaching? Are empirical teaching methods used? What are the ways of empirical teaching? How do you feel about the teaching effect? Through the observation of these stages, we can understand the teaching behavior, children's learning behavior and emotional experience of aesthetic education teaching.

Documentary method: Collect literature and research results related to the topic selection through Google Academic and other databases. Through the summary of the existing research literature, grasp the research trends of empirical teaching in aesthetic education teaching activities, grasp the direction of further research, and provide objective basis for further research.

3. Current situation of aesthetic education teaching in a kindergarten in Fuzhou City

3.1 Research objects and research tools

The main research object of this paper is Fuzhou Meihua Kindergarten, which has 385 students in 5 small classes, 4 middle classes and 4 large classes. According to the research purpose and needs of this paper, the author randomly selected three classes in this kindergarten as the focus of observation, one in each class. In the form of random sampling, non-participatory observation and interview were conducted among the staff in this kindergarten.

By referring to the existing research results, the author rearranges the previous observation outline and forms the survey tool "Kindergarten aesthetic Education Teaching Observation Table" which meets the needs of this paper.

3.2 Observation Process

In order to understand the current situation of aesthetic education teaching in this kindergarten, especially the application of empirical teaching in aesthetic education teaching activities, the author adopts the way of overall observation and focus observation. The whole observation is to know the whole situation of aesthetic education teaching in kindergarten by consulting the teaching record of kindergarten. The key observation is to select the classes as the object of observation, and carefully investigate the specific methods and effects of aesthetic education teaching in these classes, especially the application of empirical teaching and teaching effects[17-23].

The author observed the subjects on the spot during the one-month observation and interview period. Before each formal observation, pre-observation will be conducted one or two days in advance, and the teachers and students under observation will be familiar with the contact, so as to avoid distracting the attention of children due to the curiosity of the author in the formal observation stage, affecting the real credibility of the observation results. During the formal observation, the author adhered to the observation principle of being comprehensive, focused and detailed, recorded the teaching activities of dance, art and music classes in the kindergarten, taking the participation status of students, the performance of students and the effectiveness of the atmosphere as the observation dimension, and whether the teaching method is conducive to the learning of children as the observation point, and observed different classes in small, middle and large classes. The specific observation scale is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Observation scale of different aesthetic education courses

Teacher's name	Miss Wang			Class			Primary Class 1		
Course	Dance "Little Star"			Time			August 1 - August 31, 2023		
The main part of class activities	Student participation status			Student's mastery of skills			The appropriateness of teaching methods and objectives		
	Strong interest and active participation in activities	General interest, passive participation in activities	Disinterest, passivity, or disengagement from activities	Dexterity	Understand	Normal	Suitable	Basic fit	Out of place
Lecturing against textbook		✓			✓			✓	
Teacher demonstration		✓		✓			✓		
Student presentation	✓			✓			✓		
Mini game design	✓			✓			✓		
Classroom records: In the first half of the course, the teacher mainly taught against the textbook, and the students' participation enthusiasm was not high. In the interactive part of teacher demonstration and student demonstration, the students' participation enthusiasm was higher and they mastered more things. At the end of the course, the teacher carefully designed a small game based on the teaching content -- imitating the movements of different animals. Students' participation enthusiasm and mastery of knowledge are high.									
Teacher's name	Miss Li			Class			Middle Class 1		
Course	Music "Selling Newspaper Songs"			Time			August 1 - August 31, 2023		
The main part of class activities	Student participation status			Student's mastery of skills			The appropriateness of teaching methods and objectives		
	Strong interest and active participation in activities	General interest, passive participation in activities	Disinterest, passivity, or disengagement from activities	Dexterity	Understand	Normal	Suitable	Basic fit	Out of place
Lecturing against textbook			✓			✓		✓	
Teacher demonstration		✓			✓			✓	
Student presentation	✓			✓			✓		
Music development appreciation		✓			✓			✓	
Classroom records: In the first half of the course, the teacher mainly taught against the textbook, and the students' participation enthusiasm was not high. In the interactive part of teacher demonstration and student demonstration, the students' participation enthusiasm was higher and they mastered more things. At the end of the course, the teacher combined the teaching content to conduct an extended appreciation of music and led the students to enjoy the opera video, but the students were not very interested in this, which may be related to the students' young age.									
Teacher's name	Miss Zhang			Class			Class 2		
Course	Art - Drawing			Time			August 1 - August 31, 2023		
The main part of class activities	Student participation status			Student's mastery of skills			The appropriateness of teaching methods and objectives		
	Strong interest and active participation in activities	General interest, passive participation in activities	Disinterest, passivity, or disengagement from activities	Dexterity	Understand	Normal	Suitable	Basic fit	Out of place
Lecturing against textbook			✓			✓		✓	
Teacher demonstration	✓			✓			✓		
Student presentation	✓			✓			✓		
Visit an art exhibition	✓				✓		✓		
Classroom records: In the first half of the course, the teacher mainly taught against the textbook, at which time the students' enthusiasm was not high. In the demonstration part, the teacher drew several cute sketches of small animals, which attracted the students' attention. At this time, the teacher began to demonstrate the drawing skills, and the students then practiced. The overall atmosphere of the class is good. At the end of the course, the teacher led the students to visit an art exhibition, which enhanced their interest in learning.									

3.3 Results and analysis

(1) Through investigation, it is found that every class in this kindergarten has three art courses: dance,

art and music. All three art courses will have at least one class per week. On the whole, each course has a curriculum prepared in advance, and teachers will teach students according to the lesson plan. However, the specific teaching method will be slightly different for different teachers. For example, some teachers mainly teach in the way of lecture, while some teachers prefer to teach in an interactive way. Some teachers rarely use special teaching AIDS, and some teachers use different special teaching AIDS according to the course content. Some teachers strictly follow the teaching schedule, and some teachers will adjust the teaching schedule according to the actual learning situation of students.

(2) From the perspective of students' enthusiasm for participation, art courses are more popular among students, followed by dance and music. This may be related to the preference of early childhood students for hands-on work. At the same time, as art teachers use more characteristic teaching AIDS and rich colors in the teaching process, dance teachers add animal imitation in the teaching process, which has won more students' love.

(3) From the perspective of students' mastery of skills, the teacher's explanation and demonstration are indispensable. However, considering the acceptance and understanding ability of children, the teacher's explanation should be more vivid and lively. The interaction between teacher demonstration and student demonstration is necessary, which can promote students to better grasp the skills taught by teachers.

(4) From the perspective of the appropriateness of teaching methods and objectives, the traditional teaching methods still have their merits. The innovation of teachers' teaching methods may be easier to achieve the teaching goal. In addition, due to the aesthetic education teaching, in addition to teaching and learning certain skills, more should also cultivate students' ability to appreciate beauty. This requires teachers to fully consider the purpose of improving students' aesthetic level in the course of teaching. In the content and mode of teaching, we should add some expansion activities[24-27].

4. The role of empirical teaching in aesthetic education teaching activities

In the process of observation, it is found that the aesthetic education curriculum of the kindergarten has applied the empirical teaching method, but the degree of application is different. Some teachers will analyze and adjust according to the actual situation, and the teaching is more flexible and changeable. Some teachers pay more attention to the design of lesson plans, and then teach according to the content of the textbook. In the observation of the dance teaching of the two teachers, it can be found that the empirical teaching method may be more beneficial to students. In order to cooperate with this survey, the kindergarten organized teacher Wang to give the same dance class to Primary 1 and Primary 2 students of similar age, and the ratio of male to female students in these two classes was also the same. The specific observation scale is shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: A comparison table of different teaching methods for the same course

Teacher's name	Miss Wang			Class			Primary Class 1		
Course	Classical dance "Orchid Grass"			Time			August 25th, 2023		
The main part of class activities	Student participation status			Student's mastery of skills			The appropriateness of teaching methods and objectives		
	Strong interest and active participation in activities	General interest, passive participation in activities	Disinterest, passivity, or disengagement from activities	Dexterity	Understand	Normal	Suitable	Basic fit	Out of place
Lecturing against textbook	✓				✓			✓	
Classroom records: Teachers mainly teach according to the prepared courseware in advance. In the course of the lecture, some wonderful places also attracted the interest of students. However, some students began to walk in the classroom after failing to keep up with the teacher's progress, and basically completed the teaching goal.									
Teacher's name	Miss Wang			Class			Primary Class 2		
Course	Classical dance "Orchid Grass"			Time			August 25th, 2023		
The main part of class activities	Student participation status			Student's mastery of skills			The appropriateness of teaching methods and objectives		
	Strong interest and active participation in activities	General interest, passive participation in activities	Disinterest, passivity, or disengagement from activities	Dexterity	Understand	Normal	Suitable	Basic fit	Out of place
Adopt the empirical teaching method	✓			✓			✓		
Classroom records: The teacher prepared a variety of learning plans before class. According to the actual situation of the teaching process, we adopted a variety of lively and interesting teaching methods, which greatly improved students' interest and fulfilled the teaching goal.									

5. Conclusion and prospect

Conclusion:

(1) At present, the kindergartens surveyed generally adopt the empirical teaching method to carry out aesthetic education teaching activities, but the degree of application is different. Flexible, diverse and interesting teaching methods have a positive effect on improving the quality of teaching.

(2) Different aesthetic education courses, children's love is not the same, which requires teachers to carry out more teaching design according to the actual situation.

(3) Empirical teaching method can improve teaching quality in aesthetic education teaching activities.

Outlook:

Because this study adopts observation method, the classification of experimental classes is not perfect and scientific. The evaluation method of teaching effect is not detailed and reasonable enough. The next step is to conduct a more reasonable quantitative evaluation of the effectiveness of empirical teaching in aesthetic education.

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