

The study of the difference in Elementary School Art Education curriculum between China and the United States

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Abstract:

Primary school art education is a key component of the primary education system. The idea of key competence, in the hope of fully developing students' ability in art, is seen as an important concept in China. The following study examines the curriculum of China and America on primary art education from three sections: frameworks, aims, and teaching methods. The study aims to demonstrate a thorough investigation of education in both countries, discovering the advantages of both countries to provide suggestions that elevate the quality of art education based on curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum, art education, primary school

1. Introduction

Art Education has long contributed to the development of Children. The benefits of art education for children include motor skills, language development, decision-making, visual learning, incentives, cultural awareness, and improved academic performance.^[1] In all components of art education, curriculum, with its definition of the formation and implementation of an educational proposal to be taught and learned within the school or other institution^[2], holds significant importance in identifying the structure of knowledge taught in the school. The curricula of art education from different countries often reflect the main aims of a country and the general views it wants to promote to its citizens as art education. "Many educational researchers have recommended the use of curriculum relevant to students and reflects the cultural diversity of the student's community"^[3] Scholars claimed: "Curriculum developers must always be concerned about what should be included in the curriculum and how to present and arrange what is selected. In other words, they must first deal with content or subject matter and then learning experiences."^[4] In other words, the most important component of the curriculum consists of framework, aims, and methodology. Therefore, the three aspects will be used in the analysis in this passage. This study compares the art education curricula for primary schools in the United States and China and studies their difference in social values that want to be promoted to children. This study will review papers from the two countries, presenting a literature review and exploring the different aspects of curricula. A parallel comparison will be made in this study to understand the differences between the two cities listed above and to find the advantages of different aspects of the curricula between

different countries and their difference in the primary focus of art education.

2. Literature Review

The three sections of the curricula in China and America have their characteristics, as China, in its framework, aims, and teaching method, focuses more on developing students' interests; however, it neglects the development of skills of students and their connection when analyzing the artworks. The United States, on the other hand, offers students skills in practicing and personal connection with the knowledge taught.

The Framework:

Frameworks in a curriculum, which, according to UNESCO, refers to An overarching document that places a vision of economic development and education policy in a curriculum context^[5]. As an example, the Framework of the curricula of The United States and China for primary school art lessons showed its difference as the curriculum of The United States emphasized specifically associating personal lives with the knowledge learned. At the same time, China paid less attention to that. On the other hand, the framework of the curriculum of The United States is the aims, framework, content, teaching method, and evaluating method of the art curriculum of The United States throughout K-12 education. The document recorded the standards of The United States's education department on curriculums in different courses. In the visual art section, the framework of the curriculum is split into four sections: creating (organizing artistic works and completing them), presenting (analyzing artworks and exploring the meaning of it), responding (interpreting meanings of the artwork), connecting (relating social issues, personal experiences to appreciate and create art)^[6]. The framework of The United States' art curriculum

is clearly seen as the underlying student’s ability to make artwork, present understanding of an artwork, interpret understandings, and especially, make personal connections clear to be seen. The element of personal connection is missing in the curriculum of China, which is composed of three modules and five themes shown in the curriculum as a framework. The three modules are modeling and performance, creativeness and application, and appreciating and analyzing. The five themes are painting expression, carving shapes, craft production, creative design, and appreciation.^[7] The two countries’ curriculum standards, although resembling the type of skills taught in the framework, greatly differed in the analysis aspects. Scholars from China also pointed out such difference: “The

art education evaluation index system is simple; present evaluation indicators are only for knowledge and skills, ignored emotion, manner, values, as well as individual differences of the students, were considered, thus cannot accurately reflect the reality of school art education.^[8]” The information above corresponded to the statement of a lack of personal connection with art pieces taught in the curriculum, pointing out that China lacked the idea of individual interpretation of students when constructing the framework. The United States, on the other hand, focuses on teaching the student’s ability to project personal feelings on artworks learned, presenting a more developed framework in the aspect of analysis.

Table 1 Comparison between Massachusetts Framework and Shanghai Framework

Massachusetts framework	Shanghai Framework
creating	Modeling, creativeness and application, creative design, painting expression, carving shapes, craft production
Presenting	performance
Responding	Appreciation, analyzing
connecting	

3. Aims

As UNESCO mentions, aims or objectives in a curriculum bear the meaning of Broad descriptions of purposes or ends stated in general terms without criteria of achievement or mastery. Curriculum aims or goals relate to educational aims and philosophy. In documents related to the curricula of the two cities, both curricula presented an aim to provide students with bits of knowledge and skills related to art. Still, the United States emphasized helping students understand the academic information, which China’s curriculum didn’t focus on. In the essay “A Comparative Study of Art Education Evaluation in China and the United States,” “ researchers used a literature review to research the differences between American standards of art education and Chinese standards of art education. It was stated in the passage that “The American Standard clearly states that “art subjects should have a comprehensive, thorough and solid system of knowledge and skills.” “emphasizing that” students’ thorough grasp of the basic knowledge and basic skills of art subjects. “. At the same time, “each subject has specific abilities, and students should reach a clearly defined level in their education ^[9]”. The art curriculum of America clearly shows an inclined interest in teaching academic information and practical skills throughout studying, demonstrating an aim of teaching students practical and intellectual skills throughout the passage.

The Chinese standard, on the other hand, “clearly puts realizing the comprehensive development of artistic ability and humanistic quality as the curriculum’s main aim”. Aside from “artistic ability,” humanities” was also added to this goal. China’s primary and secondary schools’ art teaching Education emphasizes not only artistic ability but also humanistic quality.” It was shown that aside from artistic focuses, the curriculum of China also aims to offer humanistic knowledge to students. However, basic skills and knowledge are not mentioned enough in the aims. Other scholars also saw such differences in objectives between both curricula. “In China, art education is considered an important auxiliary tool for moral education. There is no mandator requirement to cultivate one’s sentiment and improve one’s self-cultivation through art education.^[10]

As mentioned above, the United States standard promoted the transmission of knowledge and skills the subject required to students, which corresponded with the artistic ability mentioned, which must be taught in the Chinese curriculum, serving as a similarity. However, the American standard emphasized a “thorough grasp of the basic knowledge and basic skills of art subjects,” which refers to the general academic information about art, as the main aim is described to be developing students’ basic skills in arts, was not shown as a main point in China’s curriculum. Art education’s practical and academic side takes on a

large portion of the US curriculum, as demonstrated. The emphasis on basic skills of art education presented in the United States curriculum is something that China can look upon and enforce in their curriculum.

4. Teaching Method

The teaching method, referred to as the implemented curriculum, bears the meaning of the actual teaching and learning activities taking place in schools through interaction between learners and teachers and among learners. The teaching method of the curricula was similar in that both curricula predominantly emphasized the children's interest, but different in that the United States specifically emphasized a promotion of students' empathy of the artwork to their actual life. When describing the method, the Chinese curriculum guide stated the following: "Therefore, art courses want to have a place in the minds of most students, we should pay attention to stimulate students' internal interest in learning art, combine art knowledge and skills in interest, with interest with knowledge, to create complementary skills, so that students from the interest to feel fun, and finally form an interest."^[1] The curriculum of China, as shown in the citation, holds a teaching method primarily to invoke students' interests in art as a course and give them skills required for the field. The method was to raise student's passion for arts and offer them courses related to such objectives. However, the application of art in real life is merely demonstrated and somewhat neglected in the teaching method, differing from what the curriculum of the United States presented. In the passage of *Captured Voices* in primary school art education, the method of "Action research methodology was collaboratively used in eight primary schools selected to provide a cross-section of pedagogical approaches used by generalist primary school teachers across all four art disciplines: drama, dance, music and visual arts." The case study of the school's policy, as well as responses from students and teachers, asserted that dominant art education strategies include: "mimetic tradition," a connection of natural phenomena with the artwork that resembles such phenomenon, "Expressivist," the emphasis on the expression of feelings, and "formalist tradition," a self-autonomous ideology that artwork centralizes around the artist themselves^[12]. The teaching method of the United States, as to be seen, is focused on encouraging the students to express their specific feelings and reflect on the ideals of oneself through the artists, giving the curriculum a nature of teaching students about self-reflection and analysis. The emphasis on development interests from the Chinese curriculum resulted in deficiencies in developing

aspects of expression and real-life connections of the students. Such deficiency could be supplemented if the method of the United States could be adopted and merged with the existing teaching method that the Chinese curriculum beholds.

5. Discussion

From previous research, we could see the differences in both countries' frameworks, aims, and teaching methods of curricula. On the framework, the United States presented its difference from China as emphasizing developing connections between the students and the knowledge they can apply. Such emphasis could be studied and added to the curriculums to provide more knowledge for students and raise their personal interests in learning art rather than enforcing it on a broad, less focused skill. The element of the framework can also be combined with the humanistic aspects of the curriculum in China, further raising the relations of students to their local culture. On the aims of the curriculum, the United States elaborated its need to teach basic skills and knowledge to students, a component that China could use as a reference. The aim of the Chinese curriculum, which is to promote interest in students, can sometimes be vague and leave students with a less programmed curriculum to study with. Adding lessons in professional skills, in turn, offers an opportunity for students if they want to obtain art as an education path. The teaching method of the United States emphasizes the connection and analysis of artworks, which is also important to raise awareness in the Chinese curriculum to develop student's taste and passion for the course.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the differences in curricula in China and the United States can be looked at in 3 different aspects: framework, aim, and teaching method. As for the three aspects, the common problem is that China's investigation stayed on its surface and enforced broad methods. In contrast, the United States presented a detailed, systematic emphasis on each problem. For the framework of the curricula from the two regions, the United States curriculum especially focuses on the personal relationships of students with the artworks and knowledge taught, which isn't present in the curriculum of China. The aim of the two curricula showed matching values in teaching students basic skills. Still, China stayed in developing students' interest in general, while The United States focuses on academic information students learn with detailed planning. The teaching methods of the two curricula showed an interest in developing

student-orientated methods and focusing on their interests, but the curriculum of the United States holds more activities related to activating students' connection with their real lives. Therefore, comparing the curricula can be achieved, and the different ideas passed by the art education curricula can be seen. The benefit of the American curriculum, with more developed and structural frameworks, can be used as references to elevate education quality in China. In present-day China, key competence is popular in art education. The key competencies consist of art perception, aesthetic experience, creative expression, cultural understanding, and comprehensive integration^[13]. Corresponding to the aspects discussed above, China can develop the five components with a detailed plan presented in the United States, demonstrating systematic learning of arts in different aspects with the aspects mentioned. The art perception can correspond to the analysis of artwork, and the aesthetic experience then corresponds to the personal connection made with the knowledge and artworks studied; the creative expression can also be found in both curriculums, which can advance itself in adapting a thorough teaching style, the cultural understanding can be combined with the interesting development to promote the spread of local culture, and the comprehensive integration can be found in making personal connections with the artworks as well as integrating student's opinion.

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