

Original Paper

The Research of Early Childhood Art Education in Taiwan

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Abstract

In general, the research of early childhood art education has its importance. For this reason, research into early childhood art education in Taiwan has been emphasized by scholars, in the hope that preschool teachers can better understand the early childhood art education. By reading, analyzing and discussing related studies, this paper aims to explore the research of early childhood art education in Taiwan. Hopefully, such an exploration can help teachers understand concepts related to early childhood art education, and most importantly develop an excellent praxis of early childhood art education. After reading, analyzing and discussing related studies, the research issues of early childhood art education in Taiwan we identified are as follows: (1) young children's art making processes, (2) the practice of implementing an aesthetic thematic curriculum, (3) the development of learning indicators of the aesthetic domain for kindergarten curriculum in Taiwan, (4) the teaching principles of aesthetic education in early childhood, (5) multicultural art education for children, (6) investigation of art education in kindergartens, (7) children's art learning with parents, (8) making use of picture books to design a suitable art integrated curriculum for children, (9) teaching art appreciation in kindergarten, (10) employee retention and collaboration with art institutions on early childhood education, (11) integrating mangrove environmental education into art teaching for young children, and (12) the progress of implementing aesthetic feelings by integrating a community based viewpoint.

Keywords

early childhood art education, research, young children's art

1. Introduction

Early childhood education is the foundation of all basic education and plays an important role in individual development. Thus, it has an important impact on the future. There is less academic pressure at the learning stages of early childhood than at any other stages. As such, this stage is an important period in which to perform childhood art education. Young children in this learning stage are often curious about many things (Chen, 2016). Instilling reasonable beliefs about early childhood art education will promote the aesthetic development of young children at this stage.

Presently, due to rapid economic development in Taiwan, many mothers with young children have joined the workforce. Unlike the traditional family structure in Taiwan, most younger parents do not live with their own parents, who used to help take care of their grandchildren. Presently, most nuclear families in big cities include only parents and young children. These young parents need to take on the child-care responsibilities by themselves. When young mothers also need to work outside the home during the day, kindergartens or day care centers become the only choice available as a substitute to fulfill these child care needs. In addition, when considering the educational needs of their young children, mothers may prefer to send their children to kindergartens to receive education even if they do not need to work. This phenomenon is especially evident in the big cities (Lai, 2000).

The Ministry of Education proposed the Provisional Guidelines for Preschool's Educare Activity and Curriculum for teaching kindergarten in Taiwan. Curriculum of preschools includes six domains. One of the six domains is the aesthetic domain. Furthermore, providing meaning-rich learning experiences can be seen as one of the most important goals of education. How can learners have meaning-rich learning experiences? This question may be briefly understood based on two aspects: the content of subject matter and pedagogy (Hung, 2018). Therefore, teachers play an important role in the process of providing meaning-rich learning experiences. Art can be one kind of language for young children. Children's drawings provide a window to see into their own personal world (Wei & Lin, 2009). Many scholars have discussed the importance of early childhood art education research in Taiwan (Shih, Lai, & Wang, 2017). For this reason, by reading, analyzing and discussing related studies, this paper aims to explore the research of early childhood art education in Taiwan, help teachers understand related concepts, and develop the excellent praxis of early childhood art education.

2. The Importance of Early Childhood Art Education

2.1 *Value of Young Children's Art*

As we all know, young children are very interested in art and art creation. Why is this so? In addition to serving as presents for parents and decorations for the home refrigerator, art serves as a natural vehicle for young children to present their creative ideas and express their inner feelings (Lai, 2000). Art is basic. Of course, every subject area is important, but no program for young children could succeed

without emphasizing art. Through making, looking at, and talking about their own artwork and the art of others, three-, four-, and five-year-old children are doing the following: (1) Expressing their feelings and emotions in a safe way. They learn to control their emotions and recognize that they can express and handle negative as well as joyous feelings through positive action; (2) Practicing and gaining fine muscle control and strengthening eye-hand motor coordination; (3) Developing perceptual abilities. Awareness of colors, shapes, forms, lines, and textures result as children observe these and try to replicate them through art; (4) Being given the opportunity to make choices and solve problems. Making art offers children a multitude of choices and many decisions to make; (5) Seeing that others have differing points of view and ways of expressing these than they do; (6) Becoming aware of the idea that, through art, culture is transmitted; (7) Experiencing success. Because art leaves the end open to the creator, all children experience a measure of success (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006).

2.2 The Praxis of Early Childhood Art Education Is Important

If education were to continue along the old lines of mere transmission of knowledge, the problem would be insoluble and there would be no hope for the world (Montessori, 1963). In other words, education is not just transmission of knowledge, but it should also provide different learning experiences for young children.

Children's art creation is one of these learning experiences. However, traditionally, art teachers put a lot of emphasis on drawing techniques, while neglecting the process of art experiences and the importance of provoking creativity. In this new century, the holistic experiences obtained through art are integrated within multiple cultures. Piscitelli and Weier pointed out that the new trade of art education offers support for integrating rich, meaningful art experiences. By doing this, the art teacher challenges children to reach a deeper level of understanding that goes beyond their current mental level of functioning (Wei & Lin, 2009).

Moreover, infants and toddlers readily enjoy activities and experiences in the arts that reflect their environment and everyday life. Art related activities can be designed to include one-on-one interaction with a parent, professional or other caregiver. Activities in the arts should encourage infants and toddlers to use their senses, curiosity and imagination, while reinforcing early language and literacy skills; for example, singing and playing, or even dancing to "the itsy bitsy spider...". Such activities also encourage new word learning and reinforce the child's language by providing as many experiences as possible to label objects used in an art form or even label works of art. For instance, "These are shakers. Let's shake them together to make some music" (Malley, 2005).

Every child is born with creative potential. It is our job in early learning programs, and later school years, to nurture that creativity and support resourceful problem-solving, imaginative thinking, and transference of skills and knowledge to new experiences. This new review adds to the growing evidence about how art participation helps young children develop strong social and emotional skills

(National Endowment for the Arts, 2015). The praxis of early childhood art education is important. On the intuitive level, there is significant merit in setting up art centres in preschool classrooms and allowing children to play with art materials. There is something good about it (Kindler, 2010).

3. The Research Issues of Early Childhood Art Education in Taiwan

The research issues are illustrated as follows:

3.1 Young Children's Art Making Processes

The arts are a wonderful way to help children learn, express themselves and have fun! The arts take many forms that include music, singing, dance, movement, drawing, painting, sculpting, storytelling, performing, and dramatic play. All young children need opportunities to create, participate in and perform a variety of activities in the different art forms. These experiences should reflect the child's preferences and interests, as well as developmental skills and culture (Malley, 2005). Furthermore, arts participation in early childhood often includes such activities as music, song, and dance; drama and theater; visual arts, crafts, and artistic creation (NEA, 2004). For example, Shih, Lai and Wang's research explores the process of a day-care teacher's art course teaching. By such an exploration, young children can encounter art. To fulfill this purpose, weaving a "spider web" is used as an example to illuminate young children's art making process. It was hoped that art can enter young children's minds through this kind of exploration (Shih, Lai, & Wang, 2017).

3.2 The Practice of Implementing an Aesthetic Thematic Curriculum

Chen's study aimed to investigate the practice of implementing an aesthetic thematic curriculum in a preschool in Taiwan. The major findings are as follows: (1) based on young children's life experiences, the co-teachers applied a thematic approach to integrating the aesthetic domain and other learning domains in the aesthetic thematic curriculum, focusing on the topic of "Beautiful Restaurants"; (2) the young children's aesthetic abilities were developed in terms of exploring and perceiving, performing and creating, and responding and appreciating. Moreover, there was a significant difference in the children's aesthetic abilities; (3) the co-teachers promoted their professional development in aesthetic curriculum design and aesthetic teaching skills (Chen, 2017).

3.3 The Development on the Learning Indicators of Aesthetic Domain for Kindergarten Curriculum in Taiwan

In Lin's study, in order to prepare for the Curriculum Guideline after the integration of preschool and kindergarten in Taiwan, the Ministry of Education commissioned some scholars to construct the learning indicators for six learning domains in the new preschool and kindergarten curriculum guideline between 2006 and 2008. Based on the empirical research findings, Lin constructed a drama indicator and scale as an example to show the development of the aesthetic learning indicators. The findings provide foundations for theory and studies in both the aesthetic domain of young children in

Taiwan and the process of constructing learning indicators (Lin, 2012).

3.4 The Teaching Principles for Aesthetic Education in Early Childhood

Since broadening the aesthetic experiences of young children is an element of early childhood education, aesthetic education is important at this stage. Shih's study aimed to give preschool teachers a better understanding of the teaching principles for aesthetic education in early childhood so that young children can receive the appropriate type of aesthetic education. These principles broaden the aesthetic experience and promote the children's aesthetic literacy. The teaching principles for aesthetic education in early childhood are: (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. This study was intended to allow preschool teachers to more fully incorporate aesthetic teaching in early childhood education (Shih, 2018).

3.5 Multicultural Art Education for Children

In the 1970s, a worldwide movement toward multiculturalism grew out of the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States. Multicultural education has since become an international education reform movement. In art education, reconceptualized curricula have been recommended to reflect the nature of the culture and the environment in which the students are socialized. Historically, Taiwan has been the home of immigrants and in recent years, it still is. Cultural diversity is a fact in Taiwan. However, visual art education has not reflected the multicultural nature and democratic society of Taiwan. Kuo's study advocated the understanding and respect for the multi-cultures of Taiwan in order to enhance the equity of society. This study discussed some alternative conceptions and characteristics of culture, the nature of culture in Taiwan, multicultural perspectives in visual art education and the implementation of art instruction which celebrates diversity through a multicultural approach (Kuo, 2010).

In addition, Wu's study aimed to explore a 4-unit teaching plan and children's performance in the study of multiculturalism through a self-designed "culturally diverse arts" course unit, and to conduct course assessment and feedback analysis. Results of the study are as follows: (1) the implementation of the course promotes the children's acknowledgement of native culture; (2) children's understanding and identification of multiculturalism come from their cultural experience. They interpret different cultures with their cognition of life experience and express their opinions on multiculturalism and the application of culture with artistic materials; (3) course assessment and feedback: The experiential cultural activities included in culturally diverse arts courses are very popular among children because they conform to the principle of "learn by doing". During the process, the teacher's ability to design a course and to review his/her teaching activity was improved (Wu, 2009).

3.6 Investigation of Art Education in Kindergartens

Wu's research explored the practice of art education in Taipei City. The general conclusions were: (1)

art teachers' professional training was varied, so they should enhance their professional skills before and during their teaching; (2) most art teachers' teaching was based on the Kindergarten Curriculum Standards and aimed to promote children's creativity; (3) most art teachers approve of their teaching approaches; (4) art teachers chose various evaluation approaches; evaluations were mostly carried out by the teachers, and the results were meant to provide parents with knowledge concerning their children's art studies; although children nearly all had their own portfolio, only one fifth of the art teachers adopted portfolio evaluation; and (5) the most reflected difficulties were: (a) art teachers needed to do more studying and training in art education, and (b) insufficient teaching time (Wu, 2007).

3.7 Children's Art Learning with Parents

Taiwan's parents today pay greater attention to children's art education. Given that parents play crucial roles in children's early development stage, it is very meaningful for children to be guided by their parents in art learning. Lia's research adopted a qualitative case study method in which three cases of parents' teaching experiences were studied. The research findings suggest that: (1) a child's mother and father may have different expectations, teaching styles, and use different language that may impact a child's attitude toward learning and creativity; (2) authoritative teaching style coupled with guidance over a child's capacity are likely to divert a child's attention from parents' instructions, causing them to feel puzzled and confused, lose attention, and be less confident; (3) parents' teaching helps a child to develop his/her potentials and thus to improve child learning; (4) parents' teaching changes the communication between a child and his/her parents and attitude toward art learning; (5) the biggest problem that parents encounter in art teaching is the lack of time and psychical capacities due to long work hours; (6) when parent's teaching extends the topics taught in school, it is more likely to make a child motivated and creative (Lia, 2011).

3.8 Making Use of Picture Books to Design Integrated Art Curriculum Suitable for Children

Hsieh's study made use of picture books to design an integrated art curriculum suitable for children and investigate the procedure and its effect on children's learning after carrying out of the instruction. Hsieh's study was an action research applied to kids in a class. During the process of the action research, various picture books were used. The major findings of the study are: (1) art education helps promote the positive sides of society and individuals during preschool education; (2) teachers' playing applying scaffolding design to integrated children's art curriculum should consider children's developmental processes and experiences; (3) the diversity and artistic quality of picture books can balance children's development of diverse intelligence and inspire their imagination and creation, and thus, improve children's art leaning; (4) integrated art curriculum with picture books can promote children's appreciation of beauty as well as attitude toward creation for art. Furthermore, these books help to build up their confidence and enjoyment of reading (Hsieh, 2012).

3.9 Teaching Art Appreciation in Kindergarten

Yu's study focused on teaching art appreciation in Kindergarten. Based on the classroom observation of art teaching and the conclusions from literature reviews, the following conclusions were obtained: (1) for curriculum design: researchers have blended art appreciation ideas into their learning units to develop art education for preschool kids. Picture book appreciation, art experience activities and art creation have also been adopted for art education; (2) the process and the effect: preschool kids are more interested in learning art appreciation through picture books. By experiencing art, preschool kids learn to explore the sensory experiences in their environment. They also learn to show their feelings and thoughts through art creation; (3) preschool kids learn to know art and are inspired by art. They learn to think, to appreciate and to create with art. Teachers are more enthusiastic about teaching with art and were inspired by art (Yu, 2011).

3.10 Employee Retention and Collaboration with Art Institutions on Early Childhood Education

Chen's study investigated and resolved the issues of turnover and unwillingness to collaborate with employees in an art institution on early childhood education. Based on action research methodology, results of the analysis are as follows: with regards to employee retention, the results show that proper job analysis prior to employee hiring is able to help determine the appropriate skills and competencies needed for a specific job. Furthermore, sample teaching and in-depth interviewing during employee selection makes the entire process more systematic. In sum, refining the entire employment process makes possible the hiring of appropriate individuals fit for the organization. With regards to employee collaboration, the use of mentorship or mentoring is able to provide new comers with the appropriate training. Promoting organizational training that fosters collaboration and cohesion are seen as crucial. Lastly, the utilization of healthy competition for flexible work schedules is able to both effectively promote collaboration and help nurture group learning (Chen, 2014).

3.11 Integrating Mangrove Environmental Education into Teaching Arts to Young Children

Wu's study used the methods of literature review and field research to design a course. Through the integration of mangrove environmental education into visual arts, students can express their feelings about the mangrove ecological environment observed through their own artistic creation. The outcomes are as follows: (1) curriculum design regarding the integration of mangrove environmental education into teaching arts to young children: visual art creation can be achieved individually or through peer cooperation; (2) the effectiveness of integrating mangrove environmental education into teaching arts to young children: art courses can help achieve the goals of environmental education; an integrated course can enhance children's learning, facilitate their understanding of community culture; (3) the integration of mangrove environmental education into teaching arts to young children: integrated courses can inspire children's appreciation of the environment, enhance motivation for artistic creation, improve interpersonal interaction, promote understanding of living art, beautify living spaces, integrate local resources, and resonate with their life experiences (Wu, 2011).

3.12 The Progress of Implementing Aesthetic Feeling by Integrating a Community Based Viewpoint

Kuo's research adopted action investigation of "teacher as researcher" to study the progress of implementing aesthetic feeling by integrating a community based viewpoint. Kuo's study offered the following conclusions: (1) the course began with a community based viewpoint, i.e., teaching about aesthetic feelings based on the spirit of culture from community based viewpoint; (2) the course emphasized reconstruction of children's aesthetic feelings, i.e., reproducing children's understanding of community culture through art. Learning starts at school, expands outward into the community, and then moves back to school. The role of children changes from visiting to take the leading role in learning to obtain an aesthetic feeling experience; (3) aesthetic learning courses should follow the rules of integration, providing enough course time, a plentiful environment and various media. Courses can extend children's aesthetic feeling experiences by encouraging and leading them to play; teachers should accept children's unique thoughts and innovations (Kuo, 2015).

4. Conclusion

Art has traditionally been an important part of early childhood programs. Friedrich Froebel, the father of kindergarten, believed that young children should be involved in both making their own art and enjoying the art of others. To Froebel, art activities were important, not because they allowed teachers to recognize children with unusual abilities, but because they encouraged each child's "full and all-sided development". More than a century later, early childhood teachers are still concerned with the "all-sided" development of each child. Curriculum includes activities that will help children develop their cognitive, social, and motor abilities. As Froebel recognized, making art and enjoying the art of other people and cultures are very important to the development of the whole child (Fox & Berry, 2017). Based on the above description, we can understand the importance of early childhood art education. For this reason, by reading, analyzing and discussing related studies, this paper first aims to explore the importance of early childhood art education and the research of early childhood art education in Taiwan. The research issues of early childhood art education in Taiwan we identified are as follows: (1) young children's art making processes, (2) the practice of implementing an aesthetic thematic curriculum, (3) the development of the learning indicators of aesthetic domain for kindergarten curriculum in Taiwan, (4) the teaching principles for aesthetic education in early childhood education, (5) multicultural art education for children, (6) investigation of art education in kindergartens, (7) children's art learning with parents, (8) making use of picture books to design an integrated art curriculum suitable for children, (9) teaching art appreciation in kindergarten, (10) the employee retention and collaboration with art institutions on early childhood education, (11) integrating mangrove environmental education into teaching arts to young children, and (12) the progress of implementing aesthetic feeling education by integrating a community based viewpoint. The above

description reveals the diversity of the research issues of early childhood art education in Taiwan, and shows what previous scholars have emphasized in the research of early childhood art education in Taiwan. It is hoped that such an exploration can help teachers understand concepts related to early childhood art education, and most importantly, develop an excellent praxis of early childhood art education.

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