

The Cultivation and Research of Children's Observation and Expression Abilities in Art Education

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Abstract:

With the development of society and the increasing emphasis on early childhood education, the importance of fostering children's observation and expression abilities through art education has garnered widespread attention. Art activities that integrate hand-eye coordination play a crucial role in children's intellectual development within the context of whole-brain education. This study explores the relationship between children's art education and the cultivation of their observational and expressive skills, highlighting how art education impacts the development of these abilities. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for teaching strategies that stimulate and enhance children's expression and observation. The research also addresses the importance of creating appropriate educational environments and integrating comprehensive strategies to promote the overall development of these abilities. By investigating relevant theories and the effectiveness of various teaching methods, the study aims to provide practical recommendations for art education that supports children's intellectual and emotional growth.

Keywords: Children's Art Education, Observation Ability, Expression Ability, Whole-Brain Development, Teaching Strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

With the development of the times and the rise of civilisation, families are paying more and more attention to the early education of children and more teachers want children to receive brain development education at an earlier age. In brain development education, art activities, which use both the hands and the brain, are responsible for developing children's intelligence. The children's art curriculum is accompanied by the concept of whole brain development, which is moving from a single approach to one that is diverse, integrated and ecological. The development and reform of children's art education is influenced by the Western theoretical concept that art education for children should be closely related to the child's development and that children's expressive and observational skills should be nurtured in a subtle way. As children grow older they are subject to social constraints and their imagination and creativity are gradually and possibly permanently lost. This is why art education for children is so important, as it opens the door to a child's mind while leading them to a sense of beauty.

Today, art education is universal, but only in terms of art classes, and research into the curriculum and teaching of art education for children is still to be further developed. There is a growing consensus that childhood is not just a stage of preparation for adulthood, but has its own value. Children should enjoy their childhood to the full and

have a happy childhood. The means of their education is play. The design of art activities should not be confined to the teaching of art skills. Rather, they should be taught in a way that brings out the unique cultural value of art as a humanities subject. It should be an effective way to develop children's inner potential, to promote their all-round development, to help them grow up healthily, and to improve their ability to observe, create, express and appreciate.

In art practice, observation is a prerequisite for expression, and expression is the result of observation. Observation and expression are unified as a whole and are closely integrated as a process. In the author's view, separate studies of the two lack a holistic approach. In summary, research on the means of observation and expression in children's art education is relatively systematic and comprehensive, and researchers attach great importance to the value of art activities for children in terms of exploration, recording and expression. Children are able to observe and explore the unknown through the experience of art activities, and to express themselves freely and emotionally. Existing research is rich and theoretically sound. However, the lack of practical guidance and the lack of a holistic approach to art education has affected the development of art education for children to some extent. In addition, the current utilitarian and skill-based values of children's art education have also seriously affected children's development. How to change this situation through teaching methods, so that children can experience the fun brought to them by art activities, is the expectation and desire of all art educators, and also the original intention of the author's research on this topic.

1.2 Research Problem

The research on children's art education is inherently multidisciplinary, drawing upon the fields of art, sociology, psychology, and education. However, a critical review of existing literature reveals a notable gap in research specifically addressing the development of children's observational and expressive abilities in art education. Most of the extant studies predominantly focus on historical analyses of art education, the therapeutic potential of art (art healing), or the integration of traditional art practices with contemporary art education methodologies. These studies, while valuable, largely overlook the nuanced developmental aspects of children's cognitive and emotional growth, particularly in relation to how art education fosters their observational and expressive skills.

One of the significant limitations in current research is the insufficient exploration of the intrinsic characteristics of children and how these traits interact with the process of learning and creating art. While some literature touches on aspects of creativity, imagination, or motor skills development in the context of children's art, there is a dearth of focused studies that investigate the distinct processes through which children develop the ability to observe and express through art. The lack of theoretical frameworks directly linking children's developmental psychology with the pedagogical strategies employed in art education further exacerbates this gap.

Moreover, the existing body of research rarely provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation to support the development of children's observation and expression skills in art. This theoretical void makes it challenging to establish well-grounded, evidence-based teaching practices aimed at enhancing these fundamental abilities.

Given the importance of these skills in the overall cognitive and emotional development of children, the absence of specific studies focusing on their development within the context of art education remains a critical oversight.

This gap in the literature is one of the primary motivations for choosing this topic for the present study. The research aims to bridge this gap by providing a theoretical and practical exploration of how children's art education can be effectively designed to nurture their observation and expression abilities. By addressing this void, the study aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on children's cognitive and emotional development through art education, offering insights that can inform both theory and practice in this vital area of early childhood education.

1.3 Scope of the study

This paper explores the relationship between art education and children's expressive and observational skills, and the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies to inspire children's art education, to explore the impact of art education on the development of children's expressive and observational skills, and to rationalise the design of teaching content through the impact achieved. In addition to focusing on the teaching of art to pre-school children, the study also focuses on the creation of an art teaching environment for pre-school children, which promotes the development of children's expressive and observational skills in an integrated manner. The research in this paper can be divided into the following parts: firstly, a literature study on the characteristics of children's expressive and observational skills and their influencing factors based on an understanding of the concept of divergent thinking; secondly, an explanation of the influence of the content of children's art education and teaching on the development of expressive and observational skills; and then a proposal of teaching strategies on how to develop preschool children's expressive and observational skills in art education.

2. Points of Innovation

2.1 Innovation in research methodology: A combination of comparative analysis and typical argumentation is used, combining theory and practice, and using typical cases for specific analysis, with a view to better applying teaching courses targeting children's observation and expression abilities to children's art education, and providing vivid material and useful attempts for applied theoretical research on children's art education.

2.2 Innovation in research content: Art education research involves multidisciplinary perspectives such as history, sociology, psychology and pedagogy, and most research literature focuses on children's psychology and the history of art education, etc. This study focuses its research content on the cultivation of children's observation and expression abilities, which is less studied in the literature. This study focuses on the development of children's observation and expression skills.

3. Significance of Study

The existing art curriculum has not yet paid sufficient attention to children's ability to observe and express themselves, and in the past, children's art teaching activities mostly focused on the educational significance of the content of art painting itself, and the teaching content mostly taught children's painting skills, ignoring the significance of art

education combined with children's developmental characteristics for children's development. This not only affects the enthusiasm of preschool children for art learning, but also hinders the development of children's creativity, so the study of children's observational and expressive skills in art education is a very meaningful research topic. The results of this study will help to enrich the understanding of the different forms of art teaching in children's stage, help children's art teachers to correctly understand and grasp the process and rules of children's observation and expression abilities, help art teachers to adopt reasonable teaching strategies, enable them to correctly guide preschool children's art works, understand the meaning behind the works and guide children's art teachers to adopt reasonable art teaching strategies. This course will help art teachers to adopt reasonable teaching strategies so that they can properly instruct pre-school children's artworks, understand the meaning behind the artworks and guide children's art teachers to adopt reasonable art teaching strategies.

Starting from the theoretical level, the study provides a different interpretation of the previous literature, fills the gap concerning the direction of cultivating children's observation and expression abilities, and creates a new way of thinking about children's art education. The joint interdisciplinary study uses a variety of research methods, which is an innovation in research theory as well as research methods, and this study provides a creative reference for the design of children's art education programmes and broadens the thinking.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW Modern education system

4.1 Development of art education in the 20th century

In the early 20th century, art education shifted from a focus on geometry to the study of nature. An art based on the elements and principles of design

A new philosophy of education was developed and design became a universal method of organising and directing the production of artworks and the study of art forms. It is widely believed that it was Dow (1913) who introduced this method to art education, teaching art through clear principles of composition and the organisation of elements such as line and colour. Dow saw this teaching of design instead of drawing as a comprehensive approach to teaching art. 1920 saw the beginning of interest in creative self-expression. Rugg & Shumaker (1928) noted in *Child-Centred School*: "The goal of traditional education was social gain. Growth was seen as the growth of the capacity to conform, the acquiescence in school discipline; maturity was seen from the point of view of successful conformity to social needs In the new school, however, it is seen from the encouragement of the creative spirit rather than from conformity to a model imposed from without." Among the art educators who held this line of argument emerged many prominent figures such as Cizek in Vienna, Richardson in England and D'Amico and Lowenfeld in the USA. They believed in the inherent value of children's art and emphasised a pedagogy of art in its natural state. Furthermore, these art educators believed that art was vulnerable to corruption by harmful social forces and that children's delicate sensibilities must be protected from the negative influences and oppressions of society. Children should be encouraged to unleash their imagination and create art of their own.

During the Cold War, the teaching of art as a discipline began to emerge and

gradually became mainstream in art education. The discipline of art included four sub-disciplines: art history, art criticism, aesthetics and art composition. Based on the context of the time, some art educators such as Barkan (1962) felt that art education had to be treated as a 'demanding and subject area' if it was to survive. Barkan presented his vision of art education and stated that artistic inquiry was structured and that the curriculum should be based on the artist's approach to the kinds of problems that characterise a work of art. In 1840 the first kindergarten was established in Germany by the famous pedagogue Flaubert (1840), who proposed that juvenile schooling should include, in addition to the teaching of labour, the establishment of diagrams for observing nature and learning the schoolyard in relation to the developmental stages of children's drawing. In 1957, with the rise of "elementalist education", psychological and educational theories began to be studied in depth in early childhood education, with music, drawings, dance, games and crafts being used to educate children. Sally (1995) was the first to propose the term "child artist", suggesting that children's art had an independent value and that children's paintings were not meant to reproduce reality, but rather to symbolically represent the environment. Although discipline-based art education (DBAE) began with the curriculum reform movement of the late 1950s, this approach is still evolving and evolving.

For ease of understanding, Efland's account of several major developments in art education from the 17th century onwards is cited for reference (See table 1). (Images in PDF version, to view please download this article)

Table 1 Major developments in art education since the 17th century

Movement	The Nature of Art	Content and Methodology	The value of art
College Art 17th-19th century	The aesthetics of imitation: art imitates nature	Like a human sketch reproduced from an artist or nature	Accuracy of performance
Elements of design. Early 20th century	The aesthetics of formalism: art as structured order	Teach the elements and principles through a series of exercises	Organised and leading to an outstanding aesthetic experience
Creative self-expression. Early to mid 20th century	Art is an expression of the individual artist	Unleashing the child's imagination, eliminating rules and not imposing ideas or standards of recognition	Originality of personal expression
Art in Everyday Life: 1930-1960	Art as a means of enhancing one's environment	Applying knowledge of art or design to the home or community	Values are found in intelligent solutions to everyday problems
Art as a discipline: 1960-1990	Art is an open concept, a question of art and an academic inquiry	Activities based on the modes of enquiry used by artists, art critics and art historians	An understanding of artistic growth

4.2 Theoretical research on children's art development and education

The first publication of Roenfeld's (1947) book *Creative and Mental Growth*. It has since been translated into many languages and reprinted to date, and has become an

introduction to art education. He believed that children's art was a reflection of children's mental growth and that it should be studied in conjunction with mental studies, with the two being mutually dependent. Roenfeld divides children's art development into six stages: the doodling stage (2-4 years), the pre-stylistic stage (4-7 years), the stylistic stage (7-9 years), the emergent stage of reasoning (9-11 years), the mimetic realistic stage of reasoning (11-13 years) and the crisis of adolescence (13-17 years). In each of these stages, children's drawings have corresponding characteristics. Influenced by Rousseau's naturalistic education and Dewey's progressivist educational ideas, Roenfeld advocated the development of children's general creativity through the fine arts. He believed that teachers should play a supportive and stimulating role in teaching, and opposed the imposition of adult views and ideas on children by teachers. The development of creativity was a focus of Ronfield's attention, and he sought to combine the development of creativity with the building of a complete personality through artistic activities. Roenfeld focused his art education on creative art activities that involved a wide variety of art materials and emphasized the process of art making rather than the outcome.

4.3 The influence of teachers on children's artistic development and education

In art education, the boundaries between 'high art' and 'popular art' are no longer important. As a result, the aims of the art education curriculum should also change. In the past, the traditional academic curriculum emphasized the study of classical art. Although still valued to some extent, the problems with this curriculum as part of general education have led to reflection. In *Teaching Visual Culture* (2003), Freedman (2003) refers to three problems: firstly, from kindergarten to high school level, the curriculum is based on narrow, prescribed behavioural learning objectives, resulting in a curriculum that is easy to teach and assess, but not necessarily what students should learn; secondly, the paradigm-based teaching leads to a simple, repetitive and fragmented teaching process that is divorced from the complex, multifaceted connotations of the artwork; thirdly, this approach has a tendency to interpret the stylised development of Western art, emphasising form and technique to the exclusion of other aspects of the artwork's meaning. Therefore, there should be a shift in the objectives of this traditional academy-style art curriculum. Given the complexity of visual culture, learning and producing visual art requires a certain amount of guidance in order to go beyond the surface of the image to design and produce artworks as they are understood.

In the art classroom, students use their prior knowledge about art, the classroom and school to interpret the environment. At the same time, the teacher's personal behaviour also has a significant impact on these interpretations by students. The way teachers teach, the strategies they use to manage the classroom and the environment they create can all be a part of the hidden curriculum. The cognitive scientist Resnick (1994) suggests that educators need to adopt at least two different approaches to learning: the first, learning that is 'consistent with biologically prepared structures'; and the second, a conceptual developmental type, involving learning that is not consistent with biologically based structures, which is based on culturally formed concepts. Eisner has proposed expressive and instructional goals for the art curriculum, echoing the cognitive domain research described above. At the same time, classroom assessment

should be adjusted accordingly to accommodate different learning styles. Zeng Lin (2014) mentioned in her article 'Focusing on the quality of classroom assessment: research and practice in the US' that American researchers believe that high-quality classroom assessment should be aligned with academic achievement or learning goals, and that diverse assessment methods and tools should be chosen according to different assessment purposes.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role that children's art education plays in the development of their observational and expressive abilities, which are integral components of cognitive, emotional, and intellectual growth. Art activities, particularly those that combine hand-eye coordination, not only enhance sensory-motor skills but also foster creativity, critical thinking, and emotional expression. As society increasingly recognizes the importance of early childhood education, the significance of integrating observation and expression training within the art curriculum has become even more pronounced.

One of the primary findings of this study is the recognition that children's observation abilities, when nurtured through structured art education, extend beyond mere perception. They contribute to more sophisticated cognitive functions, such as attention to detail, analytical thinking, and spatial awareness. These abilities form the foundation upon which children can build other academic and life skills, including language development, problem-solving, and memory retention. Moreover, expressive abilities, nurtured through artistic activities, empower children to communicate ideas, emotions, and experiences, thereby fostering self-expression and identity development. Art thus serves not only as a tool for creative exploration but also as a language for emotional intelligence and social communication.

The findings also underscore the need for well-designed teaching strategies that are tailored to stimulate both observation and expression. Traditional, teacher-centered approaches are often inadequate in fostering the holistic development of children's abilities. Therefore, art educators must employ innovative and child-centered pedagogies, which encourage active engagement, critical observation, and open-ended expression. Through such approaches, children are encouraged to explore a variety of mediums and techniques, thereby gaining exposure to diverse forms of art and enhancing their ability to see and interpret the world around them.

In addition to instructional strategies, the importance of creating an appropriate and enriching educational environment cannot be overstated. A supportive learning environment, characterized by access to diverse materials, ample space for creativity, and an atmosphere that values artistic exploration, is essential for the development of children's observation and expression. Moreover, integrating interdisciplinary approaches into art education—where art is linked with other subjects such as language, science, and mathematics—can deepen children's learning experiences and reinforce the connection between observation, expression, and cognitive development.

The study also highlights the need for continued research into the effectiveness of various teaching methods and their impact on children's development. While there is

substantial evidence supporting the link between art education and cognitive development, further empirical studies are needed to better understand the specific mechanisms through which art activities enhance children's observation and expression skills. Future research could explore longitudinal studies that track the impact of early art education on children's long-term academic and emotional outcomes.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the role of children's art education in developing observation and expression abilities. It calls for a comprehensive and integrated approach that not only enhances children's artistic skills but also contributes to their overall intellectual, emotional, and social development. By fostering these fundamental abilities through art, educators can lay the foundation for children's success across all areas of learning, ensuring they become well-rounded individuals capable of navigating the complexities of an ever-evolving world.

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