

# The State of Art Education in Taiwan and Some Potential Remedies

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## Abstract

*Art education is an important aspect of education that is indispensable for nurturing body and mind, combining human emotion, reason and spiritual motivation, and achieving a rounded character. But education policies over many years, together with skewed notions on the part of the public and even responsible figures, have meant that art education has been unable to exercise its true function within normal school education and have led to art education actually stagnating, let alone spreading among society at large. The present paper sets out to examine the current state of art education in Taiwan, to identify the problems, and to present reasonable proposals for improvement.*

## Introduction

The main emphasis in education often reflects the requirements of dominant social trends. For example, Taiwan over the past 40 years has devoted all its efforts to developing its economy, giving rise to a world-famous economic miracle. This has been reflected at the educational level by the widening of compulsory education and an emphasis on practical disciplines (language, math, science, and technology) directly linked to economic development. As a result, school education has become a long-term investment in the attainment of national practical requirements.

To speak of education in economic terms, it is undeniable that *efficiency* then becomes a principle for weighting priorities. While we all know that education is a long-term continuing process, and leaving economic efficiency aside for a moment, *efficiency* in education certainly is meaningful. It's just that avoiding efficiency becoming a *fast-food civilization* mechanism and instead turning it into *efficacy* is an issue everyone involved in education must think about.

While the *education accommodating reality* argument outlined above is difficult to avoid, this always places education in a passive state without the autonomy and vision proper to education itself.

The strength and dominance of Western culture in recent years has actually been the outcome of its accumulated emphasis on *human* values. The high achievements of science and economics have carried world civilization forward, but have also brought mankind up against unprecedented environmental damage and social problems. People are beginning to ponder the question of how to restore the balance between culture and technology. Passivity and lack of vision in education have long been regarded as the key to the problem, and so *educational reform* has become a major issue that countries around the world are working hard to promote.

## Research Motives and Goals

Upholding the spirit of bringing art into life, we can approach the ultimate goal of general art curriculums—*enhancing the quality of all citizens' cultural life into the 21st century*. The coming century will no longer be one where the economy

holds sway. Looking around at the countries of the world, economic growth is gradually entering a *mature phase* or even *senile phase*, whereas the level of cultural life generally lies behind that of economic life. This phenomenon is beginning to receive greater attention. Today, enhancing the position and priority of art curricula within school education has particular contemporary significance, and will assist in enhancing the broad population's artistic and cultural life.

In this regard, art education in Taiwan's present school education is still beset by unclear thinking and aspects that remain to be implemented. The writer will address these issues and provide strategies for guidance.

### **The Value of Culture in Art Education**

Aesthetic experience is one of the functions to be achieved by art appreciation teaching, and true aesthetic experience arises in an interaction between the individual and a work of art. Thus S. C. Pepper holds that appreciation of a work of art should not be engaged in with a utilitarian or analytical attitude, but the object should be appreciated as something one is cognitively aware of, and pleasure should be derived from it (Pepper, 1949). Treating a work of art purely as something to be appreciated in itself, without involving anything else or any other aims, is true aestheticism, and the experience derived from it is aesthetic experience (Stolnitz, 1960). But while aesthetic experience is objective in nature, the essence of art appreciation teaching is to let the student experience the universality and uniqueness of human thought and feelings as expressed in art, to gain a more objective understanding, and to develop a creative interpretative ability that partakes of both subjectivity and objectivity.

In sum, to develop students' art appreciation ability requires some study of art history in order to apply appropriate terminology and arrive at more sophisticated explanations and analysis. Comparative studies enable students to understand cultural and social phenomena of different times and places, and to gain the ability to express human emotions and experiences, as well as furthering their sensitivity toward visual perception and promoting their creativity.

### **A Survey of Art Education in Taiwan's Elementary and Junior High Schools**

#### *(1) Current problems with administrative coordination:*

1. Not enough opportunity for studying art-craft related courses,
2. Too many teaching hours, too little time for academic research,
3. No schedule for specialized teaching,
4. Scattered timetable of classes, art curriculum sacrificed to joint examination subjects,
5. Not enough special art and craft rooms,
6. Too many cross-discipline teachers, uneven quality of teaching,
7. Class time too short.

#### *Suggested problem solving:*

1. Hold more short workshops (3 days, 1 week),
2. Reduce art teachers' teaching hours,
3. Define limits for art teachers' qualifications,

4. Create *art education task force leaders* to promote art teaching.
5. Art classes should be scheduled to last at least 2 periods.

(2) *Current problems with curriculum goals:*

1. Goals too limited to attract students' interest.
2. More theory than actual effectiveness.
3. Curriculum goals are over-ambitious and cannot be achieved in one or two classes per week.
4. Curriculum goals are not known.
5. Not enough awareness of local art.
6. Scope of elementary, junior high, and senior high courses not clearly defined, and not easy to link together.

*Suggested problem solving:*

1. Courses should be reorganized and take practical experience into account.
2. Lower the standard of goals and emphasize nurture of aesthetic outlook.
3. Study elucidation of curriculum goals.
4. Increase classroom time.
5. Curriculum goals should be determined by teachers within educational norms.
6. Knowledge of local art should outweigh traditional Western art history or Chinese painting.
7. Curriculum standards should have built-in continuity, with students achieving greater profundity at each stage.

(3) *Current problem with design of teaching materials:*

1. Rigid content, unconnected with everyday life.
2. Lack of interdisciplinary integration.
3. Where teachers design their own materials, continuity is not easily achieved.
4. Difficult to obtain reference materials for art appreciation teaching.
5. Teaching schedule too burdensome, hard to prepare good teaching material.

*Suggested problem solving:*

1. Compile new teaching materials based on content students are shown to find interesting.
2. Teaching material must keep pace with scientific and technological progress.
3. Give teachers more scope, time, and freedom to design teaching materials.
4. Set up a research center to provide appropriate teaching materials and methods.
5. Compile a teaching guide to both basic and extended curricular to aid continuity in design of teaching materials.

(4) *Current problems with carrying out teaching:*

1. Serious problem of students not bringing equipment and materials.
2. Lack of expertise in guiding students.
3. Teaching time is too short for good results to be achieved.

4. Too many students for individual teaching,
5. Too many classes taught. affects quality,
6. Off-campus class teaching often limited by transportation provision,
7. Teaching methods lacking in variety.

*Suggested problem solving:*

1. Schools should uniformly supply non-consumable art supplies and materials,
2. Implement smaller classes, smaller schools,
3. Basic teaching hours be reduced,
4. Art classes should be scheduled consecutively,
5. Art museums should purchase buses for teachers to use in off-campus art museum teaching,
6. Emphasize more active teaching methods: drama, debate, and experimentation.

*(5) Current problems with teaching equipment and facilities:*

1. No fixed specialized classrooms, lack of specialized tables and chairs,
2. Lack of classroom space,
3. Lack of art appreciation teaching materials,
4. General lack of large teaching facilities such as: pottery kilns, print making presses, computers,
5. Lack of reference materials in school libraries.

*Suggested problem solving:*

1. Encourage teachers to make their own teaching aids,
2. Establish specialized classrooms,
3. Allocate art education funds to improve teaching equipment.

*(6) Current problems with teacher expertise:*

1. Lack of teacher autonomy and professional spirit,
2. Not enough specialist teachers, mainly through schools not reporting vacancies,
3. Art and craft classes are treated as subsidiary, so specialist teachers cannot be employed as regular staff,
4. Regular teachers are lacking in outlook of self-growth and learning,
5. Research into teaching is still undeveloped,
6. Preference given to teachers who just know how to paint.

*Suggested problem solving:*

1. Systematically encourage and evaluate teachers' professional abilities,
2. Encourage teachers to carry out research into teaching and to publish papers,
3. Specify that regular qualified teacher must be employed,
4. Strengthen in-service study and hold more teaching workshops,
5. Survey teacher strengths, and allocate classes according to those abilities.

(7) *Current problems with evaluation of teaching:*

1. Evaluation of standards in teaching material design and teaching effectiveness is neglected,
2. Only evaluation of artwork is emphasized, while evaluation of appreciation ability is lacking,
3. Evaluation methods are too sweeping, with a large element of subjectivity,
4. Lack of student self-evaluation or parental evaluation,
5. Students tend to judge the standards of art lessons by marks awarded.

*Suggested problem solving:*

1. Hold more study courses on evaluation to exchange experiences,
2. Evaluate students' participation processes rather than outcomes of learning,
3. Design a teaching self-evaluation chart for teachers,
4. Strengthen evaluation of visit reports, reading reports, or thematic studies,
5. Discuss with students the inner meaning of each course,
6. Avoid being led by marking,
7. Marks should include attitude to learning, expression, and day-to-day performance.

(8) *Students' general aesthetic cultivation and values are:*

1. Generally insufficient, lacking in self-confidence, poor knowledge of artistic vocabulary,
2. Divorced from everyday life,
3. Tendency towards popular fashions, no independent aesthetic judgement,
4. Largely influenced by aesthetic outlook of family, society,
5. Influenced by dominant broadcast media, cartoons, and other popular arts.

*Ways of enhancement*

1. Strengthen teaching of art appreciation, broaden horizons to nurture aesthetic judgement,
2. Enhance interest in learning through enrichment of content,
3. Take more teaching materials from the surrounding environment,
4. Encourage media to produce and broadcast more programs on art appreciation,
5. Allow artworks on campuses to be exhibited,
6. Include artistic cultivation in senior high and college entrance exams,
7. Organize art cultivation activities for parents and the public.

(9) *Position of art classes in schools as a whole:*

1. Very much enjoyed by lower-grade students,
2. Invariably vulnerable,
3. Still liable to be *borrowed* for other purposes,
4. High in the eyes of students, low among parents and teachers,
5. Art classes can link the essence of different disciplines, they are distinctive and of profound value,
6. Art classes help to mould people's inner spirit, so they're important.

*Ways of enhancement:*

1. Correction of overall outlook, especially towards nonart major teachers.
2. Correct students' erroneous views.
3. Art teachers must strive to raise their professionalism and show results.
4. Raise the necessity for art education in examinations and vocational selection.
5. Draw up a national art education white paper to draw public attention.

*(10) Current problems in other areas:*

1. Lack of aesthetic outlook in social education.
2. Under the *all-round classroom teacher* system, art and craft teaching is difficult to professionalize.
3. Entrenched concepts difficult to change among administrative heads.
4. Without abolition of the joint entrance exam, art will remain a vulnerable subject.
5. The art community lacks cohesion, lacks a guiding center.
6. Art competitions are too frequent, and administrators unreasonably demand that teacher take part in competitions and assess them on the results, thus affecting normal teaching.
7. Teaching is examination-led, to the detriment of art education.

*Suggested problem solving:*

1. Art is not a tool for entering higher education; it should be carried through in everyday life as part of the extension of education.
2. Students can only benefit by enhanced professional standards among art teachers, which in turn will also promote rightful acceptance and respect for art as a discipline.
3. Establish art societies, strengthen professional dialogue, focus collective strength.
4. Let government establish education resource centres for exchange and supply of teaching resources.
5. Strengthen awareness of aesthetic education as multifarious, and reform education through love of ourselves and of nature.

**Analysis of Research Results:****Characteristics of Art Education in Taiwan**

The clearest feature of art teaching in public elementary and junior high schools all over Taiwan is the disproportionately small amount of classroom time allocated to art compared to other *main disciplines*.

Why are classes treated so lightly in elementary and junior high schools? Because schools and parents alike regard reading, writing and arithmetic as *main subjects* and value highly ability in these areas. This has a major effect on learning in other disciplines, especially due to the college joint entrance examination. Prior to 1968, around 40% of Taiwan's school children dropped out after elementary school, but now almost 100% stay in school, and almost 90% pursue their education beyond junior high school. But since subjects like art and music do not fall within the scope of the joint

entrance examination, they are not highly regarded and are even sacrificed for other purposes in the education system.

Lack of classroom time naturally has an adverse effect on learning art, but even if more time was allocated, the majority of elementary school teachers could not manage to teach art properly because of their lack of professional experience. Most of Taiwan's elementary schools use the *all-round classroom teacher* system, with only 30% of schools using specialist teachers in middle and upper grades. Less than 60% of the art teachers in junior high schools are properly qualified for the task. There is also a shortage of regional art advisers, with most area advisers lacking specialist art knowledge.

With frequent art competitions for elementary and junior high schools, many administrators take competition results as evidence of teacher performance. Thus many teachers make their teaching competition-based, and the lack of a normal quality of teaching restricts the students' imagination and creativity. This greatly reduces the fundamental function and scope of art education.

There is a serious deficiency in channels for in-service training for art teachers in Taiwan. While new fields of knowledge are opening up rapidly in the information age, our education is often out of step with the times. If teachers cannot expand their professional know-how, students cannot grow either. Secondly, we still do not have a sound substitute teacher system in our schools. Even when excellent discipline-related symposiums take place, teachers are rarely encouraged to attend. Such limitations on opportunities for in-service teacher training means that teacher quality cannot be enhanced.

Education needs to respond to social changes, political evolution, and scientific and technological development for it to keep pace with the times. Art education in Taiwan's public-sector schools at present lacks concern for cultural pluralism, a forward-looking, innovative, macroscopic approach, and detailed, rigorous and conscientious planning. It is still stuck in the decades-old attitude of art classes as picture-making sessions and that art equals technique, utterly ignoring the significance and true content of the art curriculum.

### **A Prospect for Art Education in Taiwan in the 21st Century**

Education is an extension of culture. There are no objective standards for any education system, for these grow naturally out of each ethnic group's cultural background. Where an education system suffers from persistent faults, one should first look to its overall cultural environment. In Taiwan, the effects of economic prosperity, political democratization, social freedom and educational development mean that those concerned with educational reform shoulder a greater responsibility than ever before. Thus the current educational reform can be described as a daunting project of very wide scope.

The scope of educational reform should include everything from pre-school education through compulsory education, senior high school education, vocational education and university education to lifelong learning. From another point of view, the reform process also requires funding, skilled personnel, facilities and research. It is therefore dependent on many kinds of support and assistance to succeed.

Art education in Taiwan's elementary and junior high schools needs a reform process based on autonomy, freedom, flexibility and diversity, in addition to a program of promotion and development for art education based on being forward-looking, in tune with the times, academic, and international in nature. It also needs:

1. *Culturally diverse educational ideas.*
2. *A humanities-based, interdisciplinary, integrated outlook,*
3. *Sound, culturally diverse pre-service and in-service teacher training in art education,*
4. *The development of international cultural exchange and cooperation to raise standards of academic research and artistic creativity, leading to outstanding quality of teaching.*

The following objectives are proposed for promoting art education in Taiwan's schools:

1. *To develop sound content for art education, map out a development strategy, and plan course structures to promote excellence in art education,*
2. *Overall planning of refined, civilized school environment with a wealth of cultural content, with the aim of nurturing law-abiding, self-respecting, socially concerned students with a love of their homeland, as well as enhancing their ability to think creatively,*
3. *To establish a national, high-level art education research body to bolster research work, promote high-level research into art theory and nurture creative artists.*
4. *To establish and maintain outstanding art resources centers to promote distance learning and to bring schools, social groups, art museums and museums, music and performing arts centers together under the umbrella of an art education orientation, the better to promote nationwide education and further life-long learning.*

Our country depends on the skills of our people. Root and branch educational reform is the only way for Taiwan to regain its international competitiveness and nurture those qualities of imagination, creativity, independent thinking, independent judgement, self-reliance and group cooperation needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century and provide our country with its future leadership. We look ahead with confidence to the development and growth of art education in Taiwan in the future. As long as we do not shirk the difficulties and are ready to try new approaches, art education in Taiwan will surely have a bright future.

## References

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