

Relationship Between Arts Education Course System of Advanced Normal University and Arts Course of Middle School in China as Well as an International Comparative Study

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Abstract

With the coming and development of the global knowledge economy in 21st century, social development and economic growth are more and more relying on knowledge and talents. As an important approach of intermediate level arts teachers training, arts education in advanced normal universities is bearing the educational responsibility of training middle school arts teachers with solid professional abilities, broad knowledge and talent in different aspects. In some of countries with developed education in the world, such as America, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Singapore, etc., the training of arts teachers is performed by comprehensive universities, while in China, the arts education system of advanced normal universities is mainly established centering on the professional arts college, which places emphasis on teaching of professional knowledge in both course setting and teachers' arrangement of teaching content and ignores training on students' education ability, resulting that arts graduates don't have necessary comprehensive quality. As a result, arts education in middle school cannot be comprehensively performed.

How to accommodate arts education course setting in advanced normal universities to the system of arts education in the middle school with a reference to advanced educational experience in developed countries has become a main theme we have to discuss.

Key words: China's arts education in advanced normal universities; Arts education; International comparative study

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INTRODUCTION

In view of the whole world, many developed countries have made some policies on arts teacher education fitting for them according to actual conditions of them, while in China, there has always been a dispute on which one is more important, academic quality or teaching quality, for normal education in advanced normal universities. The course setting of arts education in China's advanced normal universities focuses on training of students' practical arts skill and places more emphasis on development of arts media and education of arts creation, but its training aim is supposed to be training of teachers qualified for arts education of middle school. At present, research on the link between arts education course setting in advanced normal universities and the content system of arts education course in the middle school lacks profound and systematic theoretic research and exploration. Instead, it rests more on description of appearance and superficial understanding of the problem. In practice, it is also in the exploration stage. In some of the countries with developed education in the world, such as America, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Singapore, etc., the training of arts teachers has already been undertaken by comprehensive universities, which are non-fixed normal education. Also, the training mode of middle school arts teachers varies in those countries. In America, content in four aspects, arts creation, arts criticism, arts history and arts theory, is integrated into the middle school visual

arts courses. In Germany, pedagogy and psychology are taken as compulsory courses in the education department specializing in training arts teachers of middle school. Besides, many optional courses are opened for students to choose. Students choosing arts have to study courses of sketching, oil painting, watercolor, sculpture, design, etc.. Arts student is trained in this way not only have solid foundation of professional theories but also get experience in teaching practice. In Japan, arts course takes performance of “representation” and “appreciation” activities as the focus. In course setting, it takes full-scale study as basis while gets professional characteristics. Thus, students of arts education must have broad vision also well as sharp insight and research ability, which gives special consideration to its training object, arts teachers of primary and middle school teachers. Besides, only this kind of course setting and training mode can develop middle school arts teachers with comprehensive ability and full-scale quality.

1. ARTS EDUCATION COURSE SYSTEM IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL OF CHINA AT CURRENT STAGE

1.1 Basic Ideas of Arts Course Setting in Middle School

The *Standard on Arts Course of Full-time Compulsory Education (Pilot Version)* made by Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China in July 2001 clearly puts forward basic ideas of arts course: Developing basic arts quality of students, motivating students’ interest in arts study, understanding arts in a broad culture background, cultivating students’ spirit of innovation and ability of solving problems, make appraisal to promote students’ development (Anonymous, 2001).

“In terms of age characteristic, middle school students are in the transition stage between adolescent and youth” (Zheng & Chen, 1991, p.164). It is the second peak of student’s physical and psychological growth. In this stage, students as adolescent have a stronger desire for knowledge. Therefore, the implementation of arts education in the stage of middle school education has to cultivate sound personality of middle school students, develop profound humanistic quality and aesthetic appreciation ability in them to meet requirements of quality-orientated education. The education shall accommodate difference in students’ quality in different areas to give the new course standard a wide applicability. Attention should be given to students’ gradual understanding of characteristics of arts study in the process of arts study to develop their basic arts quality and learning ability and lay a foundation for their study in the whole life.

1.2 Nature and Value of Middle School Arts Education

The *Standard on Arts Course of Full-time Compulsory Education (Pilot Version)* made by Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China in July 2001 clearly puts forward the nature and value of arts courses.

The arts course with humanistic nature is the main way to perform art education at school and compulsory for all students, which play an irreplaceable role in the implementation of quality-orientated education. The value of arts education is to strive for development of the close relationship between subject development and object cultivation in the process of organized and step-by-step research on how to cultivate people’s arts ability to make the subject to get the potential for development. (Deng et al., 2000, p.46)

Therefore, the nature of middle school arts education is to cultivate a profound humanistic quality through students’ study of arts courses, to fully promote middle school students’ ability in various kinds of aspects and meet requirements of quality-orientated education. The value of middle school arts education is reflected through the value of arts courses.

The value of middle school arts education is reflected in the following aspects. Firstly, in a world of diversified politics, economy and culture, students can get contact with arts creations of different ways of representation and explore their personal characteristic. Secondly, a lot of information can be communicated through a network, media and other tools with the coming of information age and students can increase their love for and responsibility for the nature and life in the process of study. Thirdly, as the most important carrier of human culture, arts can make students get known of various kinds of new media material, understand various kinds of visual language and use them for information communication to make their own contribution to the inheritance of human culture. Fourthly, sense is the precondition for human’s acquisition of knowledge. Middle school courses can make students get more contact with actual objects and detailed environment, which are good for development of students’ sensing ability and thus can promote the comprehensive thinking level of students.

1.3 Characteristics of New Art Courses of the Middle School

1.3.1 Weakening Training on Professional Arts Skills

After entering the age of knowledge economy, reform on middle school arts courses is not only the need of social development but also the need for full individual development of every middle school student. In the background of ideas of new course value, arts study is not purely professional skill training any longer. Instead, it is a cultural study and inheritance. “Most learners of arts courses will not be ordinary citizens taking arts as profession. Therefore, course reform must lower the

difficulty and requirement of arts knowledge and skills.” (Yin, 2003)

1.3.2 It Changed the Traditional Mode of “Subject-Based”

The new arts course of middle school attach great importance on interinfiltration with other subjects, which well accommodate the development trend of the age, subject and modern education and thus will cultivate students’ humanistic spirit and aesthetic appreciation ability, promote development of students’ sound personality, lay a good foundation for student’s overall development, confirm humanistic nature of arts education, promote development of students’ personality and diversified course value with full-scale development.

1.3.3 Strengthening Connection with Real Life

The ideas of new *Course Standard* emphasize “The content of arts courses shall be closely connected with life experience of students, emphasize the role of knowledge and skill in helping students to beautify life to get students sense the unique value of arts in real life”. Thus, many courses of middle school arts, from content arrangement to title design, are about things can be sensed in real life.

1.3.4 Highlighting Cultivation of Students’ Personality and Ability of Creation

As arts study has characteristics of practicality and operability, middle school arts courses plays an irreplaceable role in cultivation of students’ creativity. Pushing students to the forefront of environmental beautification and creation of beautifying life helps a lot to cultivation of their creativity and spirit of creation.

1.3.5 Emphasizing Student’s Role as Learning Subject

To make students learn, explore, find questions or even solve questions in teaching is an important aspect in students cultivation in the new *Course Standard*. Arnheim (1993) once said, “Teachers’ task is to stimulate the inborn impulse hidden in every young heart, that is, the desire to create, explore and process materials.” To make students get interested in the study and participate in educational activities in the process full of aesthetic appreciation delight reflected the role and function of students as learning subject.

2. INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE OF ARTS EDUCATION COURSES SETTING OF CHINA’S ADVANCED NORMAL UNIVERSITIES

We can find experience deserving reference for us through a comparison and analysis on arts education course setting of China’s advanced normal universities and a further comparison on arts courses setting in America, Japan and Taiwan area of China.

2.1 Present Status of Arts Education Courses Setting of China’s Advanced Normal Universities

2.1.1 Common Knowledge Courses

Common knowledge courses take about 1/4 to 1/3 in arts education courses setting of China’s advanced normal universities. The ratio of ideology and politics courses opened is relatively great while relatively few courses in humanities, social science, natural science, etc. are opened and no comprehensive courses are opened, rendering that student focuses on professional skills, can only acquire a simple and narrow knowledge structure and lack humanistic quality and knowledge on nature and society, which cannot meet the requirements of quality-orientated education in the background of diversified culture.

2.1.2 Subject Professional Courses

Taking about 2/3 in arts education courses setting, subject professional courses are more liable to adopt the training standard of arts college, which emphasizes on depth and ignores the cross link of subject knowledge, emphasizes teaching of painting skills and ignores improvement of culture cultivation, emphasizes on training of students’ creativity and lacks content in visual culture. The setting of professional theory courses is not systematic and ignores cultivation of student’s aesthetic appreciation ability. The aesthetic appreciation education, painting skills and training of creative thinking shall be connected in an organic way to break professional boundaries and pay more attention on normal education in itself. Only in this way can students be more competent of the task of middle school arts education.

2.1.3 Education Courses

The ratio of education courses is relatively small, which ignores the training of research ability in arts subject education and normal education of the arts education major. Importance shall be attached to teaching of basic educational theories and training of practical educational ability. Courses of education psychology, an overview of pedagogy, teachers’ professional development, course and teaching design foundation, organization and management of classroom teaching, analysis on education and teaching cases, basic professional skills of teachers, etc., shall be opened. Also education probation and internship shall be implemented to help students transfer the knowledge learned in teaching practice into their own professional qualities to acquire solid teaching ability.

2.2 Arts Education Courses Setting of Advanced Normal Universities in Taiwan Area

By taking arts education courses setting in National Chuanghua University of Taiwan as an example, the paper made an analysis on the arts education courses setting in Taiwan area below and summarized its main characteristics as below:

(a) Its teaching aim is to train arts teachers with great arts creation ability, broad professional arts knowledge, good culture and arts quality and good morality through diversified courses setting.

(b) The courses of common knowledge cover four fields—social science, natural science, humanities, arts and life, which provides a broad vision for students and enriches student's knowledge system.

(c) Abundant courses on arts theory are established, including courses of Taiwan arts history, western modern arts, Chinese arts history, western arts history, etc., which emphasizes the communication between eastern and western arts study, deepened individuals' understanding on self and culture and develops students' acceptance and respect of different cultures. Also, it introduces visual culture into arts education, for example, it sets courses of visual culture and arts education, etc..

2.3 Present Status of Arts Education Courses Setting of Advanced Normal Universities in America and Japan

2.3.1 Arts Education Courses Setting in Advanced Normal Universities of America

In 1960s, the normal education system gradually changed from "fixed normal education" into "non-fixed normal education". Teachers of normal education are trained by the education college or department of comprehensive universities or general universities. Academic standard and professional pedagogy training is taken at two key points of teachers training.

With a tradition of valuing normal education, America is not longer satisfied with understanding of teaching materials and pedagogy in term of teachers training. Instead, it hopes that teachers can have more broad knowledge. As to middle school teacher, they are required not only to have profound research in their professional courses but also have broad knowledge in natural science and humanities to assume the responsibility of giving general education on future citizens. In term of education theory, they have to study education psychology, education principles, theory lessons, education history and philosophy. Education practice is regarded to be a part of very great importance.

Therefore, American Association Advancement of Science put forward the suggestions of strengthening teacher's study

The teacher training plan should provide a chance for future teachers to observe, sense and participate in various kind of teaching practical activities...Future teachers should be able to apply the knowledge they learned in the process of training into teaching practice and find some new teaching methods. The school also should provide them with some chances of communication and discussion of class experience. (American Association Advancement of Science, 2011, p.220)

2.3.2 Arts Education Courses Setting in Advanced Normal Universities of Japan

In Japan, normal universities are the ones to train teachers of compulsory education of middle school and primary school, which means that all universities, stated-owned ones, public ones or private ones, can train normal graduates and gain teaching qualification certificate as long as they can open various kinds of legal courses required for teachers' qualification.

The courses of normal arts education in Japan are in six major types of painting, sculpture, design, craft, art and craft art theory, arts history. In course setting, normal arts education firstly takes full-scale study as basis while gets professional characteristics. In normal arts major of Japan, painting teaching takes forms of sketching, color print, sculpture, etc., as the main content and emphasizes the training of presentative faculty for beauty in teaching. In education of normal universities, there is plane composition and three dimension composition as well as optional courses as basic design, visual patterns and some practical design in life, etc..

Besides courses of arts studies, western arts history, Japanese arts history, etc., normal education major in Japanese universities also open a lot of theoretical lectures on painting, sculpture, design, craft, etc.. It is clearly pointed out that the arts education major is mainly to train the ability of beauty sensing, imagination, thinking and representation through the study on representation, identification, creation and appreciation. The appreciation teaching in normal universities, departments and faculties of Japan is not limited to acquiring knowledge of pure art and arts history but involves more knowledge.

The teaching of Japanese arts education theory is mainly to train students' sense, technique and skill of aesthetic appreciation as well as certain thinking ability and judgment ability. The courses are set centering on developing knowledge and practical ability necessary for the teacher and place equal importance to study and research. The optional courses place more importance on complexity and comprehensiveness of courses and advocate training of talents capable of solving various kinds of new problems. It mainly includes nature and ideas of education, personality education psychology, teaching practice and teachers, research on pedagogy of arts subject, education practice, practical arts skills, arts theories, etc. (Zhong, 2002, p.250).

Through the above comparative analysis we can conclude: Taiwan area and American and Japanese are all attach importance on education practice and training of students' research ability and have a lot in common in course setting. The first type of course is about basic educational theory, such as middle school pedagogy and course, education overview, educational psychology, education philosophy, education sociology. The second type of course is about education method and skill, such

as thesis seminar chosen in intermediate education, school and society, process of contact with adolescent, teaching principles, education measurement and appraisal, research on problems of adolescent, etc.. The third type of course is about education practice, such as hands-on experience in middle school guided, intern's teaching practice under guidance of teachers, etc. Students can connect their education theories with practice through education courses opened to really improve their ability in education practice. In mainland of China, education courses are separate with teaching practice. Only courses as basic pedagogy of arts subject, education research method, curriculum and teaching methodology are open while courses emphasizing mental and physical growth of adolescent, middle school pedagogy, etc., are unavailable. Also, the term of education internship in most advanced normal universities is too short, which makes it hard for students to get deep understanding and skillful command on the process, method and teaching materials used in basic arts education. After a comparison between education courses mainland of China with those in Taiwan area and America and Japan, arts education in advanced normal universities of mainland of China lacks training of students' practical education ability and research ability. But due to difference in the education system, it is inappropriate to copy their experience indiscriminately. Instead, we should construct an arts teacher education system with Chinese characteristics centering on training of talents with full-scale arts quality.

CONCLUSION

Confronting the constant deepening of reform practice on fundamental arts education courses, it becomes a top priority task for arts education of advance normal

universities to formulate a more appropriate and scientific arts courses setting of advanced normal universities and train middle school arts teachers with solid professional ability, broad knowledge, talents in many aspects, expert in one area while good at many other areas. Therefore, establishment of appropriate arts education courses to advance normal universities is the need for development of times, the need of society and the need for middle school arts teaching. It involves education and talent cultivation. Without a qualified team of middle school arts teachers, it is impossible to realize the aim of quality-orientated education and cultivate public citizens with the spirit of innovation in the new age.

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