Practical Explorations of Preschool Teachers’ Cognition and Application of Mythology in Art Education

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Abstract. Based on in-depth interviews with active preschool teachers, this paper aims at studying the cognition of preschool teachers on preschool art education and the application of ancient Chinese mythology in art courses. The teachers were encouraged to verbally express their opinions on the application of mythology in preschool art education and share their experience and insight.

Introduction

Ancient Chinese mythology is of significant exploration values in preschool art education, as many contents in preschool art education are centered on the original literature genres such as myth, fairy tale, legend and folklore. The objective of this research is to explore the intrinsic relations between ancient Chinese mythology and preschool art education, illustrate the educational values of mythology in art education for children and discuss such topics as the methods, approaches and noteworthy issues regarding the introduction of mythology into kindergarten curriculum from the perspective of developing preschool course resources. This includes the selection of mythological materials, the proper arrangement and implementation that can give full play to the educational values of mythology in promoting the development and capacity-building of children in the dimension of aesthetics and arts.

Interview Survey and Implementation

Interview Outline

Table 1. Interview about Correlation between Ancient Chinese Mythology Preschool Art Education.

| Content category | Questions |
|------------------|-----------|
| Cognition and application plans of preschool teachers with regard to the correlation between ancient Chinese mythology and preschool art education | 1. As far as you are concerned, which aspects does art education for children normally involve? 2. At your kindergarten, are there any textbooks for art education? Are you satisfied with the compatible materials with the textbook and why? 3. What kind of positive role can ancient Chinese mythology play in preschool art education activities, such as music, fine art, dance and literature? 4. In preschool art education (music/fine art/dance/literature), have you integrated your course with ancient Chinese mythology very often? And how did you apply it? 5. Do you think there is any difficulty in applying ancient Chinese mythology in art education for children? If so, in which area did you find the difficulties lie and how did you address the problems? 6. For those elements in mythology that are considered weird, or even superstitious and pseudo-scientific, how about your view? How can we address these issues in mythology education? Can you exemplify your arguments? |
7. Can you share with us any successful cases of your attempts in applying ancient Chinese mythology in art education for children?

Sampling of Interviewees

The interviewees in this survey include three teachers from a key public kindergarten in Zaozhuang, among which there is one teacher from each of the three grades (K1-K3); three teachers from a common public kindergarten in Zaozhuang, among which there is one teacher from each of the three grades (K1-K3); three teachers from a private kindergarten in Zaozhuang, among which there is also one teacher from each of the three grades (K1-K3); and one principal of the key kindergarten, totaling ten interviews.

Analysis of Interview Results

All the interviewees, including nine preschool teachers and one principal, expressed their recognition and acceptance of applying ancient mythology in preschool art education, while they also expressed their worries and concerns listed as follows:

Preschool Art Education Views of Preschool Teachers

Preschool art education mainly includes teaching music, dancing, musical instrument, handicraft, performing art and preschool literature as a way to guide children to sense the world. Some teachers contend preschool art education is not limited by superficial forms. Neither fine art activities nor musical education only would constitute art education. It is more about an ambience that can incubate real artistic activities. For instance, if there is only a simple teaching and learning process in a fine art activity without any elements of aesthetic appreciation. It shall not be considered as art education. On the contrary, if a language class involves beautiful vocabulary and poetic atmosphere, which can drive the children’s imagination; that can be seen as a form of art education. In fact, different subjects taught in kindergarten are co-related to each other, just like the various things in our lives. And art education shall permeate into each one of them.

Attitudes towards Teaching Materials in Preschool Art Education

Many teachers propose that the current teaching materials are basically sufficient to meet the demand, which would be better if picture books and physical teaching tools can be added to the existing multimedia teaching materials. As for the teaching materials of fine art and music, they work pretty well in activating and developing the children’s interest in these fields by showing them the beauty of art through appreciation and further developing their thirst for knowledge based on different cognitive levels of the children.

Attitudes towards the Facilitative Role of Ancient Chinese Mythology in Preschool Art Education

Some teachers affirm the important role of ancient mythology in preschool art education. First of all, it helps pass on the excellent ancient Chinese mythological stories. Secondly, it can activate the children’s imagination. For instance, there is the story of Chang-E, the Chinese goddess of moon, who the children have never really met. In the fine art class, they can sketch the image of Chang-E and her flight to the moon based on their own imagination. Such experience would be a good opportunity for children to appreciate ancient mythology and cultivate their aesthetic ability matching with different colors.

Mythology can be a driving force in preschool art education. It is like seeing the world through children’s eyes, which is totally non-utilitarian and suitable for the physical and psychological development of young children. Teaching art with the help of mythology at the preschool level can not only pass on the ancient Chinese culture, but also enrich the children’s imagination, cultivate their creativity in beauty, enhance their aesthetic ability and encourage them to form a pursuit for
beauty. By adding ancient Chinese mythology into music, dance and literature education, an intriguing glow of mystery is attached to all these subjects, which can boost the interest of children and enrich the art education they receive.

How to Introduce Ancient Chinese Mythology in to Classroom Teaching

Only a small proportion of the interviewed teachers have introduced mythology into their classroom teaching. In fine art classes, some teachers would normally tell some stories adapted from ancient mythology, through which the children are encouraged to imagine and create freely. In music classes, some classical Chinese musical instruments, such as Qing, Guzheng, Guqin and Liuqin, are demonstrated and selected stories related to them would be told, aiming at raising the children’s curiosity about the musical instruments. In literature education, some mythological stories with educational values would be taught, with a view of engaging the children with traditional culture. In performing art classes, the characters mentioned in the fine art classes would be acted out in role-play sessions, which are recapitulations of some stories and plots. However, most teachers haven’t introduced ancient Chinese mythology into their classroom teaching.

Difficulties of Applying Ancient Chinese Mythology as Teaching Materials

All the ten interviewees agree that it is difficult to apply ancient Chinese mythology in everyday teaching, mainly because: the children cannot fully grasp the meanings and values embodied in the mythological stories due to limitations of physical and mental development level; the teaching materials, extra-curricular books and materials related to ancient Chinese mythology do not suffice. Some are not practically feasible to be made into straightforward teaching tools for children. The application of mythology in art education must be well prepared. Only the suitable materials that are carefully chosen can bring about the most favorable outcome.

Attitudes towards the Weird, or even Superstitious and Pseudo Scientific Contents

All the interviewees unanimously agree that we shall absorb the essence of ancient mythology and abandon the coarse in its educational application by making careful selections of the mythological stories. Mythology is derived from the cultural deposits of human lives, most of which have symbolic meanings. In education, the evil forces can be compared to the villains and the positive beings shall be highlighted to pass on positive energy and meaning of the stories.

To sum up, the interviewed teachers are quite satisfied with the current state of preschool art education because there are compatible teaching materials and resources at hand. They are not against the idea of integrating art education with ancient mythology but put the emphasis on the cognitive load and comprehension capacity of the students. Generally speaking, teachers have shown wide acceptance towards the application of mythology in art education, as the classical mythological stories are considered to be beneficial for improving the aesthetic ability and imagination of children.

Art Education for Children and the Teachers

Choose the Contents that are Necessary and Interesting for Preschool Children

Games can make the educational activities lively and fun. Different dimensions of mythological art education can be integrated with role-playing and story-telling activities. The practices have proven that the children would feel intrigued and motivated in such activities and enjoy the aesthetic experience. External materials can also be adopted as the media in preschool mythological art education. For instance, various tool and materials would boost children’s interest in undertaking artistic activities, bringing out novel thoughts, enrich their imagination through hands-on experiences and further immerse them in a positive and joyful atmosphere of mythological art activities.

Create an Emotional Environment of Mythological Art Education for the Children

The setting of the art education environment shall include: First, daily living and learning
environment with a touch of artistic and emotional colors; Second, create an aesthetic environment that is compatible with specific mythological art activities. As for the activity room layout at the kindergarten, the priority should of course be given to make sufficient room for free movement of the children and conformity to safety regulations. On top of that, the interior decoration and setting should use light colors, adorable characters and interesting contents, which shall meet the aesthetic demand of the children. The teachers can also play some background music related to the mythological theme of that day, with an aim to cultivate children’s sentiment and motivate them to make mythology-related artistic creations.

Pay Special Attention to the Use of Language

When giving children guidance during mythological art educational activities, the teachers shall use heuristic languages, such as “how” and “why”, to pose open-ended questions, rather than make straightforward statements. Furthermore, artistic language in such forms as poems and stories can be adopted in mythology teaching.

Conclusion

In preschool mythological art education, the teachers shall first acknowledge that the art in mythology cannot form synesthesia if just loosely put together. The teacher’s mission is to explore the intrinsic connections between the artistic elements in all sorts of mythological stories, find a perspective that can create a favorable environment, interact with the children’s mind, and realize the educational objectives of teaching art to preschool children through ancient mythology. During such a process, the teachers should strive to make the children feel pleased.

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