Review of Educational Theory

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Harnessing University Resources to Enhance Aesthetic Education in Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This paper pinpoints the deficiencies in aesthetic education within Beijing's primary schools and delineates the strategy of the UPPE Project—short for "Universities' Participation in Primary Education"—for capitalizing on university resources to bolster this pivotal educational component. The project adopts a multi-pronged approach, including conducting needs assessments, integrating international expertise, and conducting systematic research to address pivotal issues. It introduces initiatives such as strategic planning, tiered educational goals, a closed-loop curriculum development, comprehensive course implementation, and the enhancement of cultural infrastructure in both software and hardware, along with the cultivation of diverse community groups. The project also prioritizes teacher professional development and collaborative pedagogical research, establishing a robust framework for cooperative and mutually beneficial outcomes. The conclusion highlights the project's role in fostering sustainable development in aesthetic education, which is essential for the comprehensive enhancement of students' qualities.

1. Introduction

Aesthetic education is instrumental in developing students' aesthetic sensibilities, creativity, and humanistic literacy. It enhances their overall qualities, promotes holistic development, enriches their spiritual lives, and lays the foundation for lifelong learning. Currently, aesthetic education in Beijing's primary schools lags within the educational framework, primarily characterized by exam-oriented cultivation rather than literacy enhancement, focusing on the few rather than the many, and prioritizing competitions over widespread dissemination. Teaching activities in aesthetic education are monotonous, primarily focused on imparting basic skills and aimed at nurturing a select group of talented students. Aesthetic courses often face arbitrary adjustments or are even replaced by core subjects, leading to insufficient offerings, limited student engagement, and an uneven distribution of course resources, which demand immediate attention.

From 2014 to 2020, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission initiated the first round of the Project for Supporting the Characteristic Development of Sports and Aesthetic Education in Primary and Secondary Schools through Social Forces from Higher Education Institutions

(hereinafter referred to as the UPPE Project, standing for "Universities' Participation in Primary Education"). This project leverages university resources to strengthen primary education, addresses the scarcity of teachers and curriculum resources, and aids in significant advancements in primary school sports and aesthetic education. It cultivates well-rounded talents, thus holding profound societal and educational significance.

2. Application Pathways of University Resources in Aesthetic Education for Primary Schools

The application of university resources in aesthetic education for primary schools is multifaceted. Firstly, needs assessments and analysis of societal expectations are conducted. By visiting primary schools, the current status of aesthetic education in basic education can be understood. Through media and parental feedback, public expectations for aesthetic education are gauged, providing insights into the actual needs for aesthetic education development among primary school students.

Secondly, international experiences are integrated with local practices. By drawing fully on the experiences of countries with high-quality basic education, such as Germany and Finland, and combining them with local realities, innovative solutions can be explored from new perspectives.

Thirdly, systematic design and research on key issues are carried out. Based on the current status and development trends of aesthetic education in basic education in Beijing, a combination of theoretical and empirical research methods is adopted for systematic design. Key issues in aesthetic education in primary schools are studied, leveraging universities' professional advantages in aesthetic education and integrating high-quality resources from societal forces. This approach aims to build school culture designs, expanded curriculum systems, and distinctive club activities that meet the needs of primary schools. By combining borrowing and innovation, a comprehensive, hierarchical, and diversified new model for aesthetic education is established that nurtures individuals.

3. UPPE Project Strategy and Implementation

3.1 Top-level Design and Phased Training Objectives

Top-tier training objectives of "universal coverage, tiered, and diversified" are established, integrating disciplinary and research strengths to develop phased curriculum goals tailored to student characteristics across different grades.

Taking the implementation of the UPPE Project at Bei-

jing Union University as an example, the university has amalgamated professional resources and research-practice strengths in arts, sports, psychology, and other areas to devise curriculum objectives spanning three major phases, aligning with the traits of primary school students in varying grades. The first phase targets the lower grades (grades 1-2), accommodating the transition from preschool education to primary school and laying a solid foundation. Aesthetic interest is fostered as an entry point, promoting the consciousness of holistic development through aesthetic education and executing a range of aesthetic activities. The second phase encompasses the middle grades (grades 3-4), building on the potential development of lower-grade students to ensure each student is aware of their personal development aspirations. A systematic and individualized training program is devised, nurturing each student in a targeted and personalized manner to propel growth. The third phase addresses the higher grades (grades 5-6), where through personalized training, students' artistic and humanistic literacy is enhanced, their individuality blossoms, they develop a broad range of interests and hobbies, and they fundamentally master one to two artistic skills..

3.2 Development of a Closed-loop Extended Curriculum System

With the support of universities and societal forces, the teaching channels and content of aesthetic subjects in primary schools are broadened. Aesthetic courses are integrated with school-based curricula and comprehensive practical activities, ensuring distinctive development and forming a closed-loop extended curriculum system. This system originates from training objectives and progresses to the enhancement of core literacy.

The cultivation of aesthetic literacy is taken as the central theme of this system, addressing the genuine needs of fostering children's personality development and unique talents. Aesthetic school-based extended courses with Beijing characteristics and primary school distinctiveness are actively developed and implemented. These aesthetic extended courses are categorized into nine major domains: music, sports, art, technology, dance, psychology, Chinese studies, drama, and recitation. Together, they constitute a distinctive "course menu" and a structured "9 Major Extended Courses + Community Activity Courses" curriculum system tailored for primary school students across six years. Curriculum objectives and methodologies are established in a step-by-step manner, laying a solid foundation for students' lifelong spiritual pursuit and artistic nurturing.

3.3 Achieving Full Course Coverage

Universities establish a curriculum teaching team that

collaboratively discusses and designs a series of interdisciplinary courses and distinctive activities. Through collective lesson preparation, sports and aesthetic courses are integrated with school-based curricula and comprehensive practical activities. Instruction is conducted on a class-by-class basis to implement the courses selected from the "course menu" by primary schools, thereby achieving full course coverage.

3.4 Software and Hardware Cultural Construction and Distinctive Development

For each primary school, the school's philosophy and educational characteristics are discerned based on its historical evolution, culminating in a sustainable development plan. Comprehensive planning and systematic design of the primary school campus culture are carried out, crafting a profound and multi-dimensional aesthetic model for cultural construction in both software and hardware aspects. This fosters an educational ambiance that is authentic, virtuous, beautiful, and aspirational.

In terms of hardware construction, a new campus culture of quality and taste is established, materializing, situationalizing, and artisticizing the educational philosophy. This ensures that each primary school possesses a unique campus culture, characterized by contemporary and regional traits, thereby creating a conducive atmosphere for aesthetic education.

Regarding software construction, emphasis is placed on enhancing the quality of campus culture and activities in primary schools. This leads to the formation of various distinctive activities in each primary school, such as calligraphy, folk music, drama, art, football, and recitation. Ultimately, these activities are integrated with comprehensive achievement exhibition events, blending with primary school cultural festivals and science and technology festivals.

3.5 Diversified Community Construction

Guided by the principle of enriching student community development and specializing in student community activities, our focus lies in establishing a diversified community system. This encompasses dance communities, aerobics communities, table tennis communities, drama communities, hosting communities, and scientific and technological innovation communities. We actively support our cooperative primary schools in hosting art festivals, science and technology festivals, as well as various aesthetic activities such as traditional culture and paper-cutting. Through these endeavors, we strive to foster a truly diversified and specialized community construction landscape.

4. Teacher Development and Cooperation Mechanism

4.1 Teacher Professional Growth

Teacher training is tailored to the specific needs of each primary school, providing primary school teachers with multifaceted professional development opportunities, including advanced studies, visits, and learning experiences in the arts. We dispatch professional teachers to collaborate with primary school educators, enhancing teaching proficiency through various forms of teaching and research activities. By increasing specialized training, pairing with renowned teachers, artists, and athletes for teaching practices, we continuously update teaching philosophies. This collaboration guides and co-develops school-based curricula and textbooks, further promoting the evolution of primary school aesthetic education teaching philosophies, models, content, methods, and the overall proficiency of the teaching staff. In this way, the assistance provided by universities in aiding primary school aesthetic education transforms into an internal impetus for the sustainable development of primary schools themselves.

4.2 Teaching Research and Teacher Joint Development

University teachers delve deeply into primary school education theory, integrating it seamlessly with the teaching requirements of primary school educators. They adhere to the aesthetic psychology and cognitive traits of children across lower, middle, and upper grades. Collaboratively, they study the characteristics of primary school aesthetic education teaching, assisting primary schools in refining curriculum construction concepts and fostering distinctive traits. Furthermore, they jointly compile and publish 55 volumes of primary school extended curriculum textbooks in art and music education, thereby accumulating and preserving primary school teaching content.

5. Construction of a Cooperative Win-Win and Systematic Guarantee Mechanism

5.1 Establishing a "Four-Party Collaborative" Teaching Team

By fully integrating resources, we establish an alliance comprising universities, governments, primary schools, and social forces. This alliance, consisting of disciplinary professional teachers, education committee teaching researchers, primary school veteran educators, and social force executives, forms a primary school aesthetic

education teacher training collaboration. Together, they participate in the design of future primary school aesthetic education talent cultivation models, ensuring the comprehensiveness and practicality of aesthetic education course expansion.

5.2 Establishing a High-Quality "Cross-Boundary Interconnection" Resource Platform

Leveraging the advantages of modern information technology, we establish a novel "educational resource concept" within talent cultivation paradigms. This involves cross-boundary interconnection of high-quality human and information resources. Relying on dynamic information, topic discussions, problem presentations, online courses, school-based curriculum development, and project declarations, we foster a joint educational impact, promoting mutual benefits among multiple stakeholders.

5.3 Establishing a Daily Management and Service Mechanism

We establish a curriculum team, engage in collective lesson preparation, adopt the "3+3+10" teaching methodology, implement teacher admission evaluations, establish a supervision system, and solicit feedback from students and parents. Students exhibit a high level of engagement in quality expansion courses, fostering an active classroom atmosphere. This, in turn, drives and complements the development of primary school aesthetic education.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, aesthetic education in Beijing's primary schools is essential for nurturing students' creative and humanistic qualities. The "High Participation in Primary" project, supported by university resources, aims to transform aesthetic education by addressing its current limitations. Through systematic design, phased training objectives, and a comprehensive curriculum system, the project fosters a diverse and inclusive educational environment. Collaboration between universities and primary schools ensures the sustainable development of aesthetic education, ultimately promoting holistic student growth.

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