



# Transnational tomorrows today:

Graduate student futures  
and imaginaries for art education

Guest Editors:  
Anita Sinner, Kazuyo Nakamura  
and Elly Yazdanpanah

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MULTI-DISCIPLINARY eJOURNAL IN THE ARTS

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Founding Director of the UNESCO Observatory  
Email: [lindyaj@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:lindyaj@unimelb.edu.au)  
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## ABOUT THE e-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

# JAPAN

## CHILD-CENTERED CURRICULUM TO DEVELOP AESTHETIC ABILITY: USING ART CARDS

### AUTHOR

Xiyu Zhang  
Hiroshima University

### ABSTRACT

Art education is an important element of school education. Art is not only a domain for talented people creating works of art; art education can help all people improve sensitivity, observation skills, aesthetic senses, aesthetic abilities, and understanding of design. This is in accordance with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal of 'Quality Education for All'. Cultivating aesthetic abilities and rich sensibilities during elementary school education can positively impact the development of children and influence their entire lives. This goal for sustainable development is aimed at ensuring that all people have basic literacy, which should include aesthetic literacy. This study aims to create instructional materials called 'art cards' to help all children acquire aesthetic ability as a means of advancing the goal of 'Quality Education for All'.

### KEYWORDS

Chinese art education, elementary school, aesthetic ability, appreciation, art cards, SDGs

## INTRODUCTION

I believe that nurturing aesthetic ability enables children to observe works of art from more diverse perspectives and discover more 'beauty' in works of art as well as in their daily lives. This may result in greater enjoyment and enhancement of their quality of life. The goal of this study was to design art cards aimed at realizing child-centered learning of art appreciation in Chinese schools, which may enhance children's aesthetic abilities.

This goal was pursued based on a comparative study of Japanese and Chinese art education textbooks used in elementary schools. The comparison between these two countries' textbooks enables us to better understand their different educational perspectives and identify what should be improved in Chinese art education. Overall, the current Chinese elementary schools tend to focus on 'standards-based education'. In contrast, Japanese elementary schools value child-centered learning, which is still new in Chinese art education.

First, I discuss a child-centered approach to art appreciation. Second, I indicate what I found through the comparative study of Chinese and Japanese textbooks. The comparison focused on art appreciation learning, and I investigated the ratio of each genre of artwork used for this type of learning. Third, I present a set of art cards designed based on the findings of this study as well as how to use it.

## A CHILD-CENTERED APPROACH TO ART APPRECIATION

Aesthetic ability includes judging artwork, nature, and buildings based on experience, knowledge, and sensitivity, with an emphasis on beauty. Although anyone can perceive beauty, the standard of the judgment is linked to a person's aesthetic sensibility.

A study by Miyashita (2018) shows that aesthetic values emphasize beauty and serve as universal standards for making important creative decisions. According to Liu's (2016) research, aesthetic education contributes to the construction of the human spiritual world, the development of early intellectual ability, the cultivation of rich artistic imagination and creative

thinking ability, the improvement of knowledge construction, and so on. Fujie's (2003) research confirmed that 'seeing'-led appreciation, which begins with free discussion of what can be seen, felt, or imagined directly from the work, elicits children's motivation. This aspect of aesthetic education should thus be an essential element of learning in schools.

When we develop our aesthetic ability, we can evaluate a work of art from a more comprehensive perspective rather than only based on personal preferences. This ability allows us to recognize more beauty in artwork and discover the inner characteristics of pieces of art as well as their outer appearance.

According to Miyashita, Kimura, and Oka (2015), it is suggested that those who have high aesthetic abilities valued artwork based on their own judgments. Aesthetic ability enhances the ability to perceive more elements, such as the spiritual nature of the artwork. Moreover, when our analysis is based on more than just our own preferences, we are able to develop our feelings and build our spiritual world. The more aesthetic abilities increase among people, the more an aesthetic environment that is shared by many people can be built.

To develop children's aesthetic ability in schools, it is important to promote a child-centered approach for art appreciation. This approach should have children view many artworks to gain more aesthetic experience. Repeatedly forming and reforming new images and ideas through art appreciation can lead to the development of aesthetic ability. Rather than knowledge acquirement, child-centered art appreciation focuses on the development of the child's aesthetic ability.

## **FINDINGS OF A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

A comparative study was conducted regarding the type of artwork used in art education textbooks in China and Japan. In this study, textbooks published by Jiangsushaonianertong (2014) and Renminjiaoyu (2012) in China and textbooks published by Nihonbunkyou (2020) and Kairyuudou (2020) in Japan were surveyed and examined. These were the most frequently used textbooks in China and Japan.

The examination indicated that the Chinese textbooks were characterized by the following features: an emphasis on traditional crafts (accounting for 23.8 per cent and 25.1 per cent of the total content of each textbook), more design works (17 per cent and 40 per cent), and more architectural works in the upper grades (from 2 per cent and 10.5 per cent in the lower and middle grades to 11.8 per cent and 13.1 per cent in the upper grades).

A feature of the textbooks that is common between China and Japan is that both included artwork from the country's traditions (China: 28.9 per cent and 6.9 per cent; Japan: 41.3 per cent and 26.6 per cent), and the number of artworks to be viewed increased with grade level (China: 83 works in the lower grades, 148 works in the middle grades, and 160 works in the upper grades; Japan: nine works in the lower grades, 42 works in the middle grades, and 77 works in the upper grades). In addition, many European works are included in appreciation classes in both countries.

A smaller number of architectural and design works are included in Chinese textbooks, compared to Japanese ones. Chinese textbooks tend to focus on Chinese traditional works, although they often cover artwork from other countries. This suggests that it is critical to provide art appreciation learning that draws connections between Chinese tradition and the traditions of other countries from a more global perspective.

## **DESIGN OF ART CARDS FOR CHILD-CENTERED ART APPRECIATION LEARNING**

Based on the findings described above, I developed a set of art cards that are suitable for Chinese children. A set of art cards is a type of teaching material for art appreciation and learning and is composed of various types of artworks printed on cards. It is expected that through game-based activities using art cards, children can enhance their interest in art appreciation and enhance their aesthetic abilities.

The set I designed consists of 30 art cards, though the number of cards can be changed depending on the themes of art appreciation learning being taught. The first concern for the selection of artwork is to include works not only from the home country's tradition but also from other countries' traditions. The genres include traditional crafts/artifacts, sculptures, and architectural and design works. When designing art cards, I took into account the view of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) regarding equal development of children's ability to think and communicate. In addition, this set encompasses various local cultures of regions in China. Along with the use of art cards in the Chinese art classroom, works from local art museums that are relevant to the community in which the children live can be introduced. In this way, I intended to advance cultural diversity, which is valued by the United Nation's (UN) 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and attempted to provide appropriate education for children from this viewpoint.

Here, I exemplify how to use art cards in the classroom with the 'Art Box' game approach. Art learning with this approach is designed for fifth graders and proceeds as follows:

Step 1: Present four boxes to the children. Each box has a theme, such as happiness or peace.

Step 2: Each group of children chooses one box, selects art cards that have an expressive quality related to the theme of the box, and they place the selected cards in the box.

Step 3: The children discuss reasons for the selection of the art cards as a group, paying attention to design elements such as colors, lines, and shapes.

Step 4: All of the groups share what they discussed within their group.



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Future tasks should include follow-up research on the effectiveness of art cards for diverse regional groups of children in China to meet the goal of 'Quality Education for All' for sustainable development. Art appreciation with a set of art cards in elementary schools introduces children to various types of artwork in a more enjoyable way, enhances communication among classmates, prompts children to develop aesthetic ability and interest in art appreciation, and facilitates their understanding of art. Though providing this type of art appreciation, teachers can better help children develop their own feelings and thoughts in such a way as to stimulate their potential.

I believe that through introducing activities with the use of art cards in elementary schools, Chinese art education can improve the quality of art education and facilitate the realization of child-centered education in China. I believe that this type of learning will gradually lead to the achievement of the goal of 'Quality Education for All' in the UN's 2030 Agenda.

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