

The Analysis on Popular and Forward-Looking Research Issues in Visual Arts Education from 2006 to 2016

Huei-Ling Chao¹

Cheng-Feng Kao²

Summary

Academic research as the foundation stone consolidates the knowledge system of a discipline and delineates its scope and categories. It also provides important indicators for its evolution and development. Since 2005, the Research Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences of the Ministry of Science and Technology in Taiwan has undertaken the survey and analysis on the popular and forward-looking research issues of various disciplines based on a 10-year cycle. To fulfill the common goals, the purpose of this study is to investigate the popular and forward-looking research issues in the field of visual arts education both in Taiwan domestically and internationally over the years from 2006 to 2016. The results of this study are hoped to contribute to visual arts education in Taiwan and to shed the light on the development of this field as a whole.

By using discourse analysis, literature analysis, and content analysis as the research methods, this study included internationally representative art educational journals and the research reports conducted by reputable research institutions into its primary research materials. Among international academics, the major recourses selected by this study were 216 articles published in *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research* (SAE), which is issued by National Art Education Association (NAEA), from 2006 to 2016. Meanwhile, when the trend of the emerging issues was described, some other materials were also utilized by this study, such as *Art Education* (AE) -- another art educational journal issued by NAEA, related books published by NAEA, and significant international art educational conferences, such as NAEA National Convention and the World Congress hosted by the International Society for Education through Art (InSEA). The rest

¹ Professor / Department of Fine Arts, National Taiwan Normal University

² Professor / Department of Visual Arts, University of Taipei

of international art educational journals and academic publications that are not mentioned here are not included in the discussion of this study.

For Taiwanese research, the major research materials selected by this study were 63 articles published in *Research in Arts Education*, the only art educational journal listed in the Taiwan Social Sciences Citation Index (TSSCI) and Taiwan Humanities Citation Index Core (THCI Core), from 2006 to 2016. For research reports, the major recourses selected by this study were 116 research reports supported by Research Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences of the Ministry of Science and Technology. Meanwhile, when the trend of the emerging issues was described, some other materials were also utilized, such as internationally representative art educational conference and books. The rest of art educational journals and academic publications of Taiwan not aforementioned are thereby not included in the discussion of this study.

According to the results, three popular research issues were found within the analysis of international academics: visual culture-related issues, digital technology-related issues, and issues related to the boundaries and subjectivity of art education. When analyzing the visual culture-related issues, this study further found three sub-topics that were under the category of visual culture, namely and respectively: popular culture, multicultural, and digital visual culture. It showed that these three sub-topics were intertwined in reflecting the values that contemporary art education had emphasized, i.e., the “everydayness” of individuals, the practice of “social justice” through art education, and the edutainment of “play.”

When analyzing the digital technology-related issues, this study found that the issues could be divided into two additional categories. The first one focused on the implementation of digital technologies into art teaching in order to explore and update teaching methods and teaching materials. The second one focused on understanding the experiences of teenagers when they conducted their art learning activities through digital technologies, including the influences on the subjectivities and self-concepts of adolescents.

When analyzing the issues related to the boundaries and subjectivity of art education, this study found that these debates had reflected the awareness that scholars had toward the crisis facing contemporary art education. As the 21st century was moving towards to its second decade, it was unignorable to notice the rise of many problems that caused conundrums, such as ecological crisis, economic collapse, capitalist hegemony, cultural warfare, terrorism, etc. At the same time, the rapidly and dramatically growing visual technologies were likely to threat the role played by art education. All these situations seemed to result in an atmosphere of “the inevitability of change” for art education.

The picture in Taiwan presented slight difference. Among the three popular research issues found, two of them were similar to the international academic ones: the visual culture-related issues and the digital technology-related research. Yet, the third one was slightly different: aesthetic/cognition and creativity-related issues. When analyzing the visual culture and culture-related issues in Taiwan, the results showed that the research topics were quite diverse, with the spectatorship of participants within different visual cultures, such as popular culture, mass culture, multi-cultures, etc.

As is compared to the traditional teaching media, digital technologies brought a more attractively dynamic interaction in classroom. Therefore, when analyzing the digital technology-related issues in Taiwan, it was found that many researches focused on exploring the benefits that digital technologies offered for different learners at different ages while learning arts. Meanwhile, as new digital technologies kept advancing in innovativeness, many researchers were interested in exploring new digital teaching mechanisms, such as blog, interactive whiteboard, massive open online course (MOOC), small private online course (SPOC), etc.

When analyzing the issues related to aesthetic/cognition and creativity, this study found that the relevant research might not be accumulated much, but the topics were quite multiple. It also found that many studies address individual creativity and these researchers seemed to agree that art learning played significant roles on triggering individual creativity. Furthermore, the study found that the emerging topic, art therapy, had been integrated into art education. Although the relevant research was still minor in terms of its quantity, it should still be regarded as an innovative issue for art education that might infuse fresh energy into the field.

To summarize, for popular research issues, both Taiwanese and international scholars focused on visual culture-related issues and digital technology-related issues. Other popular issues included the boundaries and subjectivity of art education for international scholars, and aesthetics and cognition for scholars in Taiwan. After reviewing these results as well as scrutinizing the status of art education, this study proposes two forward-looking research issues: digital technology-related issues and art educational subjectivity-related issues. The former shows the existing circumstances in which all disciplines are involved with and the scholars should pay close attention to the impact of technologies, while the latter is closely correlated to the persistent development of visual arts education. Instead of simply observing the results, this study singles out some emerging issues that deserve to be paid attention to, namely, the research approaches, alternative learning systems, learners, and cross-disciplines.