

A Study on How High School Visual Arts Teachers Incorporate Outdoor Education into Curricula

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Summary

Given that the paradigm has shifted toward competency-oriented curriculum guidelines and contemporary thoughts regarding visual arts education, the situationalization and contextualization of arts education has become a topic of discussion. Therefore, this study focuses on how visual arts teachers in senior high schools design and implement such curricula.

Project planners and practitioners play a crucial role in curriculum; therefore, when it comes to the design and implementation of curricula, the context of the school becomes a necessary factor for consideration. Both theory-driven and data-driven approaches are applied in this study to illustrate the process and context in which arts teachers design curriculum. For the theory-driven approach, school-based curriculum development proposed by Skilbeck was adopted, and “situational analysis,” “definition objectives,” “program design,” “implementation,” and “assessment and evaluation” were taken as categories for further analysis.

Details of the interview guide were established through initial in-depth interviews with teachers, whereas semi-structured focus interviews and individual in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data on how arts teachers in senior high schools incorporated and implemented outdoor education in their curricula. The target interviewees included teachers that have incorporated outdoor education in their arts curricula. Through reputational sampling, teachers with such teaching experiences from northern, central, southern, and eastern Taiwan have been invited to join the study.

When it comes to the content analysis of coding the verbatim transcriptions of interviews,

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categories were established based on the frequency of occurrence. This was also applied when analyzing other focus interviews and individual interviews. The reliability was evaluated using inter-rater agreement (IRA), and there was high IRA: the overall agreement was .91, indicating high reliability.

Outcomes of the analyses suggest that the way in which outdoor education is incorporated into visual arts curricula is reflective of teachers' different concerns and motives, such as students' lack of learning resources, teachers' pursuit of local recognition, and innovation of learning programs. However, the most influential factor of curriculum practices still lies in budget subsidies and other relevant resources that can be obtained through special projects. Generally speaking, when incorporating outdoor education into high school visual arts classes, teachers tend to focus on learning objectives such as the inspiration of sensory experiences and the learning of discipline-based content. Teachers are also generally capable of developing multiple outdoor curriculum projects based on specialized learning content. Such types of curricula include the learning of materials and techniques, creative representation of outdoor visual phenomena, outdoor exhibitions of artworks, three-dimensional molding techniques and on-campus art installations, visits to art galleries and museums for engaging in artistic appreciation, exploring and recording stories of community residents using new media in artistic ways, as well as the learning of aesthetics and design and reflecting on local traditional industries. These curricula also tend to feature more visits to museums and art galleries as well as creative representations, which suggests that—compared with teacher engaging in elementary education—high school teachers place relatively more emphasis on arts learning resources, discipline-based art education, and the learning of materials and techniques.

Nonetheless, it can also be seen from the outcomes that high school curricula tend to lack opportunities for exploring cultural phenomena outside of campus and for contemplating visual culture. Yet the fact is if contextual learning of culture is not valued within arts curricula, this is likely to result in the stereotype that arts education merely encompasses the creation of self-indulgent artworks. Therefore, high school teachers should provide students with more opportunities to express care for and interact with various outdoor visual phenomena. Students can thus not only accumulate their knowledge and improve their creative techniques but also, through arts learning experiences, strengthen their relationships with outdoor environments and cultures. Meanwhile, teachers will also be able to investigate changes in students' affective domain through the use of assessment strategies.

The results of the study lead to the following suggestions: (1) With an aim to challenge the boundaries and flip students' learning to achieve the objectives, curriculum designs for interdisciplinary outdoor arts education that integrate different issues should be developed, and students should be encouraged to show more concern and think critically toward local visual culture. (2) School-based elective arts courses should be developed in upper secondary schools, which not only help strengthen the bond between the community, teachers and students, increases teachers' intrinsic motivation to implement outdoor education, but also breaks through the barriers of difficulty in consecutive course arrangement and the lack of administrative supports. (3) More contemporary art-related content should be included in the arts curriculum to help guide students to reflect on issues concerning humanities.