

A Survey on Chinese Rural Art Education

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Abstract

As the core of aesthetic education, art education has been gradually extended and some results have been achieved. However, there are many “blind areas” and problems of art education in the rural areas of China. In order to improve the balanced development of education and cultivate high quality talents with all-round development, it is necessary to rethink the problems of rural art education and make some comments.

Key words: Chinese rural areas; Art education; Current situation; Reflect

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INTRODUCTION

As the main practical approach of aesthetic education, art education is an essential part of school education system. Although the state paid more attention on art education in recent years and the voice of strengthening art education is also getting higher and higher, the current situation of art education is still not optimistic. Art education is still in the marginal zone, especially in rural primary and secondary schools.

It inevitably makes people’s misunderstanding of art education because of the weakness of rural areas’ infrastructure and backward thoughts, and the application process also has difficulties. But it is worth noting that art education has special importance in the early stage of life.

“Children are born with a heart of art, and art education can evoke the beauty of nature, which is hidden in the depths of their hearts and help them to feel the color, sound and rhythm of the world.” (Zhu, 2015) Children’s nature should not be denied as well as the art education in the rural schools should receive the attention it deserves.

1. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF RURAL ART EDUCATION

Understaffed, underequipped and obsolete concept, these facing problems of rural art education can be generalized into the following four aspects:

The first is the aspect of state. There is less concern with rural art education. Less money is invested and the number of professional teachers is rare. In fact, all these two problems above rise on the basis of less developed economy in these areas. Due to less developed economy, art education cannot be carried out well so that people are not concerned with that. Due to the lack of enough educational investment fund, educational facilities are much less in quantity and quality, besides, teachers get low paid so that numerous numbers of them are unwilling to come for teaching. There is no doubt that rural art education would never be developed under such a poor economic condition. That is to say, an enormous sum of money needs urgently to be injected into rural areas. Besides, some local governments do not strictly govern rural schools’ art education and they sometimes abstain from an act. Some policies are not carried out effectively so that rural art education sometimes takes no effect. State is the policies organizer. They should observe the times and judge the occasion. Nowadays, as the rapid development of society, students should become an all round person. But due to huge economic differences of urban area and rural area, unbalance of education reflects a lot of aspects. In urban area children can get much more art learning resources in school, also a large amount of

money are continually invested into these areas whereas in rural areas much less capital would be invested into the rural area in that those area is poor. But in fact, this is unfair.

The second is the aspect of parents. Many parents don't understand well of the idea of art, even believe it is crooked and only do nothing but harmful to their children's study. Chinese parents tend to regard study as the most important thing in children's school time. Even urban parents think so, let alone parents in rural area. For most traditional Chinese parents, study for children predicates their future and high examination score decides what kind of school or university the children could enter. Thus, parents often put art education in the lowest level while ignore the great importance of art which could bring to children. Moreover, parents have the idea that children in rural areas and urban areas are not on the same level even if rural kids have the abilities and talents of drawing or singing, them and their works are still lacking of aestheticism to be a type of art. What's more, they also think ordinary people can't afford such a money-waste subject. These narrow understandings are not conducive to the development of art education. Therefore, traditional view and prejudice toward art education in rural area are deep-seated and cannot be changed in one day, that is to say, this need a long-term process to change them.

The third is the aspect of schools. Schools are significant places of education spreading while the teaching system of rural schools is not put art education in the right position. Thus, arts and sport curriculums of rural schools are empty have the names. On the surface, schools will be required to arrange music, art and PE classes every week, however, these classes actually cannot be taken normally every time. Most of them will be taken as self-study lessons, and they will also be occupied by main lesson teachers when the examination is coming. The causes of this phenomenon are not only the imperfection of school management system, but also the lack of art teachers. The survey found: Per urban or rural school only have 0.69 music teacher and 0.59 art teacher in the average. And every 568 students only have one music teacher; every 665.8 students have one art teacher (Tu, 2015). In such a situation, it is far from meeting the needs of art education. In addition, the equipment of schools is also not complete: Music teachers in many rural schools only have one music book and art teachers teaching with their bare hands. Although some schools have bought some art facilities, but they just use them to cope with the examination of superiors. Thus, schools, as a matter of fact, are the direct practitioners, having many tasks. Whether children can get a full development lie on schools' education to a great extent. How to follow policies, how to use money, how to recruit good teachers, etc., all of which need to take much great efforts to develop art education.

Last, the aspect of students. Under the social environment like rural areas, people's understanding of art is too narrow and one-sided. In the eyes of some students, art is the means of finding a job and making money, and this is no doubt to cast a veil of utilitarianism to art. There are also some children think art is nothing but blowing, pulling, singing and painting, learning these is hard to have a good future, only study cultural lessons well can be promising. What's more, some people equate the art students with the bad students, so those children who love painting and dancing unconsciously will have a feeling of inferiority. These incorrect ideas of children are also an inevitable problem in art education.

2. THE COUNTERMEASURES OF RURAL ART EDUCATION

Facing with art education's current situation in rural areas, people have to make a serious reflection: why children in rural areas cannot enjoy the edifying influence of art? They also have the rights and qualifications of full self-development, and we need to explore the road for their comprehensive development. Surely, the unilateral power is not enough to solve the problem of rural children's art education; it needs our joint efforts of all aspects.

At first, the state needs to strengthen the support power. The state has paid great attention on the field of art education. Such as the third Plenary Session of the 18th "on deepening the reform of education" already write develop the aesthetic education, improve students' aesthetic and humanistic quality, and promote educational equity into documents as major issues. *Some Regulations on the Development of Art Education* promulgated by the Ministry of Education in 2014 proposed that our country begin to evaluate high school students' artistic quality from 2015 and the grades will be included in the contents of comprehensive evaluation of student's development situation and as a reference for college entrance examination. At the literature and art work forum in 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping also stressed that literature and art are the sign of the times' advancement, the best representative of an era's style and the best leader of the age's trends. The state has already put art education on the agenda, but there is still no obvious improvement in the rural art education, so the disconnection between the formulation and implementation of policies is still a huge problem. So firstly, it is extremely urgent and important to increase money or build up foundations so as to promote the development of art education in these areas. Secondly, it is necessary for the state to strengthen the supervision over the policies' implementation and education departments should follow the instructions of the state and in accordance with the law strictly to implement the relevant policies of art education. Those policies have to

be established according to local conditions and should not apply them mechanically. Except for that, policies have to establish equality so as to ensure every child in rural area can enjoy happiness of art as well as children in developed areas. Besides, much more scholars should do more researches on those issues and explore more art educational models aiming to the specific and particular situation of rural area. Once policies are established, all local educational administrations have to take responsibility of supervising schools and all the school have to carry out them strictly.

What's more, the State Education Department should establish and perfect the system of assessment and incentive mechanism according to the specific situation of every school and treat art teachers equally with main-lesson teachers. In other words, departments should completely think over what should be the distinguishing features of an specific area, for example, some areas are further popularizing some native arts, such as playing dragon lantern, walking on stilts, dancing Yangko, traditional paper-cutting, shadow play, etc., which broaden forms of art in rural areas and highlight their own merits in art. Afterward, teachers become the most important element, thus we should pay much more attention to art teachers as equal as main-lesson teachers, which means that art teachers not only get same paid as main-lesson teachers but also the same promotion opportunities. Besides, art teachers should be provided some necessary skill trainings in some excellent professional college, and students who get much talents on such art or acquire some big awards in related art area can be given some opportunities to go further study in Art University such as entering the college without examination and entering the college with low score. Finally, lesson also should be evaluated according to the process and effect and counts its grades into the final examination. Through all the preparations being made, art education can be promoted well in rural areas and children there can indeed enjoy a feast of art.

In the second, schools should be well monitored in every step. School plays the essential role in the process of art education's implementation and that's why schools have to unite with educators to work for the art education of children in rural areas.

(a) Put art in the correct position. Rural schools should change their prejudice towards art education and put art education in the position as important as Chinese and mathematics. What's more, schools need to guarantee that every art class has professional teacher to teach related content instead of occupied by other teachers. Art courses are not "miscellaneous class", art teachers are also been through professional training and get into education system as art teachers, they deserve basic respect and attention. Schools should follow policies established by state and regularly select good art education and send

them to some good university to train their professional skill.

(b) Conforming to policies. When some policies are established by state or government, schools as the frontier of education have to implement them firstly. School should take responsibility of students' growth. Only by strictly following these policies can art education be promoted and can children enjoy their art and life. Without policies, rural art education would be in disorder; without conforming to policies, rural education would always be a dream and would never be put into practice. However, at the same time, states should supervise schools' implement. When supervision of state or government and the implement of schools are carried out, rural art education can truly be developed.

(c) Changing parents' attitude. Schools take responsibility of changing parents' educational stereotype, promoting them reach such consensus that art education is as important as main lesson. This cannot be done in a short time. Thus, schools should hold some regular parents meeting with different forms to explain functions of art education for growth of children. During the process, parents are able to understand that art education benefits building children's round character, enhancing children's aesthetic judgment, inspiring their wisdom, and unearthing their creativity and imagination. Thus, winning parents' support will lay a firm foundation on art education in rural areas.

(d) Cultivation of Teachers. Rural schools need to select art teachers through formal approach and cannot find anybody as art teacher because mistakenly believe rural children blind to art. At the same time, schools also should recommend some high quality teachers with sound art knowledge to conduct regular study or training to improve their professional level. In addition, schools should also make good use of the state's educational funds to hire some experts and folk artists as teachers, so that children can truly feel the charm of art. When recruiting art teachers, schools should insist on choosing teachers on the basis of their professional competence. Besides, schools should provide equal opportunities as main-lesson teachers for promotion. Only in this way can attract teachers and save teachers. Thus, as to school, cultivation of teacher matters whether art education can be carried out literally.

(e) Pay attention to facilities construction. The problem of facilities and equipment is one of the biggest bottlenecks of rural art education. Only owning great talent is not enough, enough facilities should be provided. The art of painting depends on canvas, paper and dye and music depends on instruments, so, art education is hard to carry out without those equipment. Building up their dream, children's art dream can be put on a pair of wings. Rural schools have to prepare for the funds to buy art teaching equipment and basic facilities actively

through various ways, meanwhile encouraging children to DIY or buy their own learning tool, so that to lay the material foundation for art education's development. When investment comes, schools should strictly use them to purchase more appropriate facilities for children so as to develop art education.

(f) Developing extracurricular activities. Even though some students have talents, we have to help them to dig them out. Besides, life is the source of art and much artistic creativity inspired by life, which is the unique part of art. So art education cannot be confined in the classroom but move towards life. Schools also should seize these characteristics of art education to carry out some activities, such as painting exhibition, classics reading. Students also can be led to visit the ancient architectural sites or cultural corridor, and let the rural students have opportunities to get the infection and influence of art and stimulate their desire for art. Extracurricular activities

At last, parents need to be cooperated. For children in rural area, parents' misunderstanding on art education as one of the most difficult problem severely blocks the way. How parents react to art sometimes decides children's art learning in rural area. Thus, how to change parents' attitude to art education has become extremely important. As children's mirror and guide, parents play an important role in children's growth and life. On the art education in rural areas, parents should give a correct understanding firstly. Art education is not a waste of time; it not only helps children to learn, but also can cultivate their emotions, to promote their comprehensive development. Then, parents should cooperate with schools' art education actively: Buy some painting tool or instrument for children within the means, and to change children's psychological biases and narrow understanding of arts. Finally, parents should also try their best to create a good environment for their children's art education. Some villages have organized drum team and Yangko team, these cultural performances affects children's aesthetic orientation in imperceptibly. Rural areas also should create a cultural environment and organize cultural performances or folk artists to perform more

often, and let rural children experience the charms of art by themselves.

CONCLUSION

This paper concludes some problems of current situation of rural art education and tries to figure out some solution to them. Problems can be reflected from the perspectives of state, school and parents. For state, huge support and capital investment are the most important; for schools, art education's implementation, the recruitment and management of teachers, and the use of money would be a huge task for them; for parents, how to change their negative attitude toward art education. In order to solve those obstacles, this paper attempts to provide some countermeasures of rural art education from the perspective of state, school, and parents as well. States should increase their concern with this issue by increasing more fund and setting up some strict policies; as to schools, placing art education in correct position, obeying those policies, changing parents' old views on art education, cultivating teachers, constructing construction, increasing and enhancing extracurricular activities; as to parents, they should be cooperated in children's art education and resolve misunderstanding.

We should consider the promotion of art education in rural areas as a development process. Although it starts from a lower base, conditions are rather tough and are difficult to implement, it also will go forward if we find the problems and solve them in time from the practical point of view. We look forward to the students in rural areas can enjoy equal education, to truly feel the baptism of art, and thrive together with the city's children.

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