

# Practical Research on Art Teaching Strategies for ADHD Children in Primary Schools Under the Background of Inclusive Education

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**Abstract:** The prevalence of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) among school-age children in China is approximately 6.3%. Such children often face academic setbacks and psycho-social difficulties in primary school classrooms, while systematic teaching support for this group in regular primary schools is insufficient. Art activities possess unique values in emotional regulation and attention guidance for ADHD children, yet these values have not been fully exploited. Based on the background of inclusive education, this study integrates multi-disciplinary theories to explore the learning characteristics and multi-dimensional needs of ADHD children in art learning, and constructs a comprehensive teaching strategy system covering four dimensions: curriculum content, teaching process, classroom management, and learning evaluation. The effectiveness of the system is verified through teaching practice. Results show that the strategy system can effectively improve the core symptoms of ADHD children, enhance their classroom participation and self-efficacy, providing practical references for primary school art teachers to carry out relevant educational practices, and also offering theoretical support for the intersection and integration of inclusive education and art education.

**Keywords:** ADHD children; Primary school art education; Teaching strategies; Inclusive education; Emotional regulation

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## 1. Introduction

In twelve years of frontline teaching practice in primary school art, the author has found that children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are often labeled as “challenging students” due to symptoms such as poor attention persistence, hyperactivity, and impulsivity in regular classrooms, frequently encountering academic setbacks and negative evaluations. However, in art activities such as painting and handicraft making, many ADHD children can exhibit extraordinary concentration, rich imagination, and a strong desire for expression. This significant behavioral contrast has triggered professional reflection: the intervention potential contained in art education has not been fully recognized and systematically utilized<sup>[1]</sup>. Research in pictorial

psychology has confirmed that children can achieve self-relaxation, release pressure, and vent negative emotions through painting, indicating that art activities have a natural psychological regulation advantage for ADHD children<sup>[2]</sup>. The diverse tactile experiences of art materials and multi-dimensional spatial expression in art activities can effectively mobilize the sensory participation of ADHD children, construct an immersive artistic context, and help them stabilize their emotions and focus their attention<sup>[3]</sup>. Nevertheless, current educational intervention resources for ADHD children in regular primary schools are scarce, and teachers' professional support capabilities are insufficient. Medication alone can hardly meet their developmental needs, so there is an urgent need for systematic teaching strategies combined with psychological and behavioral interventions. Against this background, exploring the integration of targeted teaching strategies for ADHD children into regular art curricula is not only an urgent task to respond to the practical needs of inclusive education but also a theoretical innovation path to expand the educational functions of art education and promote its intersection and integration with psychology and special education. It is of great practical significance for improving the developmental predicament of ADHD children.

## **2. Learning characteristics of ADHD children in primary school art learning**

To accurately grasp the art learning performance of ADHD children, the author, in collaboration with art teachers and head teachers from multiple primary schools, conducted long-term participatory observations and semi-structured interviews with students diagnosed through professional evaluations or displaying typical ADHD symptoms, while collecting and conducting in-depth analysis of their artworks. The study found that the art learning characteristics of ADHD children exhibit distinct differentiation and situational adaptability, mainly reflected in the following aspects<sup>[4]</sup>.

At the behavioral level, the attention concentration of ADHD children is characterized by material dependence. Their concentration is significantly better in art activities with rich tactile experiences, such as clay modeling, pottery making, and the use of waste composite materials, compared to regular planar painting like sketching and watercolor. However, in tasks requiring fine manipulation, such as meticulous line drawing exercises and small-scale decorative painting creation, most children will show behaviors such as restlessness, frequent tool switching, and increased small movements, with insufficient task continuity, often failing to complete the tasks. There is a polarization in creative behavior: some children exhibit impulsive creation, starting without sufficient conception, leading to disorganized works and unfinished tasks; others show avoidance-oriented creation, delaying to start due to excessive worry about the quality of their works, and even refusing to participate in creative tasks.

At the cognitive and emotional level, ADHD children demonstrate the coexistence of creative advantages and executive weaknesses. They have a unique perception of colors and shapes, and their works often feature bold color matching and unconventional composition, full of childlike innocence and creativity. However, they have obvious deficiencies in logical planning and step execution, and often struggle to advance independently when facing a complete creative process, requiring step-by-step guidance from teachers.

Emotional expression shows a strong fluctuation characteristic: when creation goes smoothly or they receive recognition, most children will show intense pleasure and even take the initiative to display their works to peers; when encountering creative bottlenecks, many children will experience negative emotions such as irritability and anger, and some may even exhibit extreme behaviors like tearing up works or throwing tools.

At the social interaction level, the performance of ADHD children in group art activities is polarized. Some children are overly dominant, eager to express their ideas, frequently interrupting peers' speeches and ignoring team division of labor; some are silent and withdrawn, failing to participate in discussions throughout and only passively completing simple assigned tasks due to fear of being denied by peers or worrying about their own performance; only a few children can conduct preliminary peer collaboration under the guidance of teachers.

### **3. Construction of an art teaching strategy system for ADHD children in primary schools**

#### **3.1. Curriculum content strategy: Balancing emotional release and ability development**

##### **3.1.1. Emotional expression and release activities**

These activities focus on stress-free creation, lowering the creative threshold to help ADHD children vent emotions and relax. The "color emotion diary" activity is carried out regularly in art classes, allowing children to record their daily moods with colors and lines without considering painting skills, and teachers only focus on the authenticity of their emotional expression. The "free collage creation" activity is organized, providing diverse materials such as waste magazines, fabrics, buttons, and feathers for children to freely combine and create, releasing creative pressure. A "large graffiti wall" is designed in the classroom, allowing children to paint freely during breaks or the initial stage of art classes, releasing excess energy through the combination of physical movement and creation. An additional "natural material tactile creation" activity is added, providing natural materials such as leaves, stones, and soil for children to create through touching, placing, and splicing, helping them feel the texture of natural materials and stimulate sensory experiences.

##### **3.1.2. Attention and executive ability training activities**

These activities adopt a step-by-step design to gradually improve the concentration and executive ability of ADHD children. In the lower grades, "detailed observation painting" is carried out, providing pictures or real objects with rich details for children to observe and depict, focusing on a small number of observation points each time. In the middle grades, tasks such as "step-by-step origami" and "model assembly" are set to cultivate step awareness and executive ability, with visual guidelines provided for each task to help children advance gradually. In the upper grades, "theme creation series" are arranged, such as theme paintings of "my campus" and "family interesting stories", guiding children to conduct creative planning and implementation step by step. From theme conception and sketching to detail improvement and work modification, the creation is completed in stages to enhance sustained concentration and logical planning capabilities.

##### **3.1.3. Self-cognition and social skills activities**

These activities focus on the self-identity and social ability development of ADHD children. The "self-portrait series" activities are carried out, ranging from "my little hands" and "my expressions" in lower grades to complete self-portraits in higher grades, helping children recognize and accept themselves. Group cooperative creation tasks, such as class murals and theme collages, are designed with clear division of labor for each child and group cooperation rules formulated to cultivate communication and collaboration skills. "Work sharing sessions" are organized, encouraging children to introduce their works through various ways such as language, actions, or supplementary painting, to improve their expression ability and self-confidence.

## **3.2. Teaching process strategy: Optimizing presentation and guidance methods**

### **3.2.1. Visual support strategy**

Standardized visual task cards are made, including creative goals, material lists, step requirements, and completion examples, using a combination of pictures and texts with enlarged fonts and bright colors, posted in each creation area. Visual timers are used to prompt the remaining task time through color changes, helping children perceive the time rhythm. Complex creative steps are drawn into flowcharts in a cartoon style, hung in prominent positions in the classroom for children to refer to at any time. A classroom visual schedule is established, indicating the order of daily activities with pictures or icons, posted at the classroom door in advance so that children can understand the daily process upon entering the classroom. Additional “creative prompt stickers” are added, with simple visual prompts attached to material packages or drawing papers to timely guide children to focus on creative key points.

### **3.2.2. Task decomposition strategy**

The core task of each art class is decomposed into several small steps, with clear completion standards and reasonable time allocation set for each step to ensure that children can advance gradually and obtain immediate feedback. For example, the creative task of “clay small animals” is specifically decomposed into: Step 1: Kneading basic shapes—completing basic clay blocks of different sizes with smooth surfaces; Step 2: Shaping animal features—combining basic shapes to form the body, head, and limbs of the animal with coordinated proportions; Step 3: Adding detailed decorations—using small clay blocks and auxiliary tools to add details such as eyes, hair, and patterns; Step 4: Naming and displaying works—naming their own works and briefly introducing the creative ideas. After the completion of each step, teachers conduct a quick inspection and provide brief feedback to let children gain a sense of achievement and stimulate motivation for subsequent creation.

### **3.2.3. Multi-sensory participation strategy**

Tactile experiences are integrated by providing combinations of materials with different textures, such as soft clay and hard cardboard, rough sandpaper and smooth shells, plush fabrics and metal bottle caps, allowing children to feel the material differences during creation. Kinesthetic participation is increased by designing activities such as “body painting” and “ground creation”, allowing children to paint on large-scale canvases with paint-dipped limbs or conduct collective painting on floor-spread paper, releasing energy and maintaining concentration through physical movement. Auditory elements are incorporated by playing corresponding music or sound effects according to the creative theme to create an immersive creative atmosphere. Olfactory experiences are added by placing natural-scented materials such as herbs and flowers when creating nature-themed works, enhancing the creative sense of substitution through olfactory stimulation.

### **3.2.4. Selective provision strategy**

Limited options are provided in creative tasks to avoid anxiety caused by excessive choices <sup>[5]</sup>. For example, in color selection, three options are offered: “warm color system”, “cool color system”, and “contrast color system”, allowing children to choose one; in composition methods, several basic composition examples are provided for children to refer to; in creative themes, 2-3 alternative themes are offered to meet personalized needs while controlling the difficulty of choice. In terms of material selection, basic packages and extended packages are provided: the basic package contains essential materials for completing core creation, ensuring that every child can participate; the extended package includes additional decorative materials for children with extra learning

capacity, balancing the needs of children at different levels.

### **3.3. Classroom management strategy: Creating a supportive learning environment**

#### **3.3.1. Structured environment design**

The art classroom is divided into four functional areas with clear signs and boundaries: the creation area adopts a group layout, with only materials and tools needed for the current class placed on the table to avoid interference from irrelevant items; the material area is arranged in categories with layered shelves and convenient access tools, and diagrams for material collection and return are posted to reduce chaos and waiting during material collection and return; the display area is divided into a temporary display board and a long-term display wall, with the temporary display board used to show works of the current class and the long-term display wall updated by theme to show children's phased achievements; the emotional regulation area is set in the corner of the classroom, equipped with soft cushions, stress-relief toys, emotion cards, picture books, etc., where children can voluntarily go to regulate when they are overly excited or frustrated.

#### **3.3.2. Routine and preview mechanism**

A fixed classroom routine process is established to allow children to form stable expectations and reduce anxiety caused by uncertain processes. Dual prompts are given before activity transitions: verbal reminders and visual prompts to help children prepare mentally. Simple and easy-to-understand classroom rules are formulated, with no more than 3-5 rules, using positive expressions and a combination of pictures and texts, such as "communicate softly without disturbing others", "return materials to their original positions", and "raise hands for help when encountering difficulties", posted in prominent positions at the front of the classroom. Teachers lead children to familiarize themselves with the rules at the initial stage of the class and repeatedly reinforce them in daily teaching.

#### **3.3.3. Positive behavior support strategy**

Expected behaviors are clearly defined and expressed positively, avoiding negative language, such as using "keep quiet when focusing on creation" instead of "no talking", and "take materials slowly" instead of "don't grab materials". An "immediate reinforcement mechanism" is established, with teachers carrying praise stickers and small stamps to promptly capture and provide specific feedback on children's positive behaviors, such as "you persisted in completing the entire creation today, which is very perseverance" and "you took the initiative to help peers get materials and patiently explained their usage, which is very kind", rather than vague praise. A "progress points table" is established to record children's progress in terms of concentration duration, task completion, peer cooperation, and material return. Accumulating a certain number of points can be exchanged for art materials or creative privileges, with points counted and exchanged regularly to stimulate children's positive behaviors.

#### **3.3.4. Emotional regulation support strategy**

Professional emotional guidance tools are equipped in the emotional regulation area. In addition to stress-relief toys and emotion cards, an "emotion graffiti notebook" is added, allowing children to doodle freely in the notebook to vent emotions when feeling irritable. Several simple and easy-to-operate emotional regulation methods are taught to children, such as the "deep breathing relaxation method", "emotion pause method", and "positive self-suggestion method", which are practiced with children at the initial stage of the class or when emotions fluctuate. Teachers pay attention to children's emotional changes, establish "emotional observation records", predict scenarios that may trigger emotional problems, and intervene and guide on time. For example,

when a child feels irritable due to creative difficulties, the teacher does not rush to criticize or complete the task on their behalf, but helps analyze the problem, provides specific support, and guides them to solve the problem independently.

### **3.4. Learning evaluation strategy: Establishing a developmental evaluation system**

#### **3.4.1. Focus on process-oriented evaluation**

An “ADHD Children’s Art Creation Process Observation Record Form” is formulated, including core dimensions such as concentration status, participation enthusiasm, efforts in problem-solving, peer cooperation, and creative engagement. Teachers conduct real-time records during the creation process and conduct a summary analysis after each class. Immediate feedback is provided during the creation process, focusing on children’s efforts and progress rather than just the results of the works, such as “you were more focused this time than last time and tried a new combination of materials, making great progress” and “you did not give up when encountering difficulties in material pasting but tried various methods, which is very creative”.

#### **3.4.2. Personalized evaluation benchmarks**

A personal growth file is established for each child, including their first creative work, representative works of various stages, process-oriented evaluation records, teacher comments, and self-reflection. Regular growth reviews are conducted to allow children to compare their own work and intuitively feel their progress. Personalized evaluation goals are formulated for different types of ADHD children: for impulsive children, the evaluation focuses on “whether they can complete creation step by step” and “whether they can revise works patiently”; for avoidance-oriented children, the evaluation focuses on “whether they dare to attempt creation” and “whether they can take the initiative to seek help”; for children with attention deficits, the evaluation focuses on “whether the concentration status has improved” and “whether the task completion rate has increased”. The evaluation results adopt the form of “grade + descriptive comments”, with comments specifically explaining children’s strengths and areas for improvement, avoiding simple score evaluation.

#### **3.4.3. Multi-dimensional expression evaluation**

Children are allowed to interpret their works through various ways, such as verbal description, action demonstration, supplementary painting, and peer assistance, respecting the expression habits of different children. A “work interpretation session” is held after each unit, inviting children to voluntarily display their works. Teachers provide interpretation outlines in advance to guide children to express themselves in an organized manner. Peer mutual evaluation is encouraged, and teachers formulate “peer evaluation guidelines” to guide children to evaluate from positive perspectives such as “creativity of works”, “degree of effort”, and “performance in cooperation”, avoiding negative evaluations. Parents are invited to participate in the evaluation, allowing them to understand their children’s art learning situation through home-school contact books and online communication groups, and provide feedback on their children’s art activity performance at home, forming a trinity evaluation synergy of “teachers-peers-parents”.

#### **3.4.4. Portfolio evaluation**

An integrated electronic and paper growth file bag is established for each child: the paper file bag collects physical works, evaluation records, creative sketches, etc.; the electronic file bag uses platforms such as Meipian and class official WeChat accounts to collect work photos, creative process videos, teacher and parent

comments, facilitating long-term preservation and sharing. Regular “personal work review exhibitions” are held, allowing children to display their growth file bags in the class and introduce their progress and gains to peers. An annual campus art exhibition is held, with a special “ADHD children’s work area” to display their excellent works, enhancing their sense of belonging and self-confidence. The file bag accumulates with grade promotion, becoming an important record of children’s art learning and psychological development, and also providing a reference for teachers to adjust teaching strategies.

#### **4. Implementation Effects of the Teaching Strategy**

To test the effectiveness of the teaching strategy, the author selected ADHD children from grades 3-4 of two primary schools as research objects, divided them into an experimental group and a control group, and conducted a period of teaching practice. The experimental group adopted the teaching strategy constructed in this study for art teaching, while the control group adopted regular art teaching (focusing on teacher lectures and skill training, without targeted support strategies).

The study used the Conners Teacher Rating Scale (3rd Edition) (Conners 3-T), the self-designed “Art Learning Self-efficacy Questionnaire”, and the “Classroom Participation Evaluation Scale” for pre-test and post-test, combined with qualitative methods such as work analysis and teacher interviews to collect data. The results show: Improvement of core symptoms: Children in the experimental group showed significant improvement in core symptom dimensions such as attention deficit, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, and comorbid behaviors such as oppositional defiance were also alleviated to a certain extent, forming a significant difference from the control group. This indicates that the teaching strategy adopted by the experimental group can effectively improve the core symptoms and related behavioral problems of ADHD children. Art learning self-efficacy: Children in the experimental group showed a significant increase in the recognition of their own art learning abilities and enhanced learning confidence, with significantly higher scores in the “Art Learning Self-efficacy Questionnaire” than the control group, and displayed more active creative willingness in daily teaching. Classroom participation: The classroom participation of children in the experimental group was significantly improved, with better performance in active participation, task persistence, and peer interaction than the control group. More children could take the initiative to participate in classroom discussions, share creative ideas, and conduct preliminary collaborative cooperation in group activities.

Qualitative analysis shows that the art works of children in the experimental group have obvious progress in completion, creativity, and emotional expression: the completion rate of works has been significantly improved, and more children can complete creative tasks independently; some works show unique creative expressions, such as novel material combinations and personalized theme presentations; the expression of negative emotions in works has decreased, and the proportion of positive emotional expression has increased significantly. Classroom observations found that the frequency of negative emotional expression of children in the experimental group decreased, and they could cope with difficulties in the creation process more calmly, forming a sharp contrast with before the intervention.

### **5. Conclusions and prospects**

#### **5.1. Research conclusions**

Based on the background of inclusive education and primary school art teaching practice, this study constructs

a comprehensive teaching strategy system covering four dimensions: curriculum content, teaching process, classroom management, and learning evaluation, through systematic exploration of the learning characteristics and multi-dimensional needs of ADHD children. Supported by multi-disciplinary theories, the system fully considers the psychological and behavioral characteristics of ADHD children, and has strong scientificity, pertinence, and operability.

Teaching practice shows that the strategy system can effectively improve the core symptoms of ADHD children, such as attention deficit, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, enhance their classroom participation, emotional regulation ability, and art learning self-efficacy, and promote the development of their social skills and problem-solving abilities. The study clarifies that teacher professional development, home-school collaborative cooperation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and school resource support are important guarantees for the effective implementation of the strategy, and the constructed comprehensive support mechanism lays a foundation for the promotion and application of the strategy.

As a non-verbal communication and expression carrier, art education has unique advantages in meeting the special educational needs of ADHD children. Through scientific teaching strategy design, the dual values of art education in psychological regulation and ability development can be fully exerted, providing appropriate learning support for ADHD children and helping them grow healthily. Meanwhile, this study also provides a new practical path and theoretical support for the intersection and integration of inclusive education and art education, enriching the research results of educational intervention for ADHD children.

## 5.2. Research prospects

Future research can further expand the scope of application of the strategy, explore the differences in art teaching strategies for ADHD children of different age groups and types, and improve the precise adaptability of the strategy; combine intelligent technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality to develop digital art teaching tools and personalized learning platforms, such as immersive creation environments and interactive attention training art games, to enhance the interestingness and feedback timeliness of the strategy; carry out long-term follow-up studies to explore the impact of teaching strategies on the long-term development of ADHD children in terms of academic development, psychological growth, and social adaptation, providing more sufficient practical basis for the continuous optimization of the strategy.

It is expected that through continuous research and practice, the art teaching strategy system for ADHD children in primary schools will be continuously improved, enabling more ADHD children to grow and develop in art education, promoting the in-depth implementation of inclusive education concepts in the field of primary school art, fully demonstrating the educational value of art education, and providing more useful references for the inclusive education practice of children with special needs.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

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