

Practical Implementation of Art Curriculum Development for Preschool Teacher Education Students' Ability to Interpret Psychology through Paintings

Guan Liu*

Hubei Business College, Wuhan 430079, Hubei, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

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Abstract: Painting can fully reflect young children's inner world, serving as an important tool for preschool teachers to understand and discover children's inner thoughts and carry out personalized psychological counseling. The literacy of interpreting psychology through paintings is a professional competency that preschool education students should possess in the new era. Different from traditional art painting skill teaching, it places greater emphasis on comprehensive abilities including artistic observation, psychological interpretation and educational empowerment. However, art courses for preschool education majors in universities generally focus on skills while neglecting practical application at present, which leads to insufficient professional competence among student teachers. Based on the job requirements of preschool education, this paper analyzes the connotation of preschool student teachers' ability to interpret psychology through paintings, and explores approaches to cultivate such competency via art courses for reference.

Keywords: Universities; Preschool education students; Painting psychology; Art courses

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1. Introduction

University preschool education majors shoulder the responsibility of cultivating kindergarten teachers. Traditional art courses mainly focus on painting skill training such as sketching, color painting and handcrafting, ignoring the psychological educational value of art and the cultivation of students' ability to interpret children's paintings. As a result, many student teachers only master painting creation skills yet lack the capacity to interpret children's works and figure out their psychological development characteristics, failing to meet the demands of mental health education and personalized education in kindergartens in the new era. Therefore, teachers should combine university art courses to break the barrier between art aesthetic education and children's mental health education, observe children's psychological conditions from their

paintings and conduct targeted education.

2. Connotation of preschool student teachers' ability to interpret psychology through paintings

2.1. Aesthetic perception literacy: Accurately capture visual information in paintings

Aesthetic perception is the prerequisite and foundation for interpreting psychology through paintings. It requires student teachers to abandon the traditional evaluation mindset that judges paintings by aesthetic quality. Instead of guiding children to pursue exquisite visual details and standardized creation processes, teachers should encourage children to discover and appreciate beauty in their drawings. This literacy demands student teachers to systematically observe basic visual elements in children's works, including the thickness, curvature, and density of lines; cold-warm tones, brightness, and saturation of colors; layout density, blank space, and symmetry of compositions; as well as modeling features and combination relations of figures and scenes. Meanwhile, they shall distinguish age and psychological characteristics of paintings according to children's age groups, and avoid evaluating children's works with adult aesthetic standards, so as to provide authentic and comprehensive visual evidence for subsequent psychological interpretation ^[1].

2.2. Psychological interpretation literacy: Scientifically decode children's psychological states

Psychological interpretation is the core competency. Relying on child developmental psychology and projective drawing theory, it realizes scientific transformation from visual information to children's mental states. According to projective drawing principles, children unconsciously project their emotions, sense of security, social conditions, inner needs and psychological conflicts into paintings ^[2]. Student teachers equipped with this literacy can interpret psychological implications behind children's works with Lowenfeld's stages of artistic development and Piaget's cognitive development theories. For instance, messy and sharp lines usually correspond to anxiety and inner unease; single and dull colors often suggest low spirits and introversion; empty frames with single figures stand for loneliness and lack of companions; incomplete human figures and unbalanced proportions generally indicate insufficient sense of security.

2.3. Educational application literacy: Implement personalized educational practice

Educational application is the ultimate goal of competency cultivation and the embodiment of the educational value of art education. The purpose of interpretation is to serve children's growth rather than merely analyze their psychology. This literacy requires student teachers to formulate targeted educational guidance plans according to the results of painting psychological interpretation. They shall design corresponding art counseling activities, emotional accompanying modes and educational intervention strategies for children with negative emotions, fragile psychology, social withdrawal, rebellion and anxiety. Painting creation can be utilized to help children release negative emotions, build self-confidence and improve social skills, so as to achieve the educational goals of recognizing children via paintings, educating children through paintings and healing children's psychology with paintings ^[3-5].

3. Practical dilemmas of cultivating the ability to interpret psychology through paintings in university preschool art courses

At present, most university art courses for preschool education majors still adopt traditional teaching modes. Their curriculum positioning, content systems, teaching methods and evaluation mechanisms center on skill training, which is disconnected from the cultivation demand of interpreting psychology through paintings and fails to meet the career development requirements of kindergarten teachers in the new era. Four major dilemmas are shown as follows.

3.1. Deviated curriculum position and single educational objectives

For a long time, university preschool art courses have taken “mastering painting and handcraft skills to carry out kindergarten art teaching activities” as the primary goal. Overemphasis on skill training neglects the psychological educational function of art and the cultivation of interpretation ability. Classroom teaching mainly consists of practical training of sketching, gouache, stick figure and handcraft production, lacking theoretical and practical contents such as children’s painting psychology, projective drawing analysis and children’s psychological counseling^[6]. Most universities do not regard interpreting psychology through paintings as an educational objective of art courses, leading student teachers to hold a one-sided view that “art equals painting”. They lack professional awareness to take initiative in interpreting children’s works and paying attention to children’s psychology, resulting in obvious deficiencies in their core professional competencies.

3.2. Fragmented and unsystematic curriculum content

Current preschool art courses separate skill learning from theories, and isolate art from psychology, forming fragmented and disorganized content. On the one hand, art skill courses are independent from preschool psychology and preschool pedagogy, with insufficient interdisciplinary integration. Student teachers can hardly combine psychological theories with art observation practice. On the other hand, the curriculum lacks targeted modules of painting psychological interpretation. Only a small number of courses briefly mention characteristics of children’s paintings, without systematic elaboration on psychological features of paintings in different age groups, psychological connotations of various painting elements, as well as identification and intervention methods of psychological problems. Student teachers cannot form complete knowledge systems, and most interpretation work depends on subjective experience instead of scientific professionalism^[7].

3.3. Rigid teaching modes and insufficient practical implementation

Most current art classes adopt the traditional teaching mode of teacher demonstration + student copying + repeated drills, focusing on skill imitation without interactive inquiry, case analysis and practical training. Classroom teaching only explains “how to paint” rather than “how to read paintings and educate children”. There is a shortage of targeted training such as analysis of children’s painting cases, situational simulation and kindergarten practice. The collaborative education mechanism between universities and kindergartens is imperfect. Student teachers lack real environments to observe, interpret, and intervene in children’s paintings. They can only acquire knowledge via classroom theoretical learning and fail to apply what they have learned, resulting in the phenomenon of “understanding theories yet unable to apply, capable of painting yet incapable of interpretation”.

4. Practical paths to cultivate the ability to interpret psychology through paintings in university preschool art courses

4.1. Reconstruct curriculum content and build a knowledge system for competency cultivation

Break the traditional single-skill curriculum system and reconstruct modular curriculum content including theories, skills, interpretation and application from the perspective of interdisciplinary integration to solve problems in cultivating the ability to interpret psychology through paintings.

First, add core theoretical modules to consolidate professional foundations. Based on original art courses, integrate content on children's painting psychology, projective drawing analysis theory, and children's emotional development characteristics. Systematically elaborate age characteristics of paintings of children aged 3 to 6, distinguish normal performances and abnormal psychological signals in works of junior, middle and senior kindergarten classes, and sort out psychological connotations corresponding to lines, colors, compositions and modeling. This enables student teachers to grasp the scientific theoretical basis for interpretation and avoid subjective, arbitrary judgment^[8-10].

Second, optimize the orientation of skill teaching and update educational concepts. Change traditional skill teaching objectives, weaken standardized and aesthetic evaluation standards for paintings, and highlight students' observation capabilities and diversified aesthetic thinking. In stick figure and creative art courses, guide students to focus on personalized expressions in children's original works, comprehend the childlikeness and subjectivity of children's paintings, and learn to accept children's artistic expressions and psychological projections, forming child-centered observation and interpretation thinking.

Third, set practical application modules matching post demands. Add operable contents including case analysis of children's painting psychology, identification of children's psychological problems and design of art counseling activities. Combined with common kindergarten scenarios, analyze painting features of children suffering from loneliness, anxiety, rebellion and timidity, and put forward corresponding educational intervention methods, so that students can master the whole process from observation, interpretation, judgment to intervention^[11].

4.2. Innovate teaching modes and build immersive classroom educational scenarios

Break the traditional copying-based teaching mode and create diversified classroom teaching integrating case teaching, situational simulation and group seminars to strengthen students' interpretative thinking and practical abilities.

First, carry out teaching via detailed analysis of typical cases. Collect a large number of original children's paintings from kindergartens, classify them into cases of positive emotions, low spirits, social disorders and insufficient sense of security, and conduct detailed analysis in class. Teachers guide students to analyze works from perspectives of lines, colors, compositions and themes, judge psychological states combining children's age characteristics, and summarize regular patterns of interpretation. Students accumulate practical experience through case study. Meanwhile, analyze problems and hazards of subjective stereotyped interpretation with misjudgment cases to cultivate students' scientific and rigorous interpretative thinking.

Second, conduct practical training through situational simulation. Set real kindergarten working scenarios such as children drawing dull pictures, lonely compositions, sharp lines and frequent erasures, as well as children refusing to draw and resisting emotions. Students are divided into groups to play roles of teachers, children and parents, completing full-process simulated training including work observation, psychological

interpretation, verbal communication, educational guidance and home-school communication to improve their on-the-spot response and educational application capabilities ^[12].

Third, adopt a flipped classroom mode. Assign learning tasks such as theories of children's painting psychology and case materials before class for students to preview and organize independently. Classroom activities mainly consist of group seminars, achievement presentations and Q&A, focusing on in-depth research of difficult points in interpretation and pain points in education, giving full play to students' principal role and cultivating their independent inquiry and judgment abilities.

4.3. Build diversified practical systems to realize competency empowerment

The core of interpreting psychology through paintings lies in practical application. Barriers between classrooms and posts should be broken to build a three-dimensional practical system covering classroom training, campus practice and internship in kindergartens for students to exercise abilities in real scenarios.

Strengthen basic capabilities via classroom training. Special training tasks are set for each lesson based on knowledge points. Students independently finish interpretation reports of children's paintings, recording work features, psychological analysis and educational suggestions to form standardized interpretation procedures and consolidate foundational capabilities. Regular class interpretation competitions are held to stimulate learning via competitions ^[13].

Enrich practical opportunities through campus practice. Organize student teachers to observe children's whole painting processes during campus children's open days and parent-child art activities, record children's states and work features, and complete preliminary psychological analysis and guidance on site. Meanwhile, encourage student teachers to conduct independent investigations, collect children's paintings and build personal case banks to accumulate experience in interpretation.

Connect with post-practice through kindergarten internships. Strengthen collaborative education between universities and local kindergartens, build practical bases jointly and take painting psychological interpretation as a core internship task. Student teachers are required to observe and record children's paintings every day and write regular psychological analysis reports during internships ^[14].

4.4. Improve evaluation mechanisms and build an all-round competency evaluation system

Abandon single evaluation focusing on skill achievements and form a closed-loop evaluation system integrating process assessment, comprehensive assessment and multi-subject assessment, attaching importance to comprehensive evaluation of students' ability to interpret psychology through paintings and fully assess their knowledge, thinking and capabilities.

In terms of evaluation content, shift the focus from skills to comprehensive literacy. Evaluation is divided into three parts: theoretical foundation, practical ability and professional literacy. The first part assesses students' command of children's painting psychology and interpretation rules; the second evaluates their professional capabilities in work observation, psychological interpretation, problem judgment and scheme design; the third examines their care for children, rigorous thinking and innovative educational capacity.

In terms of evaluation methods, reinforce process assessment. Reduce the weight of final work examinations and add process evaluation items including classroom case analysis, training reports, situational simulation and internship practice. The whole development of students' literacy is recorded to avoid one-sided evaluation based on a single exam ^[15].

In terms of evaluation subjects, implement multi-agent evaluation. Establish a diversified evaluation system consisting of teacher evaluation, group mutual evaluation, and kindergarten tutor evaluation, integrating professional theoretical judgment from university teachers, peer feedback, and on-the-job assessment from frontline kindergarten teachers to evaluate students' comprehensive qualities from multiple dimensions and guarantee the scientificity and practicability of evaluation results.

5. Conclusion

The ability to interpret psychology through paintings is a core professional competency that preschool education students must possess in the new era. It serves as a bridge linking art aesthetic education and children's mental health education, and directly determines the quality of personalized education and mental health education in kindergartens. Preschool art courses in universities should actively adapt to the development demands of preschool education industries, break the shackles of traditional skill teaching, and focus on cultivating student teachers' professional competencies. By reconstructing interdisciplinary curriculum content, innovating immersive practical teaching forms, building post-connected practical systems and forming competency-oriented evaluation mechanisms, universities can comprehensively cultivate students' comprehensive capabilities including painting observation, psychological interpretation, educational intervention and innovative education.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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