



A brief analysis of the trade-offs of creative behavior in children's art education

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Abstract

Children's art education serves as a targeted and meaningful initiative that cultivates aesthetic perception, modeling skills, and creativity. This paper examines the importance of creative behavior selection in children's art education through three dimensions: shape selection, compositional direction, and color expression, supported by case studies from teaching practice. The analysis aims to accumulate practical experience for future educational practices.

Keywords: Children's art education, creativity, selection

Introduction

Modern society increasingly emphasizes personality development in children, prompting art educators to question painting techniques that prioritize technical accuracy. Creativity, as a vital component of character cultivation, represents humanity's unique capacity for discovering new concepts, generating innovative ideas, and creating novel products. It emerges from the cognitive understanding of objective reality, forming an abstract thinking and behavioral potential (Dou & Gao, 2020) ^[1]. Children's creative painting serves as an effective method to stimulate such potential. Some educators now use art materials that encourage spontaneous brushwork or spark creative impulses, replacing traditional pencils. Others even allow children to retain unstructured colors on their canvases.

Of course, children's spontaneous expression is the ideal creative state. However, when this expression is not supported by logical thinking and visual organization ability, it often appears to be without rules. Therefore, the author selects some typical cases to discuss the selection of creative behavior in art education.

Shape Selection

Preschoolers express their perception of the objective world through painting with remarkable freedom and spontaneity. They vividly present their thoughts and imagination on canvas, where innocence and whimsy come alive (Yang & Qin, 2013) ^[2]. However, due to developmental limitations, educators often select highly creative shapes that emphasize visual impact for children's choice. This practice has sparked debate about its necessity. Research shows that toddlers aged 0-3 lack both realistic representation and spatial depth in their scribbles. The fundamental issue lies in their underdeveloped skills: immature hand control and limited visual focus lead to erratic brushstrokes. Most preschoolers can only achieve precise lines when older, allowing them to depict objects accurately. Notably, while accuracy in visual representation matters, children's logical reasoning develops more effectively during early developmental stages. They are more expressive. For example, they use two circles to represent the ear, one for the outer contour and one for the hole. This is enough to

show that children can fully express the picture in their minds.

Teachers should not ask children to seek geometric perfection in the process of painting, because on the one hand, children's control ability of arm movement and eye movement makes it difficult for them to draw quite accurate shapes; on the other hand, some children often consider it unnecessary to draw highly precise patterns. Unlike geometric shapes, they focus more on the universal and abstract qualities of objects rather than idealized, specific forms. For instance, circles are a favorite subject for children's drawings. Most often, they use spherical shapes like spheres or circles to represent objects because these are central symmetry figures that are easier to manipulate (Rudolf Arnheim, 2008) ^[3]. Even circular representations convey children's intended meanings. This demonstrates that when children are still freely doodling with basic geometric shapes, art teachers should affirm and respect their early visual concepts. Teachers can also provide simple circular objects for children to choose from, such as round apples or full moons. While respecting children's creativity, educators should actively promote aesthetic guidance.

In today's society, there is a strong emphasis on individuality and self-expression. With information becoming ubiquitous yet mixed in quality, children are exposed to a wide range of content. During this transitional phase, their pursuit of beauty intensifies, making the establishment of proper aesthetic values particularly crucial. Cai Yuanpei, a modern Chinese aesthete and educator, defined aesthetic education as: "Aesthetic education applies aesthetic theories to teaching to cultivate emotions." (Yang & Shu, 2013) ^[2] Therefore, when selecting artworks, teachers should consistently choose classic creations from humanity's artistic treasury, allowing children to engage with masterpieces from an early age. Through subtle influence, they can gradually develop into discerning art appreciators. Art educators must wholeheartedly serve as guardians of beauty, guiding children to explore the refined realm of aesthetics together.

Compositional Direction

In traditional art classes, teachers often meticulously explain elements like subject placement, whether to use horizontal or vertical compositions, and proportion standards, even

demonstrating complete process models. As a result, children's final works tend to look remarkably similar. However, when asked to create independently, some students struggle with starting their work, constantly asking the teacher about object positioning and composition choices. This approach not only hinders the development of creative autonomy but also contradicts the natural developmental patterns of children's physical and mental growth.

In real life, children often don't particularly care whether they're holding picture books in a right-side-up or upside-down position when flipping through them. It's been suggested that children generally don't mind the spatial orientation of objects. Recent studies have shown that children tend to recognize images hanging vertically on walls more easily than those hung upside down. While there's still no definitive data on how much visual recognition is affected by spatial orientation changes, and not all images need to be arranged in traditional right-side-up positions, children's unique way of perceiving composition often brings freshness and fun. This stems from young children's natural curiosity about observing mountains, trees, buildings, and other elements in their surroundings.

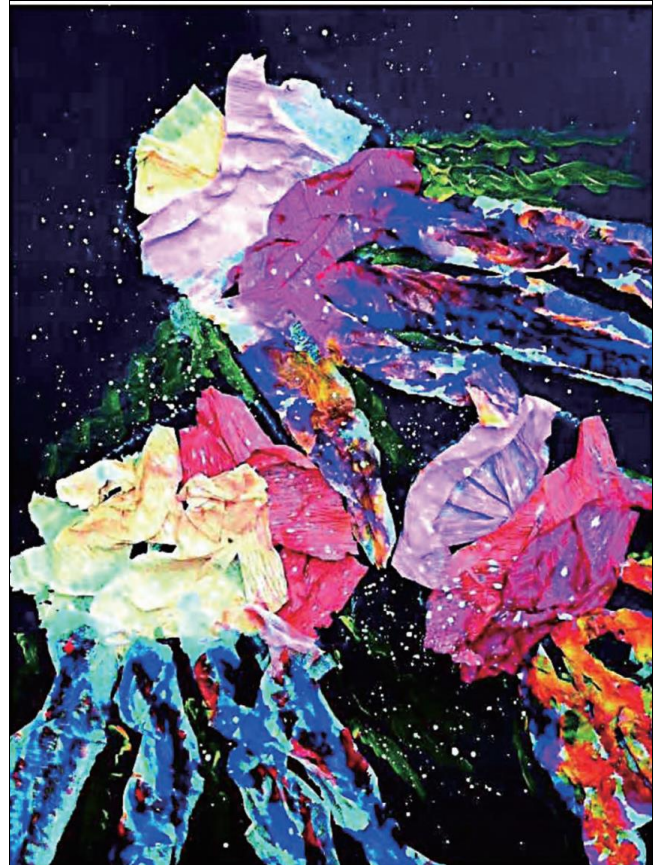
When observing inverted figures or animals, people often feel surprised as they are accustomed to ground references in visual arts. However, such constraints vanish on blank canvases where spatial orientation becomes entirely the artist's control. For instance, when depicting animal forms, spatial dimensions remain undefined initially. Only through gradually establishing vertical positioning in the artist's mind, integrating simple animal imagery into the composition, and delineating different areas of the artwork does the overall structure become more apparent. This compositional approach enriches the visual world both physically and symbolically.

Color Expression

Through teaching practice, I've observed a 4-year-old girl's particular fondness for purple. Whether in craft classes, art sessions, or collaborative creation workshops, her artwork consistently features predominantly purple tones, often layered through varying shades to create monochromatic compositions. This situation prompts educators to consider whether to discourage such color usage or encourage continued artistic experimentation. Allowing the child to apply purple across her artwork persistently would, in some sense, contradict fundamental principles of artistic development.

Based on the theory of visual perception, although children get a sense of pleasure in the process of creation by using thick brushstrokes and ink-drenched works on the shelf, to some extent, the presentation effect of the works may not meet the psychological expectations of children, which will make children's psychology suffer.

This approach may dampen children's creative enthusiasm and lead them to produce monochromatic drawings. Interestingly, artworks created by children under different psychological states can, in turn, influence their mental states. A positive mindset helps children express the world they perceive. As shown in Figure 1, a 4-year-old child enthusiastically created an engaging artwork through visual guidance and verbal prompts, moving beyond mere purple color stacking, demonstrating progress in artistic expression.



In another traffic light teaching case, a 5-year-old boy, favoring blue, replaced the green signal with blue. Teachers should consider: allowing such doodling might distort cultural perception, while intervening could rigidify thinking patterns. According to Arnheim's theory, visual forms naturally evolve through developmental stages without interference. Each stage has its evaluation criteria, distinctive expressive strengths, and corresponding aesthetic standards.

Since these developmental stages are interdependent and lay the foundation for children's cognitive maturity, each phase requires patient guidance. This implies that teachers should avoid excessive intervention when participating in children's creative processes. While people of different ages, backgrounds, or cultural contexts share common perceptions of color, "any coherent system is inherently incomplete, and the creative value of works stems from logical transformation." The leaps and flexibility in children's logical thinking are invaluable, and over-intervention may hinder their holistic development. Teachers should impart painting skills while respecting developmental principles (Xu, 2011) [5]. Such challenges frequently arise in teaching practice, necessitating a balance between creativity and visual outcomes. First, education aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals with comprehensive abilities. Creativity serves as a medium for children to express their world through art, ultimately liberating learners' spiritual essence through artistic exploration of colors and shapes, freeing them from constraints of the objective material world. Second, children's visual conceptual development progresses in stages, exhibiting both universality and particularity. By understanding these two key principles, educators can effectively gauge the appropriate intervention levels for children's creative behaviors, choosing suitable methods to meet their developmental needs at different

stages. However, when teachers rely solely on rigid, formulaic teaching approaches, mild interventions may lead children astray and prevent them from discovering new visual insights, while severe ones could cause disorientation and hinder the development of their visual judgment skills.

Conclusion

Through a comprehensive case analysis of painting composition, color application, and structural design, the author reveals that creative selection in art is not rigid or inflexible. The fundamental purpose of painting lies in expressing the creators' emotions, while educators should provide children with diverse methods to articulate their psychological states. When teachers rigidly follow conventional teaching procedures, students often become limited to copying work using pencil sketches. Similarly, prohibiting children from visualizing observed objects through artwork or forcing them to maintain visual focus during learning to create uniform compositions can be detrimental. Emotional expression without formal form is neither the ultimate goal nor a valid pedagogical tool in art education. Both classroom resources and educators' perspectives must remain sufficiently comprehensive to adapt to evolving needs. Only through such holistic approaches can children consistently develop well-rounded personalities.

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