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Preliminary Research on Taiwanese Art Curriculum Design Based on Visual  
Culture

By

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
<b>Chapter I Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter II Literature Review</b>	
Postmodern Ideas of Education.....	3
Definition of Visual Culture.....	5
Art Education and Visual Culture.....	7
The Development of Art Education in Taiwan.....	8
Visual Culture and Art Education in Taiwan.....	10
<b>Chapter III Situation.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Chapter IV Method.....</b>	<b>15</b>
World Trends in VCAE.....	15
Analysis of the Application of VCAE in Taiwan.....	16
Visual Culture as a Channel for Cultural Studies.....	16
Analysis of Educational Contents.....	18
Analysis of Educational Methods.....	19
Educational Policy Based on Taiwanese Visual Culture.....	19
Whose Culture Should We Teach?.....	19
Learning from Our Own Culture.....	21
Important Elements in Curriculum Design for Visual Art Education in Taiwan.....	22
Procedures and Framework of Curriculum Designs in Taiwan.....	24
Examination of the Theories, Roles and Functions of VCAE.....	24
Establishing the Goals of the Curriculum in VCAE.....	24
Constructing Content in VCAE.....	25
Brief Summary.....	26
<b>Chapter V Conclusion and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>28</b>
Bibliography.....	30

# **Abstract**

## **PRELIMINARY RESEARCH ON TAIWANESE ART CURRICULUM DESIGN BASED ON VISUAL CULTURE**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006

Major Director: Dr. Pamela G. Taylor, Chair & Associate Professor, Department of Art Education

In recent years, art education has started an on-going discussion on the issue of visual culture. In the past few years this issue also becomes topical due to the necessity, to improve art education in Taiwan. Currently, art education based on visual culture has become a very important concern in Taiwan. However, the concept of visual culture has its origin in foreign theories. In order for our art professional to remain independent, it is essential that Taiwanese art teachers begin to address the issue of how to properly incorporate the concept of visual culture into the design of our art curriculum, by applying an educational method entirely based on the unique experiences of Taiwan. Responding to this need, I have tried in my current research to investigate the curriculum design model that is based on visual culture theories, and to combine it with a concept of cultural education that is uniquely Taiwanese. My hope is to provide a curriculum model that is based on native Taiwanese visual culture, which might ease the educators' efforts of turning theory into practice.

Therefore, in the present study I will: (1) investigate the importance of applying visual culture to art education; (2) explore the suitability of applying the theory of visual culture to the design of art curriculum in Taiwan; (3) derive from this research a set of curriculum design principles based on the ideas of visual culture art education, which can be applied and linked to the cultural characteristics of Taiwan.

# Chapter I

## Introduction

One of the hottest topics in contemporary art education involves the understanding and criticism of the visual images in everyday life, i.e. the visual culture. There is an increasing amount of literature related to this topic. Mirzoeff (1999) described visual culture as a developing concept, a result of the 21st century technological development, particularly the digital revolution, which has opened for humankind an unlimited array of possibilities. The influences of visual culture in our daily life have become so evident that it is now hard to imagine our lives outside the realm of visual representations. More and more educators have realized the increasing impact of visual images on the construction and deconstruction of social life and cultural phenomena. They re-examined the functions of visual images in today's social environment, and discovered that the impact of visual culture may have surpassed that of the written culture. Thus, visual culture has become an important research subject among many related disciplines.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a big part of our understanding and knowledge of the world comes from the images propagated by the popular culture. Colorful media communications have occupied human's visual space without our noticing them. Undoubtedly, they have enriched our visual experiences, but they have also affected our thoughts, feelings and mentality, and intertwined with our lifestyles. As scholars in art education became more aware of the effects of this digital world, they began to encourage the adoption of the curriculum of Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE). They considered that in this world filled with images from the media, VCAE presents a new idea that will enhance the awareness and practice among art teachers.

VCAE curriculum belongs to a foreign theoretical research domain. Taiwanese scholar Kuo (2003) advocated that all teachers should pay attention to the conceptual

compatibility between Taiwanese culture and other cultures. In the spirit of the new objectives of the cultural education, we should extend the Taiwan VCAE curriculum to include artistic achievements from other cultures, and then to encompass the whole world.

Currently, practice and research of VCAE are mostly conducted based on foreign theories. The corresponding development of such areas in Taiwan has just begun. Wang (2003) believed that, despite the popularity of VCAE abroad, its theories and practices might not be suitable for Taiwan and other countries. In his opinion, culture consists of a set of unique experiences that belong to each region. Although we can adopt the theories and designs of curricula based on current international movements in education, for a firm and well-grounded implementation of such ideas it is essential that the contents and the educational goals of our curricula be compatible with our own customs and cultures. Thus, while we investigate the usefulness of VCAE curriculum in Taiwan, we must take into consideration the local cultural characteristics, students' experiences and interests, as well as their relevant knowledge of the arts. All these factors will not only help students to feel connected to their cultural experiences, but also to understand the changes happening in Taiwan during the globalization process. Also, it will further their understandings of Taiwan, and help them build their self-identities.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter will begin with a discussion of visual culture in contemporary art education. I will analyze the theoretical basis of curriculum design, and will investigate its origin, definition, the domain covered, and its application in art education. I will also address the development of art education in Taiwan and the future direction of art education and visual culture. This study will serve as the theoretical basis for developing VCAE that is properly connected to the traditions in Taiwan.

#### **Postmodern Ideas of Education**

Throughout the years, the ideas related to art education have evolved significantly. The earlier art education in Taiwan was influenced by child-centered theory, which was focused on self-expression, and valued creativity. Later, it changed to the disciplined-based art education (DBAE) model, and more recently it has assimilated the new postmodern ideas (Ministry of Education, 2002). Since the 1990s, worldwide art education has been affected by postmodernist thinking. Scholars in Taiwan also witnessed such influences, and began to consider modifying art education according to the changes that occurred in social environments.

Visual culture is not a subject, but an area of study, which possesses interdisciplinary characteristics (Mirzoeff, 1999). It is closely connected to the development of contemporary art (Clark, 1996). Particularly, modernism and postmodernism have triggered many changes in art education, and have become the essential starting points when discussing visual culture (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996). In the 1970s, Barkan and Eisner, in the spirit of modernism, proposed the DBAE approach, which included creative art, aesthetics, art history,

and art criticism as its four fundamental disciplines. This proposal also came with a complete curriculum structure, which enabled its effective implementation at all school levels (Smith, 2000). Thus, DBAE became the focus of art education, and was then well recognized and integrated in the art education system in Taiwan.

Postmodern art education condemns the art's sense of superiority and tries to break art class. It is against considering the art development as a straight historical evolution. It also regards art as a cultural product that changes in time and emphasizes the necessity to study its origins and to increase one's ability of appreciating it. Only then can we get a deeper and more accurate understanding of art. In addition, postmodern art is suspicious about avant-garde artists and regards them as having ethical responsibilities; therefore, its style uses a Social Realism perspective to better represent this moral concern. Postmodern art education considers art as an eclectic form and values an unharmonious sense of beauty. This combination can result into the clash of multiple and sometimes conflicting standards. Finally, postmodern art stresses the necessity of the artistic objects to convey various meanings and have multiple functions (Efland et al., 1996). As a result, art education faces a new situation nowadays. Postmodern art education changes traditional style of art education and provides more possibilities of approaching the artistic phenomenon. Many scholars (Duncum, 2001; Efland et al., 1996; Freedman, 2000; Wilson, 1997) believed that DBAE was no longer adequate in introducing the contemporary art scenes, and in fulfilling the visual needs of the new generation of students. It is therefore essential to implement postmodernist thinking into art education. For the improvement of DBAE, they suggested the replacement of the old curriculum with a new one, focused on visual culture. Visual culture covers all the images and sounds, and includes pure arts (or fine arts), crafts and design, performances and culture ceremonies, public and electronic media, etc. (Barnard, 1998; Freedman, 2000 & 2002).

These are images that we see everywhere in today's environment. It is inconceivable that art education today should continue to only focus on art works from the museums. Instead, we should adopt materials from everyday life, pay attention to our students' interests, and apply new educational approaches, such as discussion and interaction, in order to decipher the deeper cultural meaning behind images.

### **Definition of Visual culture**

Visual observations often occur before the use of language. As children, we begin to see and distinguish before speaking (Berger, 1972). The ways we see things are influenced by our understandings and beliefs; in turn, the images that people touch upon would shape their beliefs and values. Thus, "observing" becomes the very basic means we use to reach for the world.

Visual culture, as it implies, relies on our visual ability to observe whatever objects the humans create, as well as other relevant products and cultural phenomena. Visual image is the most powerful expressive tool of postmodernism; therefore, the superiority of visual images can't be overlooked (Mirzoff, 1999). The way of looking at an art object has always been closely related to ideology. Image decoding carried out by different individuals would certainly produce different meanings (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). In a sense, the study of visual culture involves the investigation of how our visual perception influences and determines the structure of contemporary art, its social values, and beliefs.

Barnard (1998) considered that visual culture includes everything that is to be seen. It also contains certain cultural codes. More specifically, when Barnard (1998) redefined what visual culture is, he did not merely consider those objects that are visible, but those that are infused with cultural meanings, functions, and aesthetic value as well. In short, what Barnard (1988) ascribes to visual culture are the visual experiences that any individual perceives,

interprets, or creates, in addition to functionality, communicability, and aesthetic value. Mirzoeff (1999) considered that any discussion regarding visual culture should be focused on how the meaning is created through visual images. Mirzoeff (2001) commented on the relationship between visual culture and postmodernism, concluding that “postmodernism is the visual culture” (p.4). He considered that our experiences are becoming more and more visual as compared to the past; visual cultures depict everyday life experiences, through which the consumers can find information, as well as aesthetic satisfaction by means of different media, including pictures, TV programs and the Internet. In sum, in this intensively visual era, our everyday life presupposes an almost complete immersion into visual culture, and any research of visual culture would literally include every single aspect of our daily life. Duncum (2000) thought that since visual culture consists of “visual” and “culture,” there could be two meanings involved in this concept. “Visual” represents the observation of visual artifacts, and these visual artifacts often involve certain codes and sensory modes. It is important to know how we can interpret the meanings of these visual images. In addition, Duncum (2000) pointed out that “culture” is an overall view of the visual artifacts, including the process of their production, communication, and usage. Thus, visual culture takes into account the social function of visual images, as well as how it might become an extension of various human attitudes, beliefs, and values (Duncum, 2001). This is also an important point to remember when art educators select their research materials related to the visual cultures.

To summarize, visual culture is a visual description of a culture, and includes all artifacts and the visual environment we are immersed in. Visual culture contains those images existing in everyday life that possess cultural meanings, social functionality, and communicability, and it expresses at the same time human attitudes, beliefs and values.

## **Art Education and Visual culture**

As the research on visual culture became an important area of art education, Wilson (2000) tried to explain the relationship between art education and visual culture by means of a very suggestive image. He depicted art education as a tree that can be clearly seen, and visual culture as its underground roots, from which many issues sprouted up and continued to develop. Wilson (2003) also thought that since popular visual media and artistic features continue to diversify, it is important for art education to make similar adjustments. No doubt, the existence of visual culture has widened the scope of the research in art education. In the future, it will continue to have a strong impact on art education, and art educators will need to reconsider their teaching materials.

The scope of visual culture is extremely wide. As Mirzoeff (2001a) mentioned, in this era filled with intense visual images, everyday life is equaled with visual culture. In other words, our students can't avoid visual cultural environments. For instance, everyday life in Taiwan is permeated with all kinds of advertisements, children's picture books, comics, TV cartoon series, Internet, computer games, McDonalds' playground displays, etc. These everyday life images can be seen everywhere, even outside of the educational system and museums. They exist as a reality in every student's life. It goes without saying that from this everyday visual culture, students can derive satisfaction, identify themselves with the ideas promoted, and thus establish personal sets of values. Therefore, visual culture has become a powerful expression of the students' everyday life. For art educators, visual culture provides an opportunity to re-examine or expand on the images that the students produce and consume. We must begin to ask to what extent the educational curriculum is influenced by visual culture, and how to integrate the content of visual culture into the educational curriculum.

At the time when DBAE was mainstream, the scope of art education was focused primarily on the fine arts. Featherstone (1991) pointed out that the aestheticization of

everyday life involved the use and interpretation of the symbols and images that fill up contemporary society. This led Duncum (1999) to claim that aesthetic experiences from everyday life could better shape our self identities and the ways we observe the world than the fine arts. Now that visual culture is so closely related to our daily lives, art education focused on visual culture should try to adopt a much wider scope.

Duncum (2002) coined the term “Visual Culture Art Education, VCAE”. He described VCAE as a teaching model that questions tradition. In the past, a student had a hard time applying what he learned into his life. VCAE encourages students to explore the various meanings of their works and to experience unique ways of thinking in their creative process. It emphasizes the value of the students’ cultural experience versus the mainstream perspective on art, and considers art criticism as an important subject in visual culture curriculum. In addition, according to post-constructivist ideas, audiences from different countries, different cultural traditions or periods, would give different interpretations to the same images. Interpretations are multifarious, and in the process of interpretation, images would bear very different meanings. Ultimately, Duncum (2002) considered “aesthetics to be a social issue” (p10). Art education, on the one hand, is closely connected to one’s values, beliefs and attitudes, and, on the other hand, requires aesthetic judgments. Thus, visual culture curriculum should examine how ideologies can operate through the making of art, as well as how art can shape those ideologies.

### **The Development of Art Education in Taiwan**

As a result of this educational reform, art education in Taiwan has been completely reconsidered. Now, it includes 9 years of basic curriculum in art and humanities (visual arts, music, and performing arts), followed by 3 years of high school art education (courses in visual arts, music and performances), and a wide variety of college art courses. Taken as a

whole, art education in Taiwan is comparable with that of other countries in the world.

Besides the creative process and connoisseurship, Taiwanese art education emphasizes the multi-faceted quality in the arts, places focus on the students, stresses the need to combine the learning with students' daily experiences, extends local cultural characteristics to worldwide visions, implements among Taiwanese citizens new standards of art appreciation and life quality, and promotes social development.

Given the technological advances we experience nowadays, we are more and more inclined to reconsider the artistic experience as a means of enriching and making our lives more enjoyable. We are expected to create a better world, where our working environment would be much enhanced when imbued with the aura of art and humanities.

On November 2, 2004, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan announced its four main executive missions for 2005-2008 period, which include "cultivating contemporary citizens," "establishing the integrity of Taiwan," "expanding worldwide visions," and "strengthening social awareness," along with 13 strategies and 33 proposed actions. These new directions are compatible with international movements, and are the result of unifying theory with social practice. They support the ideas of "returning to the essence of education" and "completing the individual." Only when the potentials of each individual are fully developed can a country's mission be fulfilled, and its power be elevated. The core value of the 21<sup>st</sup> century lies in creativity and broad world visions. Education can therefore serve to stimulate students' creativity and to guide them toward a broad view of the world and a deep understanding of history. Thus, the Ministry of Education sets up as its goals to create an innovative Taiwan, to realize the ideological connection with the rest of the world, and to offer all citizens the opportunity to fully use their talents. In order to educate modern citizens, it promotes a policy that would allow the equal development of both humanities and technology, with emphasis placed equally on art education as well as on scientific education. By promoting art education,

the government aims at raising the students' ability to appreciate art (Ministry of Education, 2001).

However, in recent research reports on "Development of Taiwanese Aesthetic Sense and Improvement of Art Education," Taiwanese art educators pointed to the fact that, although the government has spent a fair amount of money both on the construction of numerous art related facilities and on the promotion of artistic activities, the participation from students and citizens was notably low. As a result, art education has not been effective and could not ultimately change the people's lives.

Currently, the government is trying to encourage art professionals. There are many policies that promote the talents of artists and designers. However, in most existing schools and curricula, the support and facilities for art education are still not well funded. If we can't make a long term plan for cultivating more talents, it will become harder for our artists to impose themselves on the international arena. Therefore, it is now a critical point for us to promote art education at all levels, which will play an important role in the future development of our society.

### **Visual Culture and Art Education in Taiwan**

Currently, our compulsory 9-year education program has adopted a new set of curricula, prompted by the desire to provide a broad and integrated education (Leu, 2001). In this curriculum, "Arts and humanities" are among the important subjects, and their purpose is to give the students an introductory understanding of their mother culture, as well as of other cultures. Therein, visual culture is the main direction for teaching. For higher education, the core curriculum of art education should continue along the same directions. In addition, the core curriculum of art education should bear the responsibility of the communicators, and consider "culture" as a goal for lifetime learning. Under the direction of the Ministry of

Education (Ministry of Education, 2001), the curriculum of Taiwanese students' compulsory education is devised based on the principle of integrated and humanistic teachings. Students are expected to acquire the following ten basic abilities:

1. Understanding his or her potential
2. Express, create and appreciate
3. Career planning and lifelong learning
4. Communicate and share
5. Respect, responsibility, and team work
6. Cultural studies and international understanding
7. Planning, organizing and executing
8. Application of technologies and information
9. Active exploration and research
10. Independent thinking and problem solving

In the field of art and humanities, the study of arts should be integrated with life and culture. The art curriculum should consider the study of arts as a means to realize living as an art, to stimulate human experiences and to cultivate the appreciation of culture (Leu, 2001). Thus, items 1, 2, 4 and 10 listed above are directly connected with arts and humanities, and can serve as the major indices in the design of art curriculum. For instance, we have to address questions such as how to explore the potentials of students' aesthetic, expressive, and creative abilities, and how to raise cultural issues so that students will proceed to their research, to seek answers, etc. Items 5 and 6 have an indirect connection with the arts. After the first 4 items are well integrated into the curriculum, students' achievements in learning will reach the stages described in items 5 and 6. To realize the 9-year compulsory curriculum, the Taiwanese art educators must first consider the unifying qualities in the arts. Kuo (2002) considered that through an all-inclusive art education, we can increase the students'

knowledge, wisdom, courage, cooperating and problem solving abilities, and, as a result, students will become more interested in studying. These newly-developed abilities and attitudes can be further applied in other disciplines. This innovative approach of art education would enable the teachers to further consider the interrelatedness of the subjects, as well as the independence of their corresponding contents. It also allows flexible collaboration among different disciplines. It starts from the “I” of the first grade to the “world as an earth village” of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and there will be a total of 9 connected disciplines, positioned as 9 concentric circles. This design would allow students to approach their study from various perspectives, focusing on nature, society, culture, consciousness, and motivation, from which they can further develop individual assessments of artistic phenomena (Leu, 2001).

Based on the “Temporary 9-year Curriculum Directives,” within the 9 years of education students should be able to develop a sense of national cultural identity, as well as a better understanding of other cultures. The culture includes, to say the least, the language, food, environment, history, living habits, beliefs, totems, signs, and tribal symbols. These elements should all be included in the visual culture courses. In fact, VCAE has the mission of discovering the strong roots of a culture. In this new era, everyone should contribute to the progress of their own cultural development.

## Chapter III

### Situation

Visual culture has generated such far-reaching influences that art educators can no longer ignore them. VCAE tends to involve inter-disciplinary research, which may sometimes have the effect of restructuring society. In such a learning environment, students can integrate their life experiences into classroom teachings, become critical observers, and further endow meanings to the images they create (Tavin, 2000). Current art educators must therefore think seriously about how they may help students to decode, with a critical mind, visual culture and signs. The other issue art educators in Taiwan have to consider carefully is whether the application of a foreign theory of visual culture to the current Taiwanese art education system is appropriate, since all cultures possess features that are unique and closely related to their region. Wilson (2002), after observing the educational conditions in Taiwan, pointed out that the Taiwanese curriculum should begin with an approach that is based on the values of the local culture. Of course, the study materials can be of international interest and can be taken from the east as well as the west, such as popular visual culture, and other interesting subjects proposed by the teachers and the students. Native scholars such as Kuo & Chao (2002) also warned that the idea of visual culture is the by-product of foreign theories. Kuo & Chao (2002) suggested that art educators in Taiwan should try to decode and interpret visual images, such as fashion, advertisements, movies, TV programs, and Internet images that are part of the local culture, and help to build the foundation for the research of Taiwanese visual culture, thereby establishing a theory of visual culture that belongs specifically to Taiwan.

Taiwan is currently undergoing a major reform in art education. This new art education program is called “9 consecutive years of art and humanity.” Its curriculum emphasizes the integration of art, culture and life, and its development is based on the

fundamental concepts of “art appreciation,” “life as art,” and “embracing the humanities.”

The research method is based primarily on literature analysis. Literature related to VCAE is first collected from journals and books. From this literature, the appropriateness of applying the visual culture theory will be discussed, keeping in mind the goal of implementing the educational reform in Taiwan. By comparing positive and negative opinions, the principles of curriculum design can be derived. This approach aims at encouraging students to apply their own cultural perspectives to decode images that occur in our daily lives, and at the same time to remain curious, and to become open-minded visual consumers in Taiwan.

# **Chapter IV**

## **Method**

### **World Trends in VCAE**

While the development of digital computers has a very recent history, the close collaboration between arts and technology has exerted an important influence on the visual arts and visual culture. Not only did it increase the speed of communication through visual images worldwide, but also enhanced visual media's influences. In this contemporary movement in art education, courses that discuss "community-oriented art education," "ecological art education," and "media technology in art education" draw our attention to the huge cultural diversity. They also rely on visual images for their expressions and explorations. As the visual culture becomes inseparable from our daily lives, it will certainly become one of the main research topics in art education. However, in order to avoid any harm that may be inflicted by visual images on our students, it is crucial to establish a policy in VCAE that can help to interpret social problems closely related to the students' lives, as well as a policy that will encourage students to explore the values of diversified cultures, thereby elevating students' basic abilities to create, analyze, think, judge, and perceive art.

Although visual culture remains a developing concept, it can, nevertheless, induce many provocative discussions closely related to our daily lives. Through sharing and investigating their aesthetic experiences, students can create a wider and more diversified space for art studies. In this new era, VCAE will definitely become an important curriculum in art education worldwide.

## **Analysis of the Application of VCAE in Taiwan**

**Visual Culture as a Channel for Culture Study** We can understand culture through the arts.

But what is considered to be “art”? What are its content and domains? Education scholar

Postman once claimed that “ the clearest way to see through a culture is attend to its tools for conversation” (as cited in Duncum, 2001, p.102). Much of the cultural information in our

daily lives is directly or indirectly communicated through visual signs; see, for instance, the consumer products and the advertisements used by various companies. These visual images reveal cultural identity at all levels: cultures of different countries, tribes, masses,

pop-cultures and sub-cultures. Art education scholar Duncum (2001) considered that we exist within a society of culture. In this society, every life experience will become an expression of visual culture. Sturken and Cartwright (2001) further pointed out that visual culture is the

visual expression that the culture attaches to all kinds of media. Visual culture and cultural learning share many common elements. Art researcher Mizoeff (2001b) believed that

everyday life is the main arena of visual culture, and is therefore the main arena for cultural research as well. Taiwanese art educator Chen (2003) pointed out that visual culture is rooted

in everyday life. It not only contains various visual art products, but also includes various artistic and cultural activities that we widely observe in our daily lives. Thus, visual culture

and cultural learning are, in essence, closely related. As students explore visual culture, they also experience the diversity of life. Moreover, an increasing number of students rely on

media, Internet, electronic images and signs to recognize this world. To them, images that exist in mass culture are almost the only window through which they can receive cultural

experiences and participate in cultural activities (Duncum, 1999). For this reason alone, we should make an effort to explore how visual culture can serve as a channel for cultural

learning. This endeavor will allow students to use their most familiar images and experiences as a doorway to march toward learning about how diversified the culture actually is.

Other characteristics of visual culture are that it integrates the concepts of art, culture and life. In the directives of the Ministry of Education in Taiwan that proposed a unified arts and humanities curriculum for the 9-year compulsory education, it was clearly stated that school is part of the society. Therefore, school's art education should reflect students' lives, and help students to combine art and culture with lives. VCAE emphasizes the importance of students' daily life experiences. It destroys the long-held boundaries between the arts, culture and people's lives. This spirit of breaking the boundary to enter life itself is precisely the foundation for art education that emphasizes the interest in diverse cultures. Art professors Albert Chong and Farago (2002) from Colorado University stated how cultural boundaries can be revalued by the investigation of visual culture. They gave five explanations of this phenomenon: 1. Visual culture can expose different values, concepts and cultural backgrounds existing in various traditions, histories, and societies, from which interesting discussions can ensue; 2. Through the discussion of visual images, cultural issues will be explored in a much freer spirit, and the sensitive issues of ideological differences can be avoided; 3. The visual images that assume a rigid nature will be likely to reveal the biases of the teachers and students, from which a more inclusive perspective can be reached; 4. Visual images allow us to discover the existence of those disadvantaged groups hidden in the corners of society, and enable the students to consider the relationships between themselves and those disadvantaged groups; 5. The diversity of visual images will abolish the predominant position held by certain superior cultures and by academic authorities.

This list of characteristics that describe visual images happens to coincide with the essential traits that illustrate the practice of tolerance and respect among all cultures. This is also the main reason why I suggest the use the visual experience as a means to reach cultural understanding, and to promote a diversified artistic education.

**Analysis of Educational Contents** VCAE places emphasis on the development of historical and cultural understanding of images, and pays attention to social conditions so that students can better adapt to the social environment. Such adaptation will increase their artistic skills, cultural awareness and critical spirit, and will further promote social development and social harmony. There are, however, people who feel that VCAE risks drifting away from the learning of art in its traditional sense. For instance, Eisner (2001, as cited in Stinespring) was concerned with the possibility that the arts would become slaves of science. Stinespring (2001) pointed out misuses in the applications of social postmodernism in education; scholars Liu and Chien (2001) also pointed out that when discussing aesthetic evaluation in sociology, there were mentioned only topics related to social interaction and cultural meanings, while the essence of the art works was barely touched upon. These scholars feared that the essence of art works would be sacrificed by the consideration of social and cultural interaction. Can the art learning process, under the normal social interactions, satisfy the refined set of standards in the art educational system? If we analyze the contents taught in VCAE, we may find that the time spent on examining art works is perhaps reduced, but the quality of teaching is actually increased. The benefit of a general art education has also increased: more people now have the opportunity of entering school to study art. But can the teaching materials chosen in VCAE up to now be considered too trendy? Here we can address this issue from the standpoints taken up by the arts and crafts movement, the art nouveau, or the Japanese pop-art movement. In the arts and crafts movement, the aesthetic concepts and traditional views of ideal crafts of the Middle Ages were applied to the designs of furniture, decorations, and even perfume bottles and illustrations. Art nouveau took the ideas in the arts and crafts movement to another level, coming up with a combination of various arts and technologies. The Japanese pop-art movement, on the other hand, took place between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when commercial products were made to please the masses, and

included pictures depicting beautiful geishas, kabuki performers, and actors, as well as laborers and landscape paintings. These were all visual products closely related to public lives and tastes, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century they are considered rare and valuable art works. Thus, art education should no longer center around the elitist art works. Public taste is rooted in the aesthetics of everyday life, and develops over time according to societal changes. Although the public taste may be very different from that of the professional artists, it reflects the aesthetics of everyday life.

**Analysis of Educational Methods** VCAE emphasizes the development of the students' artistic skills and insists on giving them the power to judge and criticize. Therefore, "keeping silence," a tradition in Taiwanese classrooms, is obviously an obstacle in the realization of VCAE. The teachers face the problem of overcoming the silence of the students and encouraging them to share their opinions. Although giving students more power allows them more room for decision, it also requires them to work harder and to take on more responsibilities. In addition to the changes needed in the teaching methods, teaching materials, resources of the teaching media and the roles played by the teachers and the students, the teachers still have to examine some practical issues, such as how to encourage discussions in the classroom, and how can teachers guide the discussions around certain topics? Only then will the theory be put into practice and the power given to the students meaningful. As Freire (1993) put it, real education is the realization between people, it is not the realization for someone, or about someone by someone.

### **Educational Policy Based on Taiwanese Visual Culture**

**Whose Culture Should We Teach?** The concept of Taiwanese visual culture art educational reform is based on the consultation of other countries, such as America, Japan, Australia, etc.

Can this set of foreign theories be applied to the reform of art education in Taiwan, and bring forward an ideal result? The ten basic abilities mentioned in the directives of the curriculum decreed by the Ministry of Education are primarily adopted and modified from the key competencies in the educational policy of Australia. The corresponding seven areas of study are also formed as a collage of various learning theories. These two policies however, depart from the historical and cultural background common for educators and students in Taiwan. We need to examine if these two policies taken from Australia and other foreign countries can be applied to the cultural and social characteristics of Taiwan. According to Wilson (2002), the curriculum in Taiwan should begin with an approach based on local cultures. Then the materials for study can be of international interest, and can be adopted from the east as well as the west, by including popular visual culture, and other interesting subjects proposed by the teachers and the students.

Furthermore, the art curriculum the Taiwanese students are familiar with has already been heavily influenced by the mainstream western arts and the traditional eastern arts. Today's art education reflects the differences and imbalances among different cultures. Confronted with this phenomenon, art educator Kuo (2001) pointed out that in many areas, the discipline of art has been influenced by artists from dominant cultures, races, and art institutions. If we want to obtain mutual understanding among different social groups, it is necessary to include the curriculum of other cultures in our own, so that students can accept the fact that there are other ways of thinking, and realize that his or her own culture is not necessarily superior and that other cultures are not necessarily inferior (Kuo, 2001). Mizoeff (1999) also pointed out that the key in the study of visual culture is to develop the students' ability to describe phenomena across cultures, and to avoid the narrow-mindedness of being restricted to only the western culture. Thus, when art teachers select their teaching materials for a multi-cultural art course, it is essential to avoid possible biases coming from the superior

cultures, and try to choose, as objectively as possible, diversified cultural materials.

Of course, we should examine carefully the influences of dominant cultures on the art curriculum. However, if we design a curriculum that supports the minority and rejects the mainstream, then it will be against the spirit of diversification and tolerance, and it will not objectively take all students' experiences into consideration. Scholar Neperud (1995) considered that every student has his or her own culture, which may not be as distinctively different from the tribal cultures; yet, they will inevitably be revealed in the differences between an individual's beliefs, values, and artistic expression and those of the society at large. Therefore, in our design of curriculum, we have to take into consideration the cultural experiences of the students as a whole, as well as the cultural differences among individual students' experiences. In addition, understanding the existence of minor and major cultures will help us examine our own biases, which should not be used as the only criterion in the selection of teaching materials. Even if art education that is based on the multi-cultural approach has been criticized for its concern with groups while neglecting individual by considering the students' perspectives when designing the curriculum, we may be able to avoid the drawbacks of such an approach. As mentioned above, the teachers should urge the students to examine themselves from other people's perspectives. Ultimately, the multi-cultural study of art should return to address issues of interest for each individual student.

**Learning from Our Own Culture** In the past, the curriculum of art education in Taiwan has been mostly focused on western paintings and western artists. However, if the students do not fully understand their own culture, how would one expect them to possibly understand the cultures and arts of other people? Because of this, the curriculum designed by the teachers can hardly find any resonance among the students. After taking the whole student body into

consideration, Neperud (1995) gave the following response to the question regarding the selection of cultures: “When asked ‘whose culture?’ the answer is your culture, my culture, and the culture of others” (p. 3). However, if we put them into a different order and approach art as “mine, yours and others”, then the educational process will make more sense and become more systematic. The selection of cultures can be illustrated with three levels of concentric circles. The first level, “mine,” represents the individual’s cultural experiences, including the students’ ideas, values and artistic expressions; the second level, “yours,” involves the people surrounding the students, including other students, teachers, family and friends; the third level, “others,” includes cultural groups that are outside the classroom, and are usually unreachable. Based on these three levels, any of our explorations and research, no matter whether originated from the second or third level, should always return to the self-inspection of the first level. In this way, the explorations of art and culture may start from the individuals, then move to groups, and eventually return to the individuals again.

Thus, based on the ideas of visual culture, Taiwan can design an art education curriculum that addresses cultures of different races. This will allow students to understand the minority cultures in Taiwan, and to compare them with their own cultures. This approach can prevent them from drifting away from their native history and culture, and will further the understanding and respect among different racial groups. This kind of curriculum design in visual arts is compatible with local culture and society.

## **Important Elements in Curriculum Design for Visual Art Education in**

### **Taiwan**

Taiwan’s unique native cultural phenomena are shaped by its entangled historical background, its rich geological and ecological natural landscape, and its multi-faceted cultural development. These unique phenomena include vehement election campaigns filled

with exaggerated advertisements, multifarious and cheerful wedding celebrations, grandiose funeral processions, idol worship, well-organized business displays, changeable and very diverse eating and drinking customs (night markets and street vendors), an intriguing dieting culture, and the habit of chewing palm nuts.

From this display of life expressions, we can detect a large range of changes happening in the society and in its economy, as well as all kinds of effects caused by the collisions between the natural environment and Taiwanese people. However, in order to exercise cultural diagnosis, we need to apply critical thinking to the observation of the change of values determined by industrial development. Thus, the problem of how to decode the local visual culture will be an important topic in art education of this new era. Wilson (1997) pointed out that a rich curriculum developed in VCAE, which collects its materials from a broad spectrum of visual images would better illustrate the cultural characteristics of a specific racial group than the images of refined art works. This by no means implies that VCAE would leave behind all the refined art works to the ashes of history. It only suggests that we should begin with paying attention to the most genuine and ordinary lives, we should be concerned with native cultural phenomena, and then return to the most direct and simplest aesthetic experiences and emotions. Wilson further emphasized ways to help students become active consumers of various cultural products, instead of being blind worshippers of commercial artifacts. At the same time, he encouraged students to consider how visual images have affected our values and lifestyles. These are issues that we have to consider when designing an art curriculum based on the visual cultures. In other words, teachers must carefully select among the complex works of visual culture, while establishing their curriculum goals, and choose topics that are relevant to both the teachers and the students, as well as materials that can help to expand the concepts of visual culture. Students under such guidance will then be able to further decode and create culture.

## **Procedures and Frameworks of Curriculum Design in Taiwan**

### **Examination of the Theories, Roles and Functions of VCAE:**

- The theories of VCAE --- Investigate the social cultural background in Taiwan
- The functions of VCAE --- Cultivate the abilities of criticism and regeneration
- The roles of VCAE --- Encourage mutually beneficial activities between teachers and students

### **Establish the Goals of the Curriculum in VCAE:**

- Learn to judge the qualities of images and to enhance one's abilities of critical thinking and criticism of pictorial signs.
- Decode the meanings of signs derived from different cultures, and recognize the real contents of art works.
- Examine and respond to the directives of the 9-year curriculum of arts and humanities.
  - (1) Exploration and expression: enable every student to self-explore, to detect the relationship between the environment and individuals, and to apply media and styles in his or her art expressions, so that his or her spiritual life will be enriched.
  - (2) Aesthetics judgment and comprehension: allow every student to recognize various values, styles and cultural backgrounds in the arts, to appreciate art artifacts and art works, and to participate vigorously in multi-cultural art activities.
  - (3) Realization and application: prompt every student to obtain an understanding of the connection between art and life, to increase awareness of the environment through artistic activities, to recognize different art professions, to expand his or

her artistic views, to respect and appreciate the creation of art, and to apply these ideas in life.

**Constructing the Contents in VCAE** When we design curricula based on the theories mentioned in the current study, we can consult the recent example of the topic-based integrated curriculum. This example includes the concepts of integrated curriculum and other important ideas. The spirit of integrated curriculum relies on the combination of art courses with other subjects; especially those that involve students' daily lives and social events. This doesn't mean to neglect the study of the essence of arts, but to remind students that while studying art, it is also necessary to consider other closely related important issues. From these important issues, one can derive some core ideas on which one can devise other relevant teaching units. This approach can prevent the appearance of some irrelevant activities in the curriculum. The purpose of VCAE and multi-cultural art education is to combine the arts with contemporary lives that are closely related to students' experiences, and to guide the students to discover some core values in the curriculum. The topic-based integrated curriculum is compatible with the direction of VCAE, both in spirit and principle. Thus, in the development of an integrated curriculum, we can consider the following four aspects: 1. its relevance to the individual students: the contents of the curriculum must be significant to the students, and at the same time to interact with their individual experiences; 2. methods and scopes of expression: the expression must reveal fully the topics' contents in a style that is open for examination and exploration; 3. background knowledge: students must possess the knowledge relevant to the topics studied; 4. problems and solutions: explore the problems that are relevant to the topics, and search for the appropriate solutions. If the curriculum is designed based on the above-mentioned four aspects, as well as on the idea of introducing cross-cultural artistic values, then we can expect to enhance cultural understandings through

art experiences, to establish a connection between the students and art culture, and to provide an accurate basic background knowledge to help students' learning, as well as to examine some possibly biased impressions. At the same time, it will help the students to explore the expressive styles and the range of scopes of art images and cultures, as well as the problems and solutions which appear in the creation and interpretation of art.

### **Usage of Cultural Resources in Taiwan**

- (1) Native festivals as the starting point
- (2) Community members, artists, Internet, and other contact channels
- (3) Museum introductions of folk artists in Taiwan

### **Brief Summary**

With the arrival of the new era of visual culture, art education should continue to adjust itself to accommodate these changes. Given the fact that visual culture has exerted unlimited influence on individuals' daily visual activities and experiences, it is worthwhile to include VCAE in our consideration of the new directions in art education. One important goal of the educational system established in this new era is to narrow down the gaps between social realities and the students' abilities and knowledge. For this purpose, VCAE can provide a new example of curriculum design.

In this globalization era, in order to know ourselves and the society and the culture we are immersed in, as well as to understand other different cultures, it is important to include our life experiences (life culture) in our studies, to further our understandings of the cultural meanings of visual images, and to comprehend our own life culture and social phenomena. Since visual images can exert a very powerful influence on people, it may be time for us to make some changes in art education. It is necessary for art educators to engage themselves in learning and researching the methods used in VCAE, and to emphasize the influence and

importance of visual culture. The emergence of visual culture in art education not only gives rise to a new research subject and a new research direction, but also reveals the fact that the realization of beauty in everyday life will form the contents of a more accomplished life. To live a more accomplished life is precisely the most important principle that is currently guiding our education in arts and humanities. If we can design a curriculum that is based on the important directions provided by the ideas of visual culture, and use the native social cultures in Taiwan as its contents, then we can begin to envision a big stride forward in the art education in Taiwan.

## Chapter V

### Conclusion and Recommendations

From the above discussions, we come to an understanding of the contents of the visual culture study. This approach adopts an explorative view, which combines the art disciplines with technical learning, and emphasizes the importance of cultural exposure and the necessity to realize in life what one learns in school. It also expects the students to remain art creators and also to enjoy art throughout their life.

VCAE can expand the range of interactions between the students and their subject of study, and can allow them sufficient room for imagination in their work. This will help them to deeply understand the important meanings of daily human activities, will develop individual sensitivities and the ability to distinguish between the different qualities of various objects, will cultivate independent thinking and criticism, and will enhance their ability to use multi-faceted expressions in communication, other than the use of language. Thus, if we can provide the students with visual culture products that are closely connected to their lives, so that they can engage their thoughts and discussions, this will help them to form good aesthetic taste, to shape a more selective attitude toward arts, to develop their critical thinking, as well as the ability to communicate in a multi-faceted fashion. In this process, they will better understand their feelings and will become more critical, which will further help them realize the value and meaning of life. Thus, once we can master the characteristics of VCAE, we will use it efficiently to design the contents of arts and humanities curriculum.

The research domain of visual culture corresponds to the teaching areas covered by art education that is focused on visual culture. The research objects of the visual culture are the images of our everyday lives. Therefore, I suggest that art educators in Taiwan, when developing the VCAE curriculum, should pay attention to the phenomena that occur in the

Taiwanese visual culture, and select as the materials for their curriculum local visual images that are connected to different regions in Taiwan. Such curriculum will establish a connection between the courses' content and the teachers and students' interests. After expounding on the theories of visual culture, this research has come up with a number of principles that art educators in Taiwan may consider when designing their curriculum, which could facilitate a more helpful approach of the art education for the students:

1. The design of curriculum should consider artistic experiences and cultural learning at the same time.
2. Select visual images according to the criteria of visual culture, and combine the refinement of elitist art works with mass culture. The decision is based on the standard of their artistic expressions and meanings.
3. Apply the framework of a topic-based integrated curriculum, and better utilize the artistic resources in Taiwan.
4. The selection of teaching materials should take into consideration the cultural experiences of the students, expanding from the individuals to the group, and then returning again to the individual's self-examination.

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