

Research on Practical Pathways for the Integration of Aesthetic Education and Music Education in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era

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ABSTRACT

This paper, based on the practical work in higher education institutions, systematically explores the inherent consistency in the conceptual core of aesthetic education and music education, as well as the practical necessity for their integration. It points out that current practices in university music education face prominent issues such as an overemphasis on technique over artistry, prioritizing knowledge acquisition over aesthetic cultivation, a fragmented curriculum system, and a simplistic evaluation mechanism. To address these challenges, this paper proposes constructing a four-in-one integrated goal system encompassing "aesthetic immersion, cultural understanding, innovative practice, and value guidance." Furthermore, it suggests specific practical pathways and strategic recommendations from five dimensions: curriculum system restructuring, teaching model innovation, faculty team optimization, campus environment cultivation, and evaluation mechanism reform. The aim is to provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for promoting the organic integration of aesthetic education and music education in universities, thereby fostering the cultivation of well-rounded individuals for the new era who are developed morally, intellectually, physically, aesthetically, and labor-wise.

KEYWORDS

Aesthetic education; Music education; Higher education; Integration pathways; Curriculum reform

1 Introduction: The Convergence of Epochal Demands and Educational Mission

Aesthetic education, concerned with the cultivation of individuals' aesthetic literacy, emotional refinement, character shaping, and innovative creativity, is a crucial component in comprehensively improving talent cultivation quality and implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. Aesthetic Education in the New Era*, placing aesthetic education at an unprecedented strategic height and emphasizing its unique function of "nurturing roots and shaping souls, enlightening wisdom and moistening hearts." Music education, as one of the most expressive, universally accessible, and practice-oriented forms of art education, has always been a primary vehicle and important pathway for implementing aesthetic education. However, within the traditional higher education system, especially in non-art specialized institutions, aesthetic education and music education often exist in a state of disconnect: the goals of aesthetic education may be grand but easily become vague, while music education, though concrete, risks falling into the trap of mere skill transmission. How to precisely infuse the "soul" of aesthetic education into the "body" of music education, achieving a paradigm shift from "music skill teaching" to "educating the whole person through music," is a core issue that current higher education work must confront and deeply explore. This paper aims to analyze these problems and explore the theoretical logic and practical approaches for the deep integration of aesthetic education and music education, combining the realities of university work.

2 Intrinsic Connection and Practical Examination: The Necessity and Urgency of Integration

2.1 The Intrinsic Unity of Aesthetic Education and Music Education

Aesthetic education aims to cultivate the ability to recognize, experience, feel, appreciate, and create beauty. Its core lies in the unity of emotional education, character education, and creativity education. Music, as humanity's oldest and most direct art form reaching the soul, acts directly on human emotions and associations through its non-semantic, dynamic sound structures, possessing an irreplaceable advantage in shaping aesthetic perception, stimulating emotional resonance, fostering imagination, and sublimating spiritual realms. Therefore, music education is inherently one of the most vivid and direct forms of aesthetic education practice. The ideal process of music education inevitably contains rich aesthetic education elements: from the perception of formal beauty in pitch, rhythm, and timbre, to the comprehension of the historical context and cultural significance of musical works (understanding beauty), and further to the re-creation in performance and exploration in composition (creating beauty). The entire process constitutes a comprehensive cultivation of aesthetic ability, humanistic literacy, and innovative spirit. The two are highly aligned in their fundamental goal of "educating people," unified in the ultimate educational pursuit of "cultivating well-rounded individuals."

2.2 Prominent Issues in Current University Practice

2.2.1 Deviation in Conceptual Understanding

"Instrumental Rationality" Overrides "Value Rationality." Some university administrators, teachers, and students still hold superficial understandings of aesthetic and music education. In professional music departments, the educational focus often leans towards the refinement of performance skills and the completeness of theoretical knowledge systems, while insufficiently exploring the cultural connotations, aesthetic character, and character-shaping role carried by music. The phenomena of "emphasizing technique over art" and "emphasizing art over culture" persist. In public art education within non-specialized institutions, music courses are easily simplified as "decorative" activities to relieve academic pressure or cultivate superficial interests, their profound aesthetic education function weakened.

2.2.2 Fragmented Curriculum System

Coexistence of Professional Barriers and Superficial General Education. In university curriculum design, general aesthetic education courses (e.g., Introduction to Art, Principles of Aesthetics) and specific music courses (e.g., Music Appreciation, Instrumental Performance) often belong to different teaching modules, lacking organic connection. Aesthetic theory courses can easily become abstract lectures, divorced from vivid music art practice, while music skill courses may lack refinement and guidance from an aesthetic height. For non-music majors, the available music courses are often limited in number and fragmented in content, making it difficult to accumulate systematic aesthetic experiences.

2.2.3 Single Teaching Model

Insufficient Aesthetic Experience and Creative Practice. Traditional music teaching, especially in large-class appreciation courses, frequently employs a "listening + lecture" indoctrination model. Students passively accept given interpretations, lacking opportunities for active, deep engagement in aesthetic experiences. Creative music (such as improvisation, composition, integrated creation of music with other arts) are even scarcer, limiting students' possibility of internalizing and creating beauty through "learning by doing."

2.2.4 Lagging Evaluation Mechanism

Difficulty in Measuring the "Silent and Subtle" Educational Effectiveness. Current evaluations primarily focus on assessing knowledge retention or skill level (e.g., test scores, piece completion), but lack scientific, effective, and process-oriented evaluation tools and mechanisms for measuring core aesthetic education outcomes such as the enhancement of aesthetic taste, enrichment of emotional experience, deepening of cultural understanding, and subtle influence on values. This makes it difficult to assess and provide feedback on the effectiveness of integrated education.

3 Goal Restructuring: Constructing a Four-in-One Integrated Education System

3.1 Aesthetic Immersion

Cultivate students' acute musical perception, rich musical imagination, and refined aesthetic taste through extensive listening, analysis, comparison, and experience of excellent Chinese and foreign musical works, enabling them to distinguish beauty from ugliness, pursue elegance, and resist vulgarity.

3.2 Cultural Understanding

Guide students to understand the historical culture, national spirit, and philosophical ideas behind music within the aesthetic experience. Use music as a window to understand the world and comprehend different cultures, fostering cultural identity, establishing cultural confidence, and cultivating cross-cultural understanding abilities.

3.3 Innovative Practice

Encourage students, based on perception and understanding, to participate in music performance, adaptation, composition, or comprehensive artistic creation activities integrating music with other art forms or technological means. Stimulate innovative thinking and cultivate practical abilities and teamwork spirit.

3.4 Value Guidance

Deeply explore the positive outlooks on life, values, and patriotic sentiments embedded in musical works, especially Chinese excellent traditional music, red classic music, and the main melody music of the times. Realize the nurturing of virtue through beauty and the transformation of people through music, assisting students in shaping sound character and undertaking the mission of the era.

4 Practical Pathways: A "Blueprint" for Multi-Dimensional Advancement of Deep Integration

4.1 Curriculum System Restructuring: Breaking Barriers, Constructing a Hierarchical, Coherent Curriculum Group

4.1.1 Deepen the Aesthetic Education Connotation in Professional Music Education

Integrate content from aesthetics, philosophy of art, music history, and music criticism organically into majors like musicology and performance. Establish required or core elective courses such as "Music Aesthetics and Criticism" and "The Spirit of Chinese Music Culture." Require specialized skill teachers to consciously guide students in interpreting and performing works from the perspectives of aesthetic style and cultural significance.

4.1.2 Upgrade Public Music General Education Courses

Transform the singular model of "introduction-style" and "appreciation-style" courses. Design modular, thematic, and practice-oriented course menus. Examples include offering thematic courses like "The Artistic Conception Beauty in Chinese Ancient Poetry Art Songs," "Philosophical Reflection in Symphony," "Film Music and Emotional Narrative," and "World Music and Cultural Diversity," accompanied by small-scale practical workshops (e.g., simple arranging, integrating music with new media).

4.1.3 Develop Interdisciplinary Integrated Courses

Encourage collaboration between music schools/departments and faculties of liberal arts, history, philosophy, education, science, and engineering to develop courses such as "Order and Harmony in Science and Music," "Digital Audio Art Creation," and "Music Therapy and Mental Health," breaking disciplinary boundaries and broadening the field of aesthetic education.

4.2 Teaching Model Innovation: From "Listening and Lecture" to "Experience and Creation"

4.2.1 Implement "Immersive-Inquiry-Based" Teaching

Utilize modern information technology to create smart music classrooms. Use VR/AR, high-fidelity surround sound systems, etc., to establish immersive listening environments. Adopt Project-Based Learning (PBL), guiding students to conduct independent inquiry, cooperative creation, and presentation around specific musical themes or problems (e.g., "How to express rural revitalization through music?").

4.2.2 Strengthen Artistic Practice Components

Position practice as a key link in aesthetic education integration. Vigorously support the construction of various music clubs, such as student choirs, folk orchestras, symphony orchestras, chamber music groups, musical theater societies, and electronic music clubs, making them accessible to the entire university. Regularly organize "workshops," "masterclasses," and "creative music festivals," encouraging participation from non-specialized students.

4.2.3 Introduce Community and Natural Aesthetic Education

Organize students to participate in community art services, rural music aesthetic education volunteer teaching, or conduct "soundscape" collection and creation activities in natural environments. Allow music education to extend beyond the classroom, sublimate the experience of beauty and sense of responsibility through interaction with society and dialogue with nature.

4.3 Faculty Team Optimization: Cultivating "Aesthetic Education-Oriented" Music Teachers

4.3.1 Transform Teacher Roles and Concepts

Through training, teaching research, and academic exchange, guide music teachers to deeply understand the requirements of aesthetic education in the new era, consciously shift from being "teachers of classics" to "teachers of people," becoming practitioners of aesthetic education concepts and guides for students' aesthetic growth.

4.3.2 Enhance Comprehensive Humanistic Literacy

Encourage teachers to broaden their knowledge horizons, improve their cultivation in related fields such as literature, history, philosophy, and fine arts, enabling them to effortlessly engage in cross-cultural and cross-art associations and interpretations in teaching.

4.3.3 Form Interdisciplinary Teaching Teams

Equip integrated courses with teaching teams composed of music teachers, aesthetics/art theory teachers, humanities and social sciences teachers, and even science and technology teachers, for collaborative lesson preparation and team teaching.

4.4 Campus Environment Cultivation: Fostering a Cultural Ecology of "Aesthetic Education Everywhere"

4.4.1 Create High-Quality Campus Music Cultural Life

Systematically plan a "Semester Music Season," introducing high-level professional performances while vigorously supporting student artistic practice achievement showcases), forming a regular mechanism of "bringing in classics, sending out creativity." Utilize campus broadcasting and background music systems in public spaces cafeterias, corridors to carefully curate playlists, subtly enhancing students' musical taste.

4.4.2 Build Online and Offline Aesthetic Education Resource Platforms

Integrate high-quality music course videos), recordings of classic concerts, digital music collections, master lectures, and other resources to build a university-level aesthetic education music resource repository accessible to all teachers and students.

4.5 Evaluation Mechanism Reform: Focusing on Process and Value-Added Assessment Orientation

4.5.1 Implement Diverse Process-Oriented Evaluation

Reduce the weight of summative written exams, and increase indicators for process-oriented evaluation such as class participation, aesthetic journals, creative proposals, practical project presentations, and cooperative performance. Employ portfolio assessment methods to document students' aesthetic growth trajectory.

4.5.2 Explore "Soft" Outcome Assessment

Use methods like questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus groups to conduct long-term tracking of changes in students' aesthetic attitudes, emotional expression, cultural awareness, innovative confidence, etc. While difficult to quantify precisely, this is significant for assessing the long-term effects of integrated education.

4.5.3 Incorporate Aesthetic Education Integration Effectiveness into Teaching Quality Evaluation Systems

Set relevant observation points regarding the implementation of aesthetic education integration within the university's teaching evaluation of departments and majors, as well as in teacher assessment and appointment systems, to institutionally guide and guarantee the implementation of integration work.

5 Conclusion

The deep integration of aesthetic education and music education is a systematic project and, moreover, a historical responsibility entrusted to higher education institutions in the new era. University music educators should take proactive responsibility, act actively, sow the seeds of beauty in the hearts of every student, let music become a surging force nourishing youthful life and forging individuals for the times, and jointly compose a new movement for aesthetic education work in higher education in the new era. Future research could further focus on specific teaching design cases for integrated courses, innovative applications of digital technology in integrated teaching, and the construction of big data-based tracking and evaluation models for aesthetic literacy development, continuously deepening exploration in this important field.

About the Author

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