

Instructional Exploration on Innovative Thinking Cultivation in College Art Education: A Situational Research-Based Teaching Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The new curriculum standards have presented fresh demands for college art education in China. There is a growing emphasis on nurturing art education students' innovative capabilities and aesthetic perception in institutions. Notably, the cultivation of innovative thinking skills holds a particularly pivotal position within the curriculum. This paper explores the "Scenario-Based Research-Oriented" reform concept in practical teaching. Employing the case-analysis method, it delves into curriculum integration, dynamic task design, and situation-based teaching strategies for the abstract design thinking training course. Moreover, it discusses students' learning methods, covering aspects such as independent exploration, collaborative communication, and the establishment of situational linkages.

KEYWORDS

Situational Teaching; Art Education in Universities; Innovative Thinking; Teaching Strategies

Under the requirements of the new curriculum standards, universities have been exploring innovative approaches in the teaching reform of art education for future art teachers. Wang (2018) emphasized that to realize the reform concept of "situation-based research-oriented teaching" in professional courses, educators should build upon traditional teaching methods to develop approaches that embody the theory of "meaningful learning" and adhere to the principles of "autonomy, inquiry, collaboration, and situational context" in teaching reform. To better meet the new requirements set by the curriculum standards and enhance students' independent innovation capabilities, strengthening abstract thinking and expression training has become a crucial approach in our university's teaching reform to stimulate students' innovative thinking. This paper focuses on how to implement the multifaceted teaching principles of "autonomy, inquiry, collaboration, and situational context" through curriculum integration in skill-based courses, aiming to better achieve the goal of fostering students' independent innovation abilities through the curriculum.

1 Curriculum Integration as the Foundation for Implementing Diverse Teaching Principles

The cultivation of innovative thinking is a long-term, multi-stage progressive process. In art education, foundational courses play a crucial role in developing students' visual thinking abilities. However, such cultivation cannot be achieved through a single independent course. As Feng et al. (2024) emphasized, maintaining the coherence of foundational courses is essential, with particular attention to the seamless connection of knowledge and skills between courses to prevent significant disconnection between basic design courses and subsequent advanced design courses.

In our university's art education reform for teacher training, we have integrated three courses 'Fundamental and Applied Composition, Fundamental and Applied Design (Pattern), and Comprehensive Material Art' into a unified creative thinking development program. This integrated approach strengthens the cultivation of creative thinking abilities. The reform combines these three courses into a comprehensive teaching system with interconnected themes and content, forming a large unit teaching structure. The course contents are mutually reinforcing and supportive, collaboratively developed and designed by a team of instructors. The teaching strategies closely follow the reform concept of "situation-based research-oriented teaching."

2 Autonomy and Exploration: Accumulation of Knowledge Reserve and Diversity of Materials

Fundamental design courses serve as the cornerstone for cultivating creative thinking, and their role in developing students' imaginative thinking and creative abilities has garnered significant attention (Wu, 2024). A substantial knowledge reserve provides an effective guarantee for students' creative thinking, as qualitative improvement can only be achieved through quantitative accumulation. In previous practices of basic composition courses, the curriculum primarily focused on prolonged manual drawing by students, which proved challenging in motivating intrinsic drive and fostering autonomous exploration. Due to limited knowledge of modern design thinking, students often struggled to comprehend the transformation from concrete to abstract visual thinking in compositional contexts.

In the process of building knowledge reserves, instructors should address students' unfamiliarity with modern design by integrating various aspects of contemporary design that connect with daily life, thereby enhancing students' perspectives on modern design. This can be achieved through:

- 1 Sharing classic video resources such as
 - o Japanese documentary "Ah! Design"
 - o "Abstract: The Art of Design"
 - o "Objectified"
- 2 Encouraging students to
 - o Visit art museums
 - o Attend world art expositions
 - o Study visual innovations in classic commercial brands
 - o Understand contemporary expressions of traditional elements (e.g., modern interpretations of domestic brands, cultural creative evolutions in the Palace Museum)

These approaches enable students to understand the relevance of modern design to contemporary life through classic cases and video resources. Simultaneously, students should be guided to embrace technology, utilizing platforms like big data, GPT, and Deepseek to access more design-related resources.

Amidst the continuous impact of visual culture, students' interests have become increasingly diverse, encompassing digital media art, popular fashion culture, historical culture, and natural landscapes. To guide students in understanding abstract thinking within compositional concepts from multiple perspectives, they should be granted ample autonomy in expressing their works. Autonomous exploration and discovery should build upon the foundational knowledge delivery of basic compositional language theory, enabling students to identify learning materials and cases more independently. Instructors can disseminate key concepts to students, who can then explore various aspects of life for compositional elements through online platforms, such as WeChat and Red Notes, for searching images that embody compositional design sense, including natural landscapes, architectural photography, anime design posters, innovative expressions of traditional culture, and popular element designs. Autonomy and exploration remain central throughout the three courses, requiring students to establish and continually expand their personal material libraries through practical accumulation. They should learn to conduct independent research and organize knowledge systematically. During classroom instruction, students and teachers can engage in material exchange and discussion.

3 Sharing and Collaboration: Recomposition and Creative Expression of Materials

In traditional art skill instruction, the learning process primarily revolves around individual completion of artworks, with limited emphasis on teamwork. Extensive research indicates that collaborative learning significantly enhances innovative thinking abilities. Students should engage in group discussions to evaluate and select visual materials collected through independent observation. They can form teams of 2-4 members based on mutual interests to explore and exchange ideas about selected topics, sharing their autonomous exploration processes and methods. The project-based approach requires students to reconstruct collected elements. During the initial material collection phase, students can gather inspiration according to their conceptual frameworks, transforming these materials into visual forms. This process combines hand-drawing and collage techniques, involving image cutting, recombination, and reconstruction through methods, such as element segmentation, repetitive utilization, abstraction and geometric transformation, and imaginative derivation. Group outcomes should demonstrate comprehension of formal compositional language, with each member presenting their understanding of design language through division of labor.

4 Establishing Strong Interconnections Through Contextual Expression and Deepening Each Course via Project-Based Approaches

The integration of three courses should be achieved through curriculum content alignment, emphasizing the connection between knowledge and practical application in composition and design projects. Students are consistently required to consider how fundamental compositional knowledge serves practical applications, how to create unique outcomes, and how to make their work appealing to audiences - all through contextual thinking. In our teaching practice, we encourage students to expand their contextual scope, incorporating their understanding of society and expressing their emotions authentically. This approach has resulted in increasingly diverse student project topics. Within the framework of positive cultural and social themes, student projects demonstrate remarkable variety. For social themes, students engage with contemporary issues such as advocating for stray animals through social media or addressing food safety concerns by envisioning healthy, green food initiatives. In cultural themes, projects range from campus culture to

hometown intangible cultural heritage, promoting positive energy in learning environments, study-life balance, and sports health. Following material collection and collaborative grouping, in the design application course, students establish personal or team-based tie-dye studios as their goal, beginning with research on studio VI visual systems and subsequently exploring comprehensive material painting expressions using tie-dye techniques. Through extended teaching practice, we have observed that students demonstrate enhanced autonomy and greater enthusiasm for in-depth learning when pursuing self-selected interests. This autonomous contextual exploration facilitates curriculum coherence. For instance, students selecting campus landscapes as their theme in composition courses tend to discover patterns in nature during basic pattern design courses, while showing increased concern for environmental social issues. In comprehensive materials courses, they often prefer eco-friendly natural materials for creation.

5 Dynamic Outcome Output: Context-Based Achievement Transformation

The concept of "dynamic mastery of teaching and learning strategies in fundamental art courses" refers to the adaptive approach in art education where instructors modify teaching strategies in response to changing external educational environments. This involves arranging meaningful learning content and creating effective teaching methods to help art teacher candidates acquire new knowledge and skills promptly (Wang, 2018). Dynamic adjustment of learning outcomes has become particularly crucial, requiring adaptation of student output formats according to contextual needs. Diverse assignment formats include field study images, research presentations, hand-drawn collages, creative design posters, and comprehensive material paintings. For multi-contextual outcome presentations, beyond traditional gallery-style course exhibitions, students are encouraged to identify appropriate contexts for applying their course achievements. This includes integrating coursework with campus cultural projects, such as Spring Festival printmaking events or "Nezha"-themed mural designs, promoting the extension of course activities beyond the classroom, and enhancing the practical application of outcomes. Students are encouraged to propose utilization plans for their creations within the course framework, incorporating contemporary technological and cultural trends while utilizing AI and big data resources. This approach facilitates the completion of course achievements within reasonable and effective contextual frameworks.

6 Conclusion

The author believes that the core of enhancing students' innovative thinking abilities should primarily focus on cultivating life experience perception and natural awareness while respecting individual differences and emphasizing student agency. Each student possesses unique life experiences and perceptual approaches, and their autonomous exploration serves as the foundation for accumulation. Secondly, the curriculum should dynamically adjust learning content, incorporating context-based projects guided by student interests. Educators should facilitate collaborative principles among students, encouraging the generation of novel perspectives through communication and cooperation, thereby fostering innovative thinking expression. When cultivating students' innovative thinking capabilities, it is crucial to acknowledge these individual differences. Educators should guide students from their actual circumstances, helping them expand their perspectives and cognitive spaces through observation, experience, and critical thinking.

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