

1 Heading towards Synthetic Art Education- Views on Curriculum and Teaching Materials

There has been a deep rooted concept governing our schools so that everyone, with no exception, gives a whole-hearted conviction without any shadow of doubt. It says that for art teaching, it is best to impart the knowledge systematically through classification and art education in school is mainly reflected in music and fine arts. The sentiment of subdividing the subject into different sections has met with a certain level of impact in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan and may also well arouse our introspection in Macau. Let us ask ourselves: Is it most profitable to adopt subdivision courses for art education? Should there be any update notion for the impartation of art education?

I. Reflections on Art and Art Education

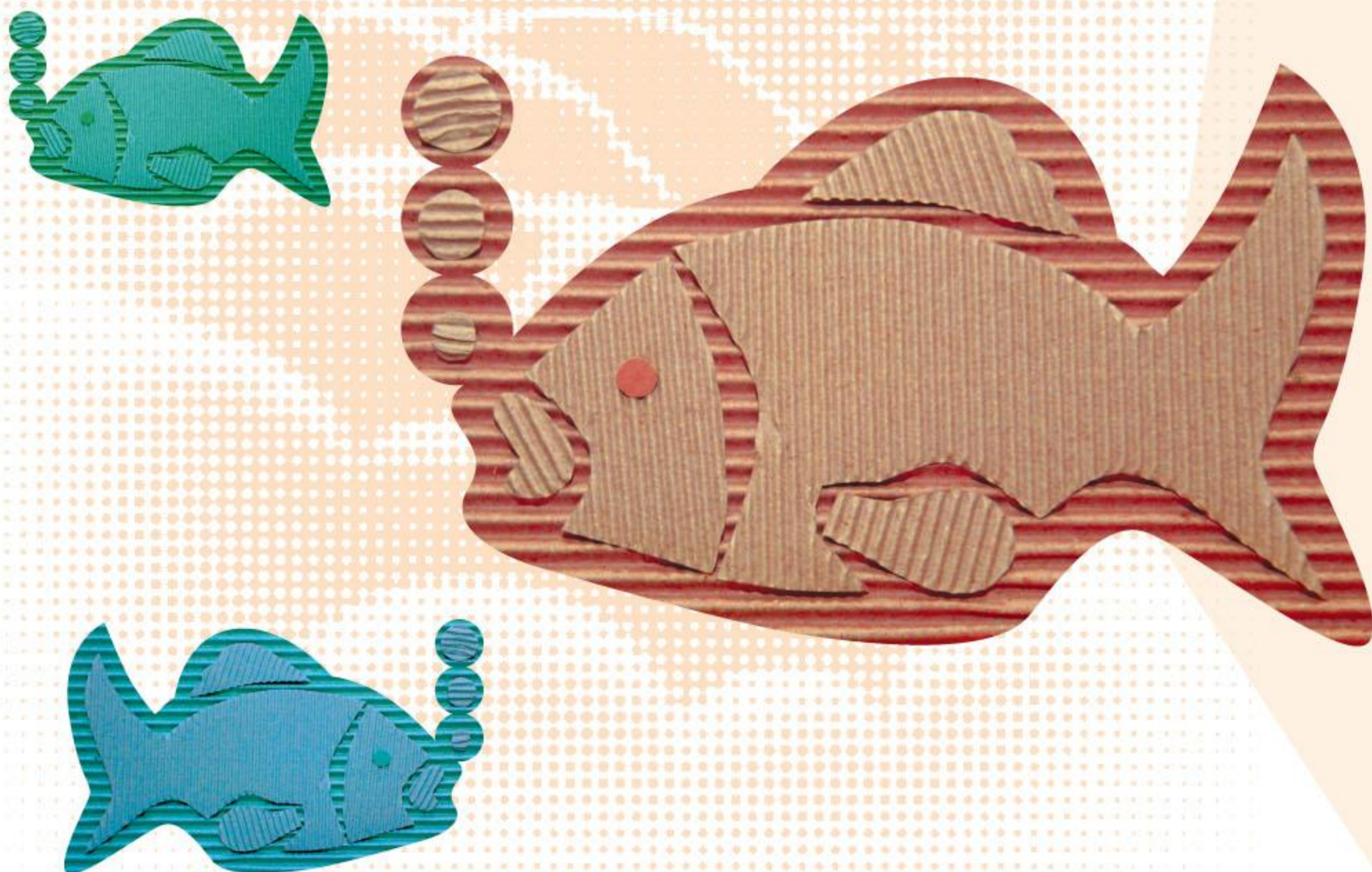
A school should never be an institute for training students to get a livelihood but a place to educate the next generation how to live. (Elliott W. Eisner, 2003) Life is related to livelihood but is never equal to it. A real human life denotes a free life and one should live idyllically in this world. Just as what the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, stated, "Life should go like a game." The spirit of game playing is, in fact, holds the connotation of being free.

Art should not be taken as a kind of ornament or plaything. It is not just a type of artistic craft. Art is indispensable to an idyllic life and genuine art is the principal means to manifest freedom. A life without an artistic bearing is sure a life of destitution. (Stuart Richmond, Hui Meng Fai, 1999) Therefore art education holds much concern about the quality of life while leading us to the situation of spiritual liberty. The key action is to nourish a cultural character, while at the same time, create an active and lively artistic learning environment.

However, does art education of to-day really bear concern for the quality of life? Has it established for the students an overall fruitful learning environment? What we generally perceive is that the art lessons turn out to be the technical knowledge classes. People care for the technique of art manifestation more than the cognition and experience of the subject. This makes art learning based on the physical changes and not the pulse of the soul and the fullness of the spirit. Art education is limited to be the courses of music and drawing, while other art categories of drama, dancing etc. hold no place at all. There are very strong restrictions, too, for the only subjects of music and drawing: they are made to appear as two unrelated worlds. The school curriculum even rejects the students' craze and fondness for the elements and activities of art, separating them from the life experience of theirs. This brings forth a direct outcome, showing art being dissected by art education. In this situation, the students just grasp individually some knowledge and technique of art in a restricted division of that course, but not experience practically its essence and value. Art education is tracing the route of professionalization, offering tedious training of skills. With the children's neglected art experience in life, the art lessons are losing their attractions day by day.

As a matter of fact, art has never been separated from living. It generates from the actual life and this vigour of life is based on the daily living atmosphere. Just like language learning, it has to be processed in that spontaneous language situation before it is wholly and efficiently acquired. Art learning has to be well connected with the actual life of the children and has to progress synthetically. To nurture an artist, specific sections may be indispensable. However, at the elementary education stage, the radical aim of art education is never to nourish

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an artist but to raise the children's innate art culture and life temperament. Therefore, art should never be imparted in broken sectors but has to be cultivated synthetically in the relevant environment. No matter it is the childhood period or the prehistoric epoch, the artistic activities of talking, singing, dancing, drawing, etc. all harmonize into one accord. This matches exactly what the famous music educator, C. Orff had said: "There has never been isolated music, it will coexist with actions, dances and words." (Basic Education Services, Ministry of Education, P.17, 2002) At present, the mode of synthetic art is still the main pattern of the appearance of human art. Be it the Chinese traditional dance in music, opera, folk dance or Western opera, ballet, they are all integrations of various art categories. Down through the ages, we are used to say "There is a picture in the poem and a poem in the picture". We also admit "sculpture is dance in solidification" and "construction is music without motion". Integrated art is also living art and synthesization is the main stream of art education development in the sixties of the twentieth century. (Teng Sau lu, 2002) In short, we have all the reasons to say heading towards syntheses is at least one of the ways to solve the many problems of art education of the present time.

II. How to synthesize Art Education?

Synthesization is not just simply putting bits of art categories together but the harmonious blending of the different qualities and elements. Heading towards synthetic art education requires a coexistent and agreeing relationship among the syllabuses of the curriculum.

1. Integrating the various categories of art

Synthetic art education first requires the integration of the various categories of art, especially music, drawing and drama, dancing, literature and media. (Basic Education Services, Ministry of Education, 2002) For a very long time, art education in school is used to be mainly in the form of music and drawing, turning a blind eye to the absence of dancing and drama. This obviously hinders the manifestation of the students' capability for synthetic art formation. As we all know that any mode of art offers much contribution, in different respects, to the development of sensibility. However, the various sensory

competence cannot be replaced by each other since integration and coordination is a necessity. The most outstanding feature of the two art categories of dancing and drama is, in each of them, a pattern of integrated art: the basic elements of dancing are rhythm, expression, structure of carriage, costumes and stage properties, etc. which frequently merge unto a whole body with music, drawing and drama; the manifestation of drama is done by means of words and speech, actions and gestures, scenes, stage properties, etc, making it an artistic performance of close coordination. The integration of the four art categories of music, drawing, dancing and drama, will forcefully enhance the realization of synthetic perception, enabling the student to acquire a richer sensation of consciousness and the art of beauty appreciation. This art learning atmosphere of mutual communication, enlightenment, and support does create a solid background for the students' capacity for synthetic art and its perception.

2. Different subjects integrated in the art field

Integrated art education also requires the synthesis of the different related subjects of art history, art philosophy, integration of art creation and criticism within the art field. (Basic Education Services, Ministry of Education, 2002) The traditional art education puts more weight to art creation and pays particular attention to the technique and skills learning. Nevertheless, excellent art competence is not merely art production and creation but includes also art reflection, perception and detection. To acquire the potential of art reflection, perception and detection, we need the assistance of art history, philosophy and criticism. The learning of art history not only enables the students to be acquainted with the magnificent art models and classical masterpieces in human history, but helps the students to delve into the relationship between the art development and human civilization with the social development. Art philosophy contributes to us clear concepts of art, elevating the potential of grasping the phenomena of art culture. Art criticism stresses greatly the model and significance of the art production with the assessment of its value and import. Introducing art education, enables the students to form their own standard of art criticism, enriching their aesthetic experience to deepen the potential of art understanding and consciousness.

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3. Creating a synthetic art learning environment

In order to hear towards synthetic education, a synthetic art learning environment has to be created. First of all, we have to give importance to the close connection between art and the overall life including art and personal sentiments. Art does originate from life and is being manifested in life. Therefore synthetic art education makes its start from the daily life and real living environment of the students. We have to lead them to absorb and expand their artistic imagination while acquiring material and inspiration for art creation. At the same time, help them to observe life and express it in an artistic way. In the process, to detect the value of the students' trend of affection is also an important item in synthetic art education. Art has always been the manifestation of human feelings and the presentation of man's abundant spiritual life. We can never imagine that real art learning can be acquired without the presence of personal sentiments. Synthetic art education emphasizes guiding the students to perceive art with their own feelings to experience the richness of human sentiment and ideology. On one hand, we grasp the art piece from its outward mode while on the other, the affection conceived therein. Furthermore, the construction of integrated art learning environment should value the connection between art and technology. (Basic Education Services, Ministry of Education, 2002) Art is symbolic information of culture, recording and reviewing the appearance of the topic while showing its developmental process and the difference among the various sectors. Strengthen the connection between art education and the whole general culture so as to offer more channels to art perception. In addition, art learning has to be raised to the recognition of culture, with respect to its multifaceted sectors, before being able to enter into a certain situation. Fortify the contact between art science, enhancing the unity of science and humanities to generate more experience to encourage an overall development for the students.

III. The features of the Synthetic Art teaching materials

Due to the uniqueness of the ideology of synthetic art education, it has its own typical process of arrangement of the teaching materials.

1. Organizing the teaching materials following the theme of integrated humanities.

A synthetic art program holds not solely the purpose of mastering the knowledge and skill but also bears the intention of transforming the former tedious activities of copying and mechanical training into the inspiration of art knowledge and technical practice, helping the students to delve into the complete artistic atmosphere. Therefore, the most important characteristics of the synthetic art teaching materials should be based on the themes of

humanities and then organize the necessary portions to manifest the objective. If we add in the arrangement of themes a unit of "thoughts of the innermost feelings" like "Father and Son", "A song to Mother", "Faithful Dove". "The Weeping Land". "Sentiments of the Four Seasons", "Heroic Spirit", "My Country is My Mother", etc, the outcome would be more successful. (Teng Sau lu, 2002) Of course, the topics should be well integrated, guiding the students, with the suggested hints mentioned above, to learn and perform art practice through syntheses. For the theme lesson of "The trials and tribulations of the Great Wall", we can make use of the different forms of art categories of strong cultural tints of music, drawing, literature, dancing, etc. to adjust the students' sentiments to experience and appreciate a masterpiece from the view of history, architecture and natural scenery so as to unfold their artistic imagination. (Teng Sau lu, 2001) Other themes similar to "The trials and tribulations of the Great Wall" are "Clay figures of soldiers and horses buried with the dead". "Radiant splendor of Tunhwang". "Joyful thoughts of the Yellow River", "The song of the Yangtze River", "The light of Ancient Greece", "The charm of the Pyramid", etc. There is practical evidence showing that the more humanistic the theme is, the closer to truth, goodness and beauty the things are. In this way, it is easier to establish a connection between the different items and truth with the goodness of art. Then, with little difficulty the ecological relationship among the various subjects of art and between art and other subjects will be well created. At the same time, the humanistic themes should be preferably set according to the life experience and the psychological features of the students, considering the topics which they most concern about for that certain period of time. Art education is always relaxing and joyful, revealing the technical connections between the meaning of humanities and the knowledge of art, while changing the sentiment and skills of the art education commonly practised in the past and modifying the separation between the quality of humanities and the professional knowledge of art.

2. "Plunge into the different subjects, integrating the various courses"

Generally speaking, art education should be synthetic. However, for the practical learning activities, we have to find a point from where the impartation may plunge in. The teaching materials of the many integrated designs of the synthetic art may often be introduced by other subjects. For the example of "The trials and tribulations of the Great Wall", it can be first acquainted through music. We may guide the students to sing and to appreciate the classical music pieces concerning the Great Wall, such as the different ways of chanting "The Great Wall ballad", "The ever standing Great Wall", "Meng Qiang-nu" or the symphony of "The Great Wall", the refined music of "The General's Command", etc. However, it is different from the separated subjects of art learning.

Synthetic art teaching materials are not just limited to one subject. Let us take the theme of "The trials and tribulations of the Great Wall" again. After the music appreciation, through other pictures or video information help the students to perceive the art and elegance of the Great Wall with its related historical and cultural background, or appreciate the different drawings and even literary articles concerning the Great Wall so as to acquire the knowledge of synthetic art. (Teng Sau lu, 2001)

3. Fade away the limitation of teaching, offer plentiful practical examples and teaching resources.

The traditional teaching materials hold the idea of limiting and regulating the method of teaching, stressing the obligation of teaching materials control. (Guo Hiu Meng, 2002) Synthetical art education takes art learning as a process of continuous growing, giving much weight to the art learning procedure and its growth. Therefore, the teaching materials should not be the "blueprint" necessary to be executed and to be established before hand, but only constructive guidelines and information storage for reference. Thus, the main purpose of the teaching materials is not for controlling pedagogy but for the function of serving. The said materials do not restrict the teachers, on the contrary, help to widen the scope of thinking, offering different possible pedagogical means for teaching. Of course, considering most of the art teachers are trained in separate art subjects, the elaborately designed teaching materials of synthetic art can sure be inspiring and demonstrating examples, offering valuable teaching resources.

IV Can we teach Synthetic Art?

At present, the problem is whether we can teach synthetic art or not. The art teachers of today are all trained in separate subjects. In Macau, many teachers do not even come from art academy. Is it possible to ask them to teach synthetic art which does cover such an extensive range? Can they make it?

The course of integrated art, is no doubt, very challenging. First of all, it requires the teachers' new perception of art and art education. Treating art merely as a type of technique and minimizing to be a practice for skills training can never really understand the value of art education and the real objectives and interest of synthetic art education. Nevertheless, the greatest challenge may probably lie in the fact of the teacher's holding a profound artistic and cultural knowledge. One who is acquainted with the different categories of art and at the same time, is able to handle them with practical coordination, will be the best synthetic art teacher with the greatest potential. However, a person possessing a certain attainment of philosophy history, aesthetics, etc. will, of course be able to perceive the essence of synthetic art education. Furthermore, synthetic art education also requires innovative pattern of art pedagogy.

Moreover, this does not mean the teachers today are unable to teach synthetic art. Here are a few important conceptions to be clarified. First of all, real art does not generate from teaching. The key of art education is to offer to the children a free and spontaneous environment to practise research and manifestation, to experience and to reflect so as to arouse their innate potential. The concept of "teaching" is often unsuitably taken to mean "delivering". If art education is a process of "delivering", it requires the teacher to be perfect and omniscient. However, it is impossible. Therefore, we are quite sure that there will never be a synthetic art teacher who can really "teach" that subject. In fact, there are quite many persons who are already serving in the synthetic art education field. This again proves to us that synthetic art education does not require teachers who are actually well acquainted with all the art categories. Furthermore, the basic spirits of the categories of art are not only well interlinked, but do follow some common principles like uniformity, rhythm, proportionment, equilibrium, multifariousness, variability, etc. This shows that there must be people with a certain accomplishment in a certain art category, allowing them to instigate transitions among the categories according to their artistic comprehension and practice. Accordingly, the same synthetic theme can be interposed by other various topics. For the theme of "rich expressions" a teacher can make use of the music of "action songs" to manifest the topic, to utilize dramas of "Cries and Laughter" or "Laughing faces and Crying looks" to show its essence, or borrow the art work of the Eastern

Han Dynasty porcelain statues shown in "Clay tomb figures in songs and drums music" to instigate artistic perception.

As a matter of fact, when imparting the appropriate integrated art, it is most essential that the teacher should first elevate his/her own knowledge of art and culture. Then, in the procedure of manifesting the information, the efficient technique of impartation will gradually be formed and mastered. In this way, the teacher will soon come to understand how to "grasp the right situation" and when to offer the students chances to meet the public so as to let the students exert fully their innate talents and potentials of art. Furthermore, he or she will have to delve into the point of how to dig out the art education resources from the community so that art education in schools is open to public knowledge, building up a relation between the community development and the life of the students. To strengthen the cooperation among the art teachers is vital also. With their joined forces, direct connection between music and visual art with their artistic presentation will be fully discovered.

All in all, for integrated art education, we have to say that it is not we are unable to make it, only we have not run the start yet!

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