

Strategies and Enlightenment of Danish Children's and Teenagers' Cultural and Artistic Cultivation

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Abstract: Based on the Belt and Road Initiative and the trend of cultural and economic globalization, through research and analysis of various policies and initiatives proposed by Denmark and China to facilitate the cultural and artistic cultivation of children and teenagers, a comparison of specific research findings between Denmark and China is proposed by means of concrete cases. As a result, the experiences of the two sides that worth academic exchanges and reference have been analyzed and summarized. It is recommended to further improve the cultural and artistic level of children and teenagers in China in three aspects which include encouraging advanced cooperation between schools and cultural institutions, improving professional qualifications of art teachers, and strengthening construction of cultural infrastructure.

1. Introduction

At present, the comprehensive cooperation strategy between China and Central and Eastern Europe has put forward higher requirements for bilateral cultural exchanges. Having a better understanding of the current status of cultural and art education in countries of Central and Eastern Europe is of great significance to establish an amicable international cooperative relationship between China and countries in this region (Gao, 2017). It is the richness and diversity of the cultures of China and Denmark that provide enormous possibilities and broad prospects for cultural and artistic exchanges and cooperation (Zhao, 2015). Strengthening cultural exchanges and sharing experience between China and Denmark are tantalizing opportunity provided by the advancement of China's internationalization process. Nevertheless, the relevant literature demonstrates the tenuous study with respect to the cultural and artistic exchanges of children and teenagers in China and Denmark. Even if such aspect is involved, it is generally intertwined with the discussion of other topics, and therefore it requires further expansion and deepening (Zhang, 2015; Yan Beni, 2015). Based on the discussion of related research themes, the author conducted an in-depth study of policies and initiatives designed for cultural and artistic cultivation of Danish children and teenagers and compared with the practical achievements of relevant fields in China. Consequently, the author proposes constructive and efficacious approaches to further improve the cultural and artistic level of Chinese children and teenagers.

2. Policies on Cultural and Art Education in China and Denmark

Cultural education is one of the important pillars of the development of Denmark, and its educational philosophy has always been praised by the world. Compared with other countries around the globe, contemporary Danish educational system is relatively more coherent, comprehensive, and equal, providing children, teenagers, and adults with a large number of excellent learning and development opportunities (Yin, 2014). With the unstinting assistance of the Danish government, the Danish education system has been increasingly mature, including

pre-school education, elementary education, junior high school education, senior high school education, higher education, and continuation education for adults, among which, education provided for students aged from 6 to 16 (or 17) is compulsory. Hence, the keystone of Danish cultural education is high-quality education, which is vital to ensure the competitiveness of the global community.

In the Danish educational system, art education is an essential part of education at all levels. Art education, a way of self-expression, in virtue of art classes or music classes, has been introduced to children before they receive formal elementary education, going a long way towards pre-school education. In 2014, the Danish government implemented a series of important reforms in various fields of education for the purpose of enhancing lifelong learning. This reform mainly targets the challenges faced by the National School (Folkeskole)¹ and aims at improving the level of cultural education in national schools. In this reform, the Danish Ministry of Culture issued a document on the cultural and artistic cultivation of children and teenagers. The document emphasizes the importance of art and culture for the overall development of school-aged children, and points out that active participation in cultural and artistic activities can help promote children's curiosity and expressiveness, assist children to excavate their interests and strengths, aid in broadening their thinking and building their confidence, and also contribute to develop their sense of teamwork and social skills. Firstly, the Government has implemented the Campus Open Plan for relevant cultural and artistic institutions and associations. Besides, it has established a mutual fund for cultural programs targeting children who have not learned about art and culture. Thirdly, it has prepared cultural and artistic incentives for children who are desperately in need. Last but not least, it has created new cultural portals and cultural service centers for children and teenagers and set up a mutual fund for specialized programs.

The reform of the National School in 2014 means that the schools must be more open to the surrounding communities. Through cooperation with the municipality, the National Schools have incorporated local sports clubs, cultural centers, and other associations into the venue for the school days. Furthermore, the National Schools and the Municipal Conservatories of Music and Art should be committed to mutual cooperation, but how to put the cooperation into practice is determined by the School's management. In addition to supporting the curriculum and overall goals of the National Schools, the purpose of the cooperation is to strengthen local cohesion and familiarize students with the activities and opportunities provided by various associations. New reforms in Danish elementary and secondary education have blazed new trails in prospects for cooperation between schools and cultural institutions and popular associations. While ensuring that all children (especially those in difficulty) have the opportunity to benefit from cultural and artistic experience and development possibilities, it has also promoted the sustainable and sound development of relevant cultural and artistic institutions and associations. Therefore, it is a mutually beneficial opportunity for both parties.

Similar to the Danish educational system, our country embraces an educational system composed of pre-school education, elementary education, secondary education, and higher education. At the advent of the 21st century, the Chinese government has prioritized educational development with its strategic status. It has put forward the strategic policy of "rejuvenating the country through science and education", continuously deepening the reform of the educational system and strengthening quality education. The comprehensive quality evaluation assesses moral education, academic proficiency, physical and mental health, art cultivation and social practice. It can be seen that art education is an important component of quality education and also an indispensable part of morals, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor.

In recent years, with the continuous reform of policies on the College Entrance Examination and related documents recurrently issued by relevant state departments, disciplines in art education that had previously been downplayed in cultural education, have been regarded at the national policy

¹ National School: In Denmark, National School is a type of comprehensive school covering elementary and junior high school education, providing 9-year compulsory education (7-16 years old or 6-15 years old) by means of two types, 1-9 grades or 1-10 grades.

level, which bespeaks the significance of art education. The Ministry of Education of China promulgated three documents in May, 2015 including the “Measures for the Evaluation of Art Quality of Elementary and Secondary School Students”, with an aim to improve art education in China and the aesthetic and humanistic qualities of elementary and secondary school students. The document has been put into practice as a demonstration pilot project since 2015, requiring elementary and secondary schools in each and every province (districts and cities) to establish an art education evaluation system, with the assessment results presented in the form of scores.

According to what has been mentioned above, the education authorities of China and Denmark are placing a high premium on the artistic development of children and teenagers. In terms of policy implementation, Denmark pays more attention to the cooperation between schools and cultural and artistic institutions, while China comparatively focuses on participation in art courses and cultivation of artistic skills.

3. The Art Curriculum and Hardware Conditions of Elementary and Secondary Schools

One of the goals for schools to carry out art courses is to encourage students to express their own ideas by virtue of art, so that all students would be able to develop their unique capabilities in different art forms and media sectors and each student would be endowed with artistic quality, to a certain extent, to appreciate art. In Denmark, schools at different levels have integrated artistic cultivation of children and teenagers into the art curriculum.

3.1. Pre-school Education

Pre-school classes primarily help guide children to get acquainted with the school environment and receive elementary education in advance. In the first year of compulsory education, through various activities, children can acquire lingual, arithmetical, and scientific abilities. As a way to express and develop themselves, young children also take part in physical activities, music, and art activities under necessary guidance.

3.2. Elementary and Junior High School Education

Danish compulsory education for children and teenagers is completed in National Schools, the purpose of which is to collaborate with parents to enable students to acquire knowledge and skills, and thereby promote their development in all aspects. Since the 2003-2004 School Year, Denmark has propounded reformation on the teaching hours of courses. The teaching hours of courses in culture and art remain the same, but a more flexible schedule has been introduced with minimum teaching hours which can be categorized into at least 3 separate stages (Level 1-3, 4-6 and 7-9). Additionally, the teaching syllabus requires three general subjects — humanities, social sciences, and practice (art).

The courses in art at this stage are mainly comprised of two types: comprehensive courses and sub-disciplinary courses. The compulsory courses in art include music, visual arts, and handicrafts and design. During the course of Grade 8 and 9, children are offered opportunities to choose from the following art subjects as core subjects — theater, film arts (media arts), photography and media. Each school also provides additional art education programs during school days, including annual performances, concert exhibitions, or “creative weeks.” Since 2014, the elementary and junior high schools affiliated with the National Schools have been obliged to incorporate local sports clubs, cultural centers, and other associations into the venue for the school days. This has strengthened cooperation between National Schools and cultural institutions and has become a widespread phenomenon.

3.3. High School Education

Danish high school education is made up of four subjects, of which art courses are compulsory. The content of the art courses is imparted from visual arts, drama, media studies or music. In addition to compulsory art courses, each student is likely to attend specialized compulsory courses and electives which include visual arts, such as music. In recent decades, an increasing number of

teachers have advocated the utilization of art and creativity as teaching tools in other disciplines.

In Denmark, there are cultural centers, theaters, or a community venue that can accommodate cultural and artistic performances in most areas. Multitudes of music and art schools have formed an extensive network, providing art courses for students both inside and outside school. Therefore, public schools are mandatory to cooperate with municipal music schools. Though the courses offered by music schools are not for free, they have received substantial subsidies from local governments and municipal authorities. And these music schools usually provide other types of art education, which greatly encourages students to attend art courses outside school.

In China, art courses in the real sense have been offered since elementary education throughout the entire compulsory education from Grades 1 to 9. Art courses integrate music, fine arts, dance, drama, film and television, calligraphy and other forms and expressions of art, which exert both direct and indirect impact on children's and teenage lives, emotions, art cultivation and scientific understanding. Analogous to Danish educational stages, the art curriculum in China is also divided into three stages — the First Stage (Grade 1-2), the Second Stage (Grade 3-6), the Third Stage (Grade 7-9). The standards of art courses at different stages vary. Through various stages, children and teenagers in China can continuously acquire basic artistic skills and improve their humanistic quality. Along with art courses, elementary and secondary schools also hold multifarious art activities on a regular basis, such as art festivals, painting and calligraphy contests, photography contests, choir games, dance competitions, etc., to reinforce artistic cultivation of students.

4. Professional Qualifications of Teachers and Evaluation Mechanism

The continuous reform and development of Danish schools has brought tremendous challenges to the teachers in national schools. The normal education they originally received is far behind the contemporary requirements. Only with continual on-the-job training can the teachers in contemporary era reach the requirements. Currently, a majority of teachers in Denmark have the opportunity to receive on-the-job training. With the implementation of National Schools Act and local school development plans, on-the-job training courses and related lectures for art teachers have also been incorporated into the management of local authorities and schools.

In Denmark, the evaluation of art activities bears a resemblance to that of other courses. National Schools regularly evaluates the effectiveness of how students benefit from art education and informs students and their parents. In addition, a student plan is indispensable to each and every student, which should contain the results of the continuous evaluation of each subject and should be composed of follow-up plans related to the evaluation results. Continuous evaluation should be designed to be used in conjunction with the grade of the students and the final goal of the course. Therefore, teachers are supposed to make judgments based on the content of the course in the process of evaluation. The evaluation results will be recorded in the student plan and sent to the students and their parents via both print-out and read-out. If the score is comparatively low or fails to meet the anticipated standards of the art subjects, or if the student obtains a high score in the art subjects or exceeds the expected standards of the art subjects, this will be represented in the student plan, and the corresponding scheme will be formulated accordingly.

The cultivation of art teachers in elementary and middle schools in China bears a likeness to that of Denmark, and it mainly has recourse to normal schools to educate qualified art teachers. Due to the gap in the level of art development, the number of professional art teachers in some areas and schools is far from enough. Under the circumstances, teachers with outstanding artistic skills can serve as part-time art teachers after professional training. The Ministry of Education, with reference to employment and evaluation, awards, on-the-job education, and training, should ensure equal treatment of art teachers and teachers in other disciplines. Furthermore, the contributions of art teachers should be counted if they offer tutorial assistance to extra-curricular art activities arranged by the school.

5. Conclusion

This article summarizes the level and current status of cultural and artistic cultivation of children and teenagers in China and Denmark from the perspectives of policies on culture and art, art curriculum, and teacher training. The author believes that by comparing the concrete research findings of Denmark and China, the theoretical experience and specific examples of cultural and art education in Denmark cast light on academic exchanges and references, proffering an abundant and operable supply of successful cases to artistic cultivation of children and teenagers in China.

5.1. To Encourage Strengthening of Cooperation between Schools and Cultural Institutions

New reforms in Danish elementary and secondary education have paved the way for future cooperation between schools and cultural institutions and popular associations. While assuring all children (particularly those in difficulty) of the opportunity to benefit from the cultural and artistic experience and development, the reformation has promoted the sustainable and sound development of relevant cultural and artistic institutions and associations. Therefore, both parties are supposed to embrace this historical opportunity of mutually beneficial cooperation. By contrast, art education in elementary and secondary schools in China is confined to schools and classrooms, without strong ambience of artistic cultivation. In future art education, the Chinese government are expected to set up specialized programs to support the development of cultural institutions and cultural service centers. Elementary and secondary schools are advised to establish cooperation with cultural institutions and popular associations, and thereby students are able to receive art education outside classrooms.

5.2. To Improve Professional Qualifications of Art Teachers

The overall professional qualifications of art teachers in Danish National Schools is relatively superior, and art teachers in the majority have the opportunity to receive on-the-job training, which has adapted to more than half of the national schoolteachers. On-the-job training is conducive to improving professional qualifications of teachers, in order to give full play to their role in education. In China, on account of existing gaps in the development of urban, rural, regional, and interscholastic art education, the professional qualifications of teachers vary considerably. On one hand, it is recommended that art teachers teach at rural schools by way of “serving rural areas”; on the other hand, schools should inspire in-service teachers to regularly participate in related training so as to maintain the required standard of teaching in accordance with the development of art education.

5.3. To Strengthen Construction of Cultural Infrastructure

Danish children and teenagers can fully experience the charm of art on the strength of strong cultural and artistic atmosphere. In Denmark, there are cultural centers, theaters, or a community venue that can accommodate cultural and artistic performances in most areas. Meanwhile, as one of the oldest kingdoms in the world, multitudinous castles, manors, and other ancient buildings in Denmark are open to tourists, where children can passionately enjoy visiting art buildings and admiring art collections, as a way to experience a fairy-tale Denmark. In comparison, the booming cultural industry in China is profiting from China’s vigorous strengthening of the construction of cultural infrastructure, but owing to imbalance of urban, rural and regional development, there remains a large number of defects in the development of cultural industries in reference to “infrastructure”. As a consequence, strengthening the construction of cultural infrastructure is regarded as “foundation” for the sake of improving the level of art education for children and teenagers. Through the establishment of nationwide cultural service centers, museums, opera houses, etc., public cultural facilities have formed an extensive network, enabling children and teenagers to experience the length and width of art of living outside school.

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