



# An Exploration of Art Education of Colleges and Universities under Covid-19 from the Perspective of Pragmatism

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**Abstract:** The paper is to discuss how "education is life", an idea put forward by Dewey, an American pragmatist philosopher and educator, is reflected in the art education in Chinese college and universities from the perspective of pragmatism. Considering the fact the Covid-19 is sweeping all over the globe and there is no sign that the trend of this global pandemic is going to slow down, the paper is to find the relationship between art education and social life of the college and universities students under this background. The paper begins with an interpretation of the connotation of "Education is Life", and then it gives reader a brief introduction of the perspective the paper adopts, Pragmatism. The main body of the paper discusses the opportunities and challenges of art education under the outbreak of the Covid-19. At the end of the paper, the author summarizes the enlightenment of art education, and puts forward that people-oriented teaching should be adopted to maintain the consistency between life and education. The study hopes to give readers some insights on the harmony development of art education under this unexpected global event.

**Keywords:** pragmatism, Covid-19, universities, art education, life

## I. Introduction

### The connotation of "education is life"

The paper aims to study how "Education is life", an idea put forward by John Dewey, a famous American philosopher and educator, is going to work with the art education in universities and colleges in China. Together with Maria Montessori, John Dewey are regarded as the top two most influential philosophers of education in the twentieth century. John Dewey is well known for his education philosophy in public school system while Montessori's influence is mainly in private schools. When introducing his philosophy, he believes "Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life", "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself." [1] He holds that earning through doing is the best approach to education.

"Education is life" is an educational philosophy with historical and practical significance, and it is one of the contents of pragmatism philosophy. It is reflected in two

aspects: on the one hand, education is the need of social life. Dewey pointed out at the beginning of people-oriented doctrine and education that "education is the need of social life, and the continuation of life needs to be constantly updated. Individuals come and go, as do species, thus the need for living beings to change responsively to changing conditions: "Continuity of life means continual readaptation of the environment to the needs of living organisms" [2] Through transmission, education can transmit people's living habits, systems, beliefs, knowledge and skills, and enhance the ability of experience to guide life and adapt to the society. In a broad sense, education is the social continuation of this kind of life. On the other hand, education is from life and it aims to improve the quality of life of mankind in the coming future. "The process of education is the process of life. Education and life start, continue and end together. Life is the best classroom for education, and the ultimate value of education is to live better." [3] It is clear that the content of education comes from life, and the process of education is related to life while the purpose of education is to serve life. Therefore, it is safe to come to the conclusion that

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education is rooted in life. At any time, education is directly involved in the growth and development of people.

## II. The Perspective of Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a term in of a philosophical tradition that understands knowing the world as inseparable from agency within it. This idea is so well recognized that it has attracted a great deal range of interpretations and understandings, including: that all philosophical concepts should be tested via scientific experimentation, that a claim is true if and only if it is useful. The first generation of pragmatism was started by classical pragmatists Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 – 1914), who first put forward the definition of the term and defended the view, and his colleague William James (1842 – 1910), on his research basis, developed and ably popularized it.[4] Charles Sanders Peirce defended himself with three arguments:

Knowledge is a tool to control reality, and reality can be changed;

Practical experience is paramount, principles and reasoning are secondary;

The truth of beliefs and ideas is that they have practical effects;[5]

Charles Sanders Peirce’s defence can be applied to the art education in the case of the author’s teaching experience. First of all, knowledge is a tool to control reality. Commercial advertising is a major that relies on practical operation to demonstrate whether the theory is practical or not, and to what extent it can be realized. Secondly, it emphasizes that practical experience is the most important, while principles and reasoning are secondary. It is because the audience of commercial advertising is consumers.[6] Whether the works created can become commodities or make a profit, it is decided by the practical result rather than the reasoning of the designers, who are supposed to have practical experience, including cognition of the market and insight into consumers. Third, whether beliefs and ideas are true or not depends on whether they have practical effects. This means whether the designer can understand the demand and transform it into the thinking in his mind, that is, belief and concept after he has done research on the market and consumer groups, so as to design the actual works and even commodities based on this idea and whether they can be accepted by the public. These above three points can be applied to the art and design major, and they have well realized the fundamental program of pragmatism, that is, to determine the belief as the starting point, to take action as the main means, and to obtain the actual effect as the highest goal.

## III. Art Education under the Pandemic

The outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 brought the world into a state of chaos and unfortunately, the pandemic is still on the rise and millions of people’s lives are terribly affected by it. Covid-19 is also threatening China, who has been working actively in every possible to put it under control. As a front-line teacher of art design education in Colleges and universities, the author keeps thinking how to handle the epidemic situation correctly with students and how to make good use of the epidemic situation as a challenge in art education. It is important for art major students to do practice so that their comprehensive practical ability is enhanced.

### 1. Opportunities and Challenges

Due to the pandemic, most universities and colleges are using online teaching system instead of traditional campus teaching. The reason is to protect the safety of the staff and students and answer to the call of “classes should not be suspended” proposed by the nation. At present, China is capable of offering perfect network coverage service and students can sit at home to finish their online courses without going outside and meeting others. It is a breakthrough of space and time compared with traditional teaching method and realizes the teaching mode of remote, real-time and interactive participation. It not only changes the way of knowledge acquisition, but also makes full use of all kinds of learning resources shared on the Internet, turning passive learning into active learning. Students can acquire content anytime and anywhere according to their own needs. It fully embodies pragmatism “taking action as the main means”. in terms of teachers, they should make good use of the current online teaching system and accumulate experience and knowledge from it. By using Internet technology, combine the traditional face-to-face teaching method, teachers should integrate the advantages of various channels of resources and realize the ultimate teaching objectives of art education.

### 2. Education is to serve the nation and people.

The purpose of education is determined according to the requirements of the political, economic, production, cultural and scientific development of a certain society and the physical and mental development of the educated. It reflects the requirements of a certain society for educated people, and it is the starting point and ultimate goal of education work. Besides, it is also the basis for determining the content of education, selecting education methods, and checking and evaluating the effectiveness of education.

The purpose of education and the purpose of teaching are the inter connected. The purpose of education is the general requirement of what kind of talents the country

cultivates and reflects the general needs of the members of the society in education. The purpose of teaching is the requirement to realize the purpose of education in the field of teaching, reflecting the needs of the teaching subject. The purpose of education guides the purpose of teaching, and the purpose of teaching is necessarily subject to the purpose of education.

In terms of art education, the author has been teaching his students with the idea of “communication with people”. In the traditional face-to-face teaching class, students will feel uneasy and self-confident because of facing the teacher, especially when answering questions or doing class activities. Most of the students are not willing to be active in the class since they think once they make any mistakes, others, including the teacher sometimes, will laugh at themselves. In this case, most students tend to be quiet and shy to participate classroom activities. Online teaching, on the other hand, enjoys the advantages in the following aspects. First of all, since the courses are conducted through the Internet, parents or children can use their cell phones or computers to learn whenever they have time. Therefore, online learning completely breaks the geographical gap and time limit. No matter where the learners are, as long as they have the Internet, they can take lessons anytime and anywhere, regardless of the region and time limit.

Secondly, the online learning gives students much freedom. Students can take classes at home or in any place with internet such as library or coffee shop, and they can learn the course in the most relaxed way. The learning environment can be nice and comfortable; students don't have to worry about other students' disrupting through online classes. In addition, online learning will also save a lot of time, such as, time you spend to go to class. During online learning, if there are some difficult points, students can search online to learn by themselves.

In short, students welcome online learning and during online courses, and students are not afraid of making mistakes or being laughed by others since they are sitting far away from other students. Without the psychological burden, students will feel free to open their mouth and express themselves clearly. In terms of cultivating students' ability of communication with others, teachers can adopt various online teaching resources and activities to encourage students do more oral practice to enhance their logical thinking. What is more, the environment of online teaching is much enjoyable compared that of off-line teaching.

When it comes to teachers, they should be well prepared to meet the challenge brought by the new change. The following aspects should be considered if teachers want to be good at online teaching. First, teachers should make a good teaching plan, including pre-learning, classroom and after-

class. Such tasks should be contextual and challenging, so as to stimulate students' interest in learning and awaken their desire to learn. Secondly, teachers should pay special attention to the process of student learning and take a variety of methods to strengthen the learning guidance for students. Teachers can offer guidance through homework evaluation and individual or group presentation, questions, quizzes, discussion or group seminars. Thirdly, teachers should use different ways to increase interaction, such as live classroom to ask questions and give feedback. Different application or software can be adopted, like emails, WeChat, QQ and other platforms interactive tools. Finally, teachers should set up interactive communication according to teaching contents, students' characteristics and learning situations. Before teaching, teachers can ask questions, or use multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions and other tests to collect students' opinions, so as to provide a basis for subsequent design of questions for student discussion; after students watch recorded videos or online classes, teachers can use polling and testing tools on the platform to understand each student's learning situation; teachers can also assign written homework to students on the platform, and acquire students' learning situation through homework. Besides, the most important one is that teachers should always pay attention to the mental health of students under the epidemic. Whenever there is sign of mental health problem, teachers should guide students in a timely manner.

The Application of “education is life” to art education

To apply “education is life” to art education, teachers should keep learning the new knowledge and put practice into teaching.

Art is about life and it is superior than life. From a professional point of view, it is a teacher's duty to guide students see and understand the Covid-19 pandemic clearly before using their profession skills to the society. The following designs show how art students put art into life under the pandemic.



Figure 1

Figure 2



Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 1: From Masks to Cherry Blossoms

Figure 2: Chinese Spirit of Unity

Figure 3: Respond to the Call of the Nation

Figure 4: Praise To Doctors

Art is about life and it comes from life. As a teacher of art, the author encourages students to do volunteer work in the community against pandemic (Figure 5 and 6). During the volunteer work, the art students made good use of their art knowledge and put it into the publicity of the pandemic control (figure 7). By applying the art professional knowledge into practice, students can feel the art in life and have more passion in life and art.



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

#### IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, although Dewey's idea of "education is life" has been a century's time, it is still of contemporary and realistic importance. From the perspective of pragmatism, his idea gives a new interpretation to the concept of art education in colleges and universities under Covid-19, that is, what is of practice is of truth. There is no ready-made models to follow for art education in history. It is teachers' duty and responsibility to keep a sharp eye to discover the beauty and element in life, to put people in the central place, to take the challenges and seize opportunities between life and education.

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