

A Study on the Core Concepts of Environmental Aesthetics Curriculum

Ya-Ting Lee, National Pingtung University, Taiwan

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to develop the core concepts of environmental aesthetics curriculum. In order to get that purpose, literature review and Delphi retrospective questionnaire are adopted. Under the “conceptual framework of core concepts of the environmental aesthetics curriculum”, there are two dimensions: “aesthetic capabilities” and “aesthetic contents”, followed by two respective sub-dimensions that include three categories and eight sub-categories of “aesthetic capabilities” and three themes and seven sub-themes of “aesthetic contents”. The functions of the conceptual framework of environmental aesthetics are to provide a systematic and analytic framework for reference, for example, when developing a thematic integrated curriculum or conducting content analysis of school textbooks.

Keywords: aesthetic education, environmental aesthetics curriculum, environmental aesthetics

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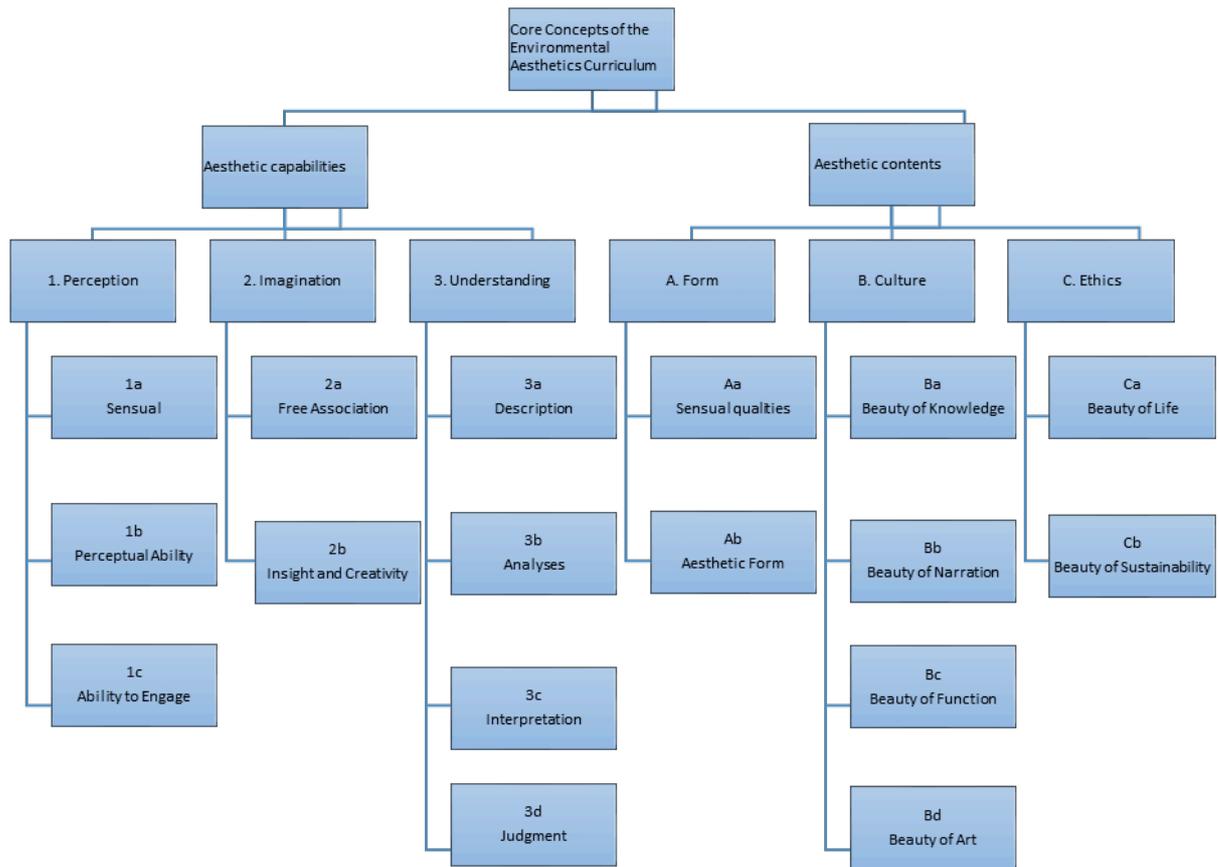
Introduction

Environmental aesthetics is one of the newly emerging aesthetics concepts of the 20th century; it originated as a reaction to Kant's "disinterested" aesthetic judgment as well as classical arts, pursuing instead the study of the aesthetic appreciation of natural and human environments. In a broad sense, by exploring the meaning of environment aesthetics, redefining environment, and expanding aesthetic concepts in general, it offers a new way of thinking for schools in Taiwan to develop students' aesthetics literacy. The purpose of this study, thus, is to develop the core concepts of environmental aesthetics curriculum.

Conclusion

This study adopts a literature review and Delphi retrospective questionnaire to investigate the knowledge and intuition of experts to effectively handle an event or an issue, rather than only one investigation conducted in most traditional questionnaires. Additionally, the communication function can be achieved in the absence of a meeting, and opinions can be freely expressed without the interference of authorities. With these merits of the questionnaire and meeting function, the Delphi method suits the purpose of this study to survey opinions by experts regarding the core concepts of the environmental aesthetic curriculum.

The conceptual framework of the core concepts of the environmental aesthetics curriculum summarizes various perspectives of environmental aesthetics, including: the "metaphysical imagination" of Hepburn (2004), "the integrated aesthetic" of Brady (2003, 2004), "positive aesthetics" of Carlson (2000, 2009), "aesthetics engagement" of Berleant (2004) and "green aesthetics" of Saito (2001, 2007a, 2007b). The purpose of constructing a conceptual structure of environmental aesthetics is to provide a systematic and analytic framework for reference, for example, when developing a thematic integrated curriculum or conducting content analysis of school textbooks. The researcher consulted experts regarding the overall classification structure and description; a questionnaire was then prepared according to the suggestions of the experts. Twelve experts from various academic fields, including aesthetics/arts and environmental education, were invited to participate in three rounds of questionnaire surveys. After my research team's discussion and experts counseling, Diag. 1 was constructed.



Diag. 1 Conceptual framework of Core Concepts of the Environmental Aesthetics Curriculum

Under the “conceptual framework of core concepts of the environmental aesthetics curriculum”, there are two dimensions: “aesthetic capabilities” and “aesthetic contents”, followed by two respective sub-dimensions that include three categories and eight sub-categories of “aesthetic capabilities” and three themes and seven sub-themes of “aesthetic contents”.

Furthermore, descriptions of each category/sub-category as well as theme/sub-theme have been provided; examples are also given for each “sub-category.” For example, in 1b, “Perceptual Ability” is described and an example provided below: “It begins when a subject actively cares for and explores the environment; it runs through basic characteristics such as integrity, selectivity, rationality, and consistency; it is the recreation and reconstruction ability of humans towards the environment. For example, through smell and hearing senses, we are able to perceive the mixed atmosphere of urban and rural areas in the air of a specific place.” In “Ba beauty of knowledge”, the description is provided below: “It refers to aesthetic judgment being realized and enhanced through knowing and understanding knowledge in various fields, including relevant knowledge of aesthetic judgment, scientific knowledge, or cultural and historical knowledge.” (please see Table 1) The research results of this

study can be used for curriculum design in environmental aesthetics-oriented curriculum.

Table 1. Core Concepts of the Environmental Aesthetics Curriculum
Dimensions of “Aesthetic Capabilities”

Category of Aesthetic Capabilities	Sub-Category of Aesthetic Capabilities	Description of Sub-Category of Aesthetic Capabilities
<p>1. Perception It refers to a viewer being able to perceive aesthetic qualities of the environment with one or multiple senses and integrates and reflects perception information sensed from the surrounding environment.</p>	1a Sensual	It generally refers to organs that are able to collect information when triggered by the environment, and the human brain’s ability to reflect on individual attributes of objects. For example, through the visual sense, we see the green and shiny appearance of moss while through the tactile sense, we know it is wet and soft.
	1b Perceptual Ability	It begins when a subject actively cares for and explores the environment; it runs through basic characteristics such as integrity, selectivity, rationality, consistency, and involves the recreation and reconstruction ability of humans in regard to their environment. For example, through the senses of smell and hearing, we are able to perceive the mixed atmosphere of urban and rural areas in the air of a specific place.
	1c Ability to Engage	It refers to aesthetic judgment of the environment through active physical and consciousness engagement to initiate a dialogue between a viewer and the objects being viewed. For example, when we look at a building, we not only appreciate its static form but also interact with it by understanding the meaning of its existence, atmosphere, space and functions.
<p>2. Imagination It means that associations come from forms sensed by organs for the creation of new meaning.</p>	2a Free Association	It refers to free exploration and association abilities. Along with sensual perception, we explore the aesthetic features of objects and extend possible correlation between sensual characteristics. For example, we personalize rough

		tree bark as the wrinkled face of an elderly person; when appreciating the aesthetic features of flowers on a high mountain, we think of surviving under tough conditions and understand the great strength of flowers.
	2b Insight and Creativity	It means creativity with imagination. The environment brings us inner inspiration as viewers and new insights are created. For example, when we look at a landscape of a valley and glacier, the unique aesthetic experience gives us inspiration from contemplating the great strength of the land.
3. Understanding Aesthetic understanding involves thinking based on direct perception, including behaviors in four abilities: description, analysis, interpretation and judgment. These four abilities are interdependent to facilitate understanding of objects being appreciated.	3a Description	This involves the abilities to describe elements of the environment including color, line, shaping, space and texture. For example, when we see a town with a canal, we are able to describe boats with distinctive styles and elegant swans on the river, the soft sound of a boat on its quiet navigation, and the complicated and enjoyable atmosphere in the air.
	3b Analyses	It is the abilities to discuss environmental composition and structural correlation. For example, from the said description, a discussion of the correlation of characteristics of a canal can be initiated: the extensive blue water of the canal is dotted with the white swans, bringing an overall elegance and simplicity to the canal. Interesting movements of grouse and ducks by the canal give people relaxing and comfortable feelings. Sunset presents changes in different layers of warm colors and contrasts with blue fishing boats in the foreground.
	3c Interpretation	It focuses on symbols, meanings and concepts produced by the environment. For example, from the description and analyses, we

		<p>are able to compare the canal with those of other towns in terms of their architectural structures. We then discover a harmonious mixture of both man-made and natural characteristics in this canal. The white swans present elegance and the water flow signifies the power of life.</p>
	<p>3d Judgment</p>	<p>According to environmental contents perceived and understood, objective analyses and subjective interpretation are presented. For example, from an image exploration and meaning interpretation about the canal, we are able to describe the work of fishermen, and the cultural landscape; the interaction of the residential area and the canal is understood, and the metaphor of “a green lifeline of nature and culture” is used to describe the canal. The ability of judgment can also be described as our ability to perceive a good horse after analyzing and interpreting its running speed and elegant pose.</p>

Dimension of “Aesthetic Contents”

Theme of Aesthetic Contents	Sub-theme of Aesthetic Contents	Description of Sub-theme of Aesthetic Contents
<p>A. Form The theme is the core of environmental aesthetics, including sensual qualities and the aesthetic forms of objects being appreciated.</p>	Aa Sensual qualities	It refers to an explicit structure or unique behavior such as sound, color, shape, texture and pose that can be described with sensual perception.
	Ab Aesthetic Form	It refers to the presentation of sequence, proportion, layer, balance, harmony, composition and structure based on the perception of characteristics such as sound, color, shape, texture and pose of objects being appreciated in the natural and man-made environment.
<p>B. Culture This theme refers to the overall value system including relevant materials, systems and spirit of humans related to environmental aesthetics and appreciation.</p>	Ba Beauty of Knowledge	It refers to knowledge and understanding in each field of environment that help to realize and enhance aesthetics appreciation, including relevant knowledge of objects being appreciated, or human culture and history.
	Bb Beauty of Narration	It refers to relevant myths or folk legends associated with the creation of meaning, generating more environmental interpretation and imagination.
	Bc Beauty of Function	This means that man-made landscape, buildings and objects in the environment can be soundly designed for practical use with the order and harmony of the environment taken into consideration, thereby enhancing life value.
	Bd Beauty of Art	It refers to how the creative behavior of humans has represented and interpreted the environmental landscape or daily objects, and conveyed the implicit cultural awareness.
<p>C. Ethics This theme refers to moral values and behavior codes generated with the power of aesthetics judgment of humans to exert an impact on the issues of environmental ethics or even to change people's actions.</p>	Ca Beauty of Life	Through perception senses, viewers reflect and perceive objects being viewed during the process of environmental aesthetics for relevant life value presentation or inspiration of human emotions, attitudes and personalities.
	Cb Beauty of Sustainability	Through the environmental aesthetics process or experience sharing, sympathy and moral values for the environment are developed to call for emotions and missions of environmental protection as well as to ensure environmental sustainability and raise public awareness.

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Contact email: yatinglee10@gmail.com